

Correlation Between the Electoral System Democratization and the Electoral Activity

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Abstract: *The article presents a research of electoral process in Russia and the process of its democratization. The research object is presidential election campaigns in Russia from 1991 till 2018. The research is based on the hypothesis that simplified process of nominating candidates for the position of the Russian President must result in their number growing. This, in turn, must increase attendance of voters. That is, democratization of electoral process must positively influence the implementation of both the passive and active electoral rights by the citizens. To check the hypothesis, three indicators of electoral process were measured, analyzed and compared. The number of signatures necessary for registering candidates for the position of the Russian President reflects the level of electoral process democratization. The number of nominated and registered candidates characterizes the passive electoral right. Attendance of voters at presidential elections reflects implementation of the active right to elect. The key research results were obtained based on the Russian laws and analysis of their content, summarization and comparison of statistical data on elections, and their retrospective analysis. As a result, it was found how administrative regulation of elections influences implementation of the active passive and electoral rights by the citizens. This served as the basis for giving recommendations on improving the electoral process in the Russian Federation.*

Index Terms: *democracy, elections, electoral system, electoral behavior, electoral activity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is based on the principle of people's power. It is assumed that only people are the source of power in a democratic state. This said, various mechanisms should be developed for the citizens to implement people's power and express their opinion on the key problems of the state. The main objective of elections is to choose a decent candidate for a particular position in the state, including that of the President of the Russian Federation. At that, the importance of this democracy mechanism is not limited to the said objective. Elections enable the citizens to use their election rights, both active and passive. The active election right reflects the opinion of the citizens not only about candidates but also about political proposals and programs. That is, the

active election right allows determining the vector of development of the state which most fully corresponds to the demands of the society. The passive election right reflects the level of the citizens' initiative. It enables the citizens to indicate their vision of the country's development and to propose solutions for significant social tasks. That is why it is important to create conditions for implementation of those electoral rights.

One of the tools for solving this task is democratization of electoral process. It implies changing the procedure of expressing the people's will, including through elections, in such a way that enhances political activity of citizens and rationalizes their political behavior. One of the mechanisms of elections democratization in Russia is gathering signatures for registering candidates for the position of the Russian President. This mechanism is related to the passive election right. It enables to reject those candidates whose ideas are not supported by the society. At the same time, it is related to the active election right. Gathering signatures influences the composition of the candidates for the position of the Russian President. This determines willingness of the citizens to go to elections to vote for a particular candidate.

So far, one may assert that the electoral activity of the Russian citizens is not high enough. Less than three fourth of the total number of voters come to the presidential elections. Thus, the topical questions are what the causes of such situation are and how it can be amended. One of the probable reasons is the complicated election process and its individual stages, including gathering signatures for registering candidates for the position of the Russian President. That is why, within this research, we will consider how gathering of signatures for registering candidates for the position of the Russian President influences the electoral behavior, active and passive electoral right of citizens. The research results would make it possible to conclude whether the mechanism of gathering signatures can be changed to make presidential elections more democratic and legitimate.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In scientific literature, the research of electoral institutions has various perspectives of analysis. The bases of theoretical studies of electoral systems were founded by M. Duverger [1]. A significant contribution into the topic, based on the experience of developed democratic countries, was made by the research by A. Lijphart [2] and G. Sartori [3].

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Most works on the topic are of applied character and aimed at studying various groups of voters in individual countries. Different authors distinguish and study multiple factors influencing the voters' activity: level of education [4], social networks and messages in them [5, 6], manipulating the voters' conscience [7, 8], expenses for participating in [9], and others. T. Rogers [10] studies the factor of behavior of eth environment of a voter, namely, electronic activity of their neighbors. Quite often, behavior of various age groups in politic is studied [12, 13]. Also, researchers pay attention to other factors influencing the election process and its result [12-14]. The data obtained in the above-listed researches vary significantly depending on the country and period under study. The Russian experience of arranging elections at federal and regional level was studied by such authors as [15, 16].

