

The Covid-19 pandemic challenges democracy's institutions and concomitant rights for free speech and peaceful assembly. It places pressures on the economic system and social relations. In response to these challenges and pressures, street-protesters demand changes to their lives, livelihoods, local communities, and societies. Worldwide, there have been over 40,000 street protests and 2700 riots specifically about the Covid-19 pandemic. In each instance, protesters demanded change and envisioned a world to come. These events shape the policies and democratic institutions of post-pandemic society. By post-pandemic society we understand a social order where the massive, systemic challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic may result in a rearranged power hierarchy, reconfigured social structures, and a reprioritization of policy. In transforming democracies, such as Poland, Covid-19 strains limited resources and institutions to their breaking point. We know that society is changing, but we do not know how it will look like after the pandemic. Covid-19 protest invites scholars to question what we know about the outcomes of protest. Protest may cause power shifts, public policy initiatives, and societal-level attitudinal changes, but these changes can be caused by many other factors, e.g. economy, inequality, and social relations. Moreover, it is often assumed that protests make democracy stronger. Yet, illiberal forces also protest, often calling for policy that goes against basic democratic principles.

In our qualitative research project, we ask: *What visions of post-pandemic society do Polish protesters have and what drives those visions?* While post-pandemic society is a matter of the future, we can observe the visionary paths that lead to this future. The demands and actions of protesters reveal the hopes of social groups and thus form a perceptual basis from which post-pandemic society will emerge. In this project, we will explain how these visions arise and what they involve. We will consider the "pandemic environment". This environment includes the public health situation, the economic downturn, and the government's policy responses (e.g. lockdown and "Crisis Shield"). We will acknowledge long-standing inequalities and a type of zeitgeist that political sociologists call "moments of madness," that is, moments wherein major disruptions to the status quo incite people to agitate for radical social change. We will examine the interactions between protesters, police, and counter-protesters and the instances of violence that result from these interactions. We will also examine the role of civil society organizations that mobilize protestors and help shape their actions. Given the strong tensions between citizen demands and state responses to the ongoing pandemic, to understand the future of Polish democracy we need to understand the full spectrum of the post-pandemic society's visions that emerge from Covid-19 protests.

We can investigate the visions of a post-pandemic society thanks to detailed protest event information included in the Armed Conflict Location & Event's (ACLED) database, in Polish newspaper media and in videos posted on publicly available websites. From these, we will create detailed narratives for 300 Covid-19 protests that took place from February 2020, which is the dawn of the pandemic, to June 2022. We will call these narratives Protest Event Reports (PERs). We will assemble a research team that will analyze these reports in order to extract the various visions of the new Polish society. To get deeper into how civil society shapes post-pandemic society, we will also interview spokespeople from 20 major protest organizations. We will ask them about their views on the Covid-19 protests and what their hopes are for the post-pandemic future of Poland.

We will prepare our findings for publication in high quality academic journals. We will archive the PERs and the interviews in a Polish qualitative data archive. We will translate the English-language final report into Polish and send it to government officials and NGOs, and make it publicly available on our project website.

The project will lead to the advancement of social science in Poland by (a) forging a new methodological path in qualitative protest event analysis and crafting a theoretical synthesis that explains the visions of post-pandemic society; (b) hiring a post-doctoral scholar and graduate research assistant; and (c) hosting a conference whose participants are graduate students, as well as young and established scholars in Poland and abroad.