Serious impact on the elections is produced by the legal basis of the process, which significantly differs in different countries. For this reason, the present research employs several federal laws on the electoral process in the Russian Federation [17, 18, 19, 20, 21]. The empirical basis of research is the official data of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (TsIK RF) on the results of presidential elections in Russia from 1991 till 2018 [22]. Also, we analyzed normative-legal acts, related to the political, legal and electoral systems of modern Russia.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

A. General description.

Systemic, comparative, historical methods, as well as principles of dialectics, were used in the research. Most significant were the principle of multidimensional analysis and the principle of the unity of the empirical and the theoretical in comprehending the essence and processes of phenomena development.

Due to the multi-faceted character of the issue under study, the researchers focused on comparative analysis of seven presidential election campaigns of 1991, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2018; namely, the legal conditions and practice of nominating and registering candidates were

studied.

B. Algorithm.

The research was carried out according to the following algorithm:

1. Analysis of the Russian legislation concerning the process of nominating candidates and gathering signatures for them. This information allowed making conclusions about the level of democratization presidential elections in Russia.
2. Comparative analysis of the numbers of the nominated candidates and those who gathered signatures for registration (based on TsIK RF information).
3. The data in para. 2 were compared with the numbers of registered candidates. This allowed determining how much the process of gathering signatures influences the dropout of potential candidates, i.e., whether it is an obstacle for the prospective candidates for presidency.
4. Analysis of the data of voters' attendance of presidential elections.
5. Comparing the results of the four stages and revealing links between them, which enabled to find out if the process of gathering signatures for candidate's registration significantly influences the electoral behavior.

IV. RESULT ANALYSIS

The institution of direct nationwide elections of the President of the Russian Federation as the supreme official of the state is a complex mechanism of implementing various legal procedures, among which the procedure of nominating the candidate for the position of the Russian President is that determining the whole course of the further election campaign. During the 28 years of existing of the Russian Federation, the head of the state was elected seven times. The total of 34 candidates for the position of the Russian President were registered. Within this research, the authors assessed the terms of running for the position of the Russian President while implementing the passive election right, namely, the procedure of gathering signatures. The analysis results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of signatures necessary for registration as a candidate for the President of the Russian Federation, from 1991 till 2018*

Elections of the President of the Russian Federation	1991	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018
Number of signatures for candidates of parliamentary parties	100 000	1 000 000 (not more than 70 000 per one subject)	500 000 (not more than 35 000 per one subject)	Signatures need not be gathered			
Number of signatures for candidates of non-parliamentary parties				2 000 000 (not more than 50 000 per one subject)		100 000 (not more than 2 500 per one subject)	



Number of signatures for self-nominated candidates (nominated by public association and initiative groups prior to 2001)							300 000 (not more than 7 500 per one subject)
Alternative to signatures	1/5 of the total number of people's deputies	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Table compiled by the authors

It should be noted that the conditions of nominating candidates for the position of the Russian President changed rather frequently. In the 1990s, transformations took place before every campaign. For example, in accordance with the RSFSR Law "On elections of the President of the RSFSR" of 1991, signatures could not be gathered at all, provided the candidate was supported by not less than one fifth of the people's deputies.

In 1996, according to the new election legislation, the terms of the passive election right implementation changed significantly. Instead of political parties, professional unions and political movements, the right for nominating candidates for the position of the Russian President was given to election associations and blocks, i.e. specialized associations. The procedure of gathering signatures was obligatory for all election associations (blocks), as well as for initiative groups nominating candidates. The first elections of the President of the Russian Federation stipulated the threshold of 1 million signatures for all nominees, which was 10 times more than in 1991. Another feature was that the number of signatures gathered in each region was regulated (not more than 70 thousand). Limitation of the number of signatures gathered in each Russian subject was aimed at providing the minimal support of a candidate in several regions, eliminating nomination of persons supported in one or several regions only. It should be noted also that, to successfully participate in the elections, a candidate needed support of the country's population, not just several regions. The Russian President was elected for 4 years, the upper age threshold was eliminated, but the residence requirement was introduced – 10 years of permanent residence in the territory of the Russian Federation.

The practice of adopting a new law on presidential elections before each election campaign was preserved before the 2000 presidential elections. The new law No. 228-FZ "On elections of the President of the Russian Federation" was signed by B.N. Yeltsin on December 31, 1999. The right for nominating candidates for the Head of the state was retained for both the citizens and election associates and blocks. The number of signatures for a candidate was reduced twofold – up to 500 thousand, which, in our opinion, testified to a certain democratization of the elections. One of the novelties of the law was mandatory notification, in the candidate's statement of consent for being put on vote and in the signature lists, of the presence or absence of unexpunged or unspent conviction of the candidate and the articles of the Criminal Code on which they were sentenced. Besides, the law made it obligatory for the subjects nominating the

candidates to submit to the Central Election Commission the documents containing information on the amount and sources of income of the candidate, their spouse and children, as well as on the property belonging to them and other property liabilities during the recent 2 years. This obligation provided the public character of the candidate's activity during the period preceding the election campaign.

At the beginning of the new century, in 2003, another law on presidential elections was adopted, which determined the new order of nominating candidates for the position of the Head of the state. The priority position in implementing the right for nominating candidates for the presidential elections was granted to political parties and election blocks; a formal notion of "a self-nominated candidate" appeared in the law wording. The main novelty in regard to gathering signatures supporting the candidates was that the political parties and the election blocks consisting of political parties and other all-Russia public associations, admitted to distribute the deputy mandates as a result of the latest elections of the Russian State Duma deputies, were exempted from gathering signatures as an obligatory term of registering the nominated candidate.

Besides, a significant change of legislation in regard to gathering voters' signatures was the increase of the required number of signatures up to two million. Also, the federal law changed the requirements regarding the regional aspect of the procedure: each subject of the Russian Federation should submit no more than 50 thousand signatures of voters. As a result, the minimal number of subjects to gather signatures was 40. The analysis of the studied provisions of the Law on elections of the President of the Russian Federation of 2003 allows concluding that one of its objectives was to enhance the role of parliamentary parties in nominating candidates for the Russian presidency, as well as to decrease the role of self-nominated candidates' institution.

It is worth noting that the Law on elections of the President of the Russian Federation, adopted in 2003, was valid during the presidential election campaigns of 2008 and 2012, retaining all requirements to election procedures.

The recent presidential elections of 2018 returned Russia to democratic lines in regard to elections. The whole legal mechanism of the procedure of gathering signatures supporting the candidate for presidency was changed, which for many years had been the main obstacle impeding participation in elections.



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In particular, self-nominated candidates were to gather no less than 300 thousand signatures to be registered (6.7 times less than at the previous elections). A political party, not admitted to distributing deputies' mandates by the results of the recent elections of the State Duma deputies, was to gather no less than 100 thousand signatures (20 times less than at the previous elections), while one subject of the Russian Federation may submit no more than 2500 signatures. Thus, for the first time in the Russian practice, the numbers of

required signatures for a self-nominated candidate and a candidate from a non-parliamentary political party were differentiated and reduced.

Below we discuss how the changes in the legal terms of the passive election right implementation influenced the practical situation with nomination and registration of candidates for the position of the President of the Russian Federation. The analysis results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistics of nominating candidates for the position of the President of the Russian Federation from 1991 till 2018 *

Presidential elections in the Russian Federation	1991	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018
Initial submission of documents to TsIK (number of applications)	6	78	34	11	13	14	37
Admitted to gathering signatures (number of candidates)	6	17	15	8	5	10	15
Registered as candidates	6	11	11	6	4	5	8
Registered as candidates (% from those admitted to gathering signatures)	100.0	64.7	73.3	75.0	80.0	50.0	53.3

*Table compiled by the authors

Analysis of the number of candidates for presidency showed that the largest number of applicants was in 1996 (78 candidates) and 2018 (37 candidates). The least number of applications was in 1991, while from 2004 till 2012 the number of applications was approximately the same. In our opinion, such a dynamics was to a larger extent due to the development of overall social-political situation in the country, rather than liberalization of election legislation. Presidential campaigns of 1991 and 1996 may serve as an example. In 1991, although the legal terms for nominating and registering candidates were among the minimal and a lot of various persons officially declared in mass media about their eagerness to take part in presidential elections, actually only 10 people submitted their documents to TsIK, of which only six were registered as candidates. This was due to the undeveloped democratic traditions in the country and to the lack of a multi-party system. This situation testifies to political alienation of a human being, who “turns from a subject (active part) into an object of influence of the external forces” [21], during election campaign.

In 1996, according to the new election legislation, the terms of the passive elections right implementation dramatically changed. For the first ever elections of the President of Russia, a threshold of one million signatures was stipulated for all nominees, which is 10 times larger than in 1991. However, the constitutional reform of 1993, the new foundations of public, legal, economic and social life caused an unparalleled stir among those who wished to take part in 1996 presidential elections and to submit documents to TsIK RF.

In 2000, the number of signatures required for registration was reduced twofold. The number of participants who submitted documents to TsIK decreased twofold as well (34 people). The first campaign of the 21st century was perceived by all participants more consciously. The experience of 1996 convinced many that gathering signatures is a

labor-consuming process. Moreover, all participants started to realize that without political image and PR, which became popular in the political environment, success is hardly feasible. This trend was also characteristic for the next three presidential election campaigns of 2004, 2008, and 2012.

Later, a rather clearly expressed demand for new faces and ideas in politics was formed in the society, which is true not only for the Russian Federation but for many other countries all over the world (examples are recent presidential elections in France and the USA). Responding to that demand, a federal legislator significantly liberalized the terms of registering candidates, reducing the number of the required signatures but retaining the previously stipulated bars for persons with a criminal past. The analysis of the number of candidates, self-nominated or nominated by political parties for the 2018 presidential elections, show that the significant liberalization of the requirements of law resulted in the increase of the number of candidates and parties initiating nomination (37 candidates). However, it did not lead to a significant increase of the number of candidates who successfully passed the first stage – registering a group supporting self-nomination or authorized representatives of a political party (only 8 candidates).

Further we consider if liberalization of the election legislation influence the implementation of the active election right by the citizens of the Russian Federation. For that, we use the indicator of voters' attendance to the presidential elections from 1991 till 2018. Attendance is the ratio of the number of citizens who actually took part in voting to the number of citizens having the right to vote. The results of analysis are presented in Table 3.



Table 3. Attendance of voters at the Russian presidential elections from 1991 till 2018 *

Presidential elections in the Russian Federation	1991	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018
Attendance of voters (%)	76.66	69.81	68.7	64.38	69.81	65.34	67.54

*Table compiled by the authors

The data shown in Table 3 allow making the following conclusions: the highest percentage of voters' attendance was registered in 1991 year – 76.66 %.

For example, attendance at the 1996 presidential elections was 69.8% and 68.9% in the first and second rounds respectively. In 2000, the same indicator was 68.7%, and in 2008 — 69.8%. In 2004, attendance was lower than in the current year (64.4%), as well as that at the previous presidential elections in 2012 (65.3%).

According to the experts, the increase of attendance in

2018 elections was probably due to unprecedentedly wide and intense campaign to attract voters to the elections. It included various techniques, from massive SMS-informing and advertising in public transport and malls to performing local polls and referendums simultaneously with the elections.

The data are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summarized data of presidential elections in the Russian Federation in 1991–2018*

Presidential elections in the Russian Federation	1991	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018
Number of signatures for registering a candidate	100 000	+	-	+	0	0	-
Number of registered candidates	6	+	0	-	-	+	+
Attendance of voters (%)	76.66	-	-	-	+	-	+

*Table compiled by the authors

Table 4 shows the changes in the three indicators under study. The 1991 indicators are taken as basic. Other indicators are shown schematically. “+” denotes the growth of eth indicator, “-” denotes its decrease, and “0” denotes that the indicator remained unchanged. According to the initial hypothesis of this research, we assumed that the increase in the number of signatures for registration must lead to the decrease in the number of registered candidates. At the same time, it was to have a negative influence on electoral activity. This is because more candidates with more varied ideas would attract more voters. However, if we turn to Table 4, we will find no direct confirmation of the above hypothesis. Not a single election campaign demonstrated such regularity. There is some regularity between the number of signatures for registration and the number of registered candidates: in the campaigns of 2004–2018 these indicators actually demonstrated inverse relationship, as it was initially supposed. This allows concluding that the said dependence exists. However, the influence of that dependence is not very strong, so it is manifested not in every election campaign.

As for the number of registered candidates and the voters' attendance, one may notice that these indicators change independently from each other: in 2004 and 2018 the relationship was direct, as it was supposed, and in 2008 and 2012 – inverse. No stable relationship was revealed. The same is true about the number of signatures gathered for registration and the voters' attendance. No steady inverse relationship of these indicators was revealed. Thus, analyzing the dynamics of the voters' attendance, one may conclude that increasing the election legislation democratization has no influence on the results of

implementation of the active election right by the citizens.

V. CONCLUSION

Analyzing the research results, one may notice that the increase and decrease of the level of election legislation democratization directly influence the implementation of the passive election right (more candidates wish to participate in elections), but very poorly influence the active election right (voters' attendance does not increase). This scenario is not logically rational; it manifests the internal problems occurring between the citizens who implement their active and passive election rights. Due to that, conclusions can be made about the character of presidential election campaigns in Russia:

1) The recent presidential election campaigns of 2012 and 2018 showed the following regularity: even if many candidates took part in the elections, attendance of voters decreased. This is largely due to the fact that citizens do not see authoritative candidates, capable of implementing well-balanced policy. This was especially vivid in the recent elections of 2018, when there were eight candidates, representing various political interests and population groups, but the attendance did not significantly increase, while the acting President Vladimir Putin got the record 76.7% of votes. Besides, a peculiar feature of the recent Russian presidential elections in 2018 was that the main indicator is now not the percentage of votes for the key candidate, but the level of attendance.



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2) The increased level of democratization of the election process results in the fact that the candidates for the presidential position are not authoritative politicians but people without much political experience (for example, Boris Titov, Kseniya Sobchak). As a result, such candidates are not perceived by the citizens as actual presidential aspirants, thus, the democratic character of elections is only manifested on the surface, which does not increase interest in the elections and attendance, accordingly. For example, considering the distribution of votes for candidates versus attendance at the recent elections of 2018, one may see the classical situation “the higher attendance, the high percentage of votes for the key candidate”, tending to 100% and 100% attendance. The share of other candidates decreases proportionally.

In future, the data collected and analyzed within this research may serve as the basis for other theoretical studies in the field of electoral behavior. Besides, the obtained conclusions are of very important from application-oriented viewpoint and may be used for improving the electoral process in the Russian Federation.

The research revealed a contradictory trend, consisting in the absence of high electoral activity despite a large number of candidates potentially capable of taking the top political position in the state. Hence, it is not enough to provide a wider range of choice for the citizens. The most essential condition of high electoral activity is the presence of authoritative and competent candidates. The main thing is not the number of the election campaign participants, but their actual potential. Stemming from this conclusion, the following recommendations for transforming the election institutions in Russia can be made:

1) Further democratization in regard to gathering signatures supporting candidates should be stopped. Lowering the threshold had a negative effect on the quality level of the candidates for the presidential position, while no full-fledged candidates, capable of competing for power, appeared. That is logical, as the person, counting for showing a high result at the elections, should be authoritative in the society. We believe that a balanced number of signatures for being registered as a candidate for presidential position is 500 thousand, as in the 2000 election campaign. If a person is unable to gather that number of signatures, they a priori will be an outsider at the elections, thus, their participation in the campaign is unpractical, both for themselves and the society.

2) The issues related to gathering signatures are not limited to quantity. It is necessary to eliminate administrative barriers which may appear during gathering and checking of the signatures by the Election Commission, for example, when the gathered signatures were not accepted because of the formally incorrect address of a citizen.

3) The issue of elections democratization is connected with the democratization of power in the country in general. No measures within the electoral institutions may become a source of high electoral activity. The key issue is in the mentality of the citizens, who show a rather low level of confidence in the authorities. This means that the main vector of global development of the state must consist in

bringing up the younger generation to become a competent civil society in future. Active life position of the population is the main criterion of the quality of feedback with the authorities, which is expressed, among other things, through electoral institutions.

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