



EVALUATION OF EXPERTS 'OPINIONS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF INTRODUCING A PENALTY FOR NOT PARTICIPATING IN ELECTIONS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to conduct a content analysis of the opinions of Russian experts on the possibility of introducing liability for non-participation in elections in the Russian Federation. The authors used a specialized subgroup of content analysis - media content analysis- as scientific research method. The article's authors conclude that in the Russian Federation, the introduction of a fine for failure to appear at a polling station is discussed only at the level of an idea. Experts' opinions can be divided into 4 groups: the group of experts has a positive attitude to introducing a fine for failure to appear at the elections; the group of experts has a negative attitude to introducing a fine for failure to appear at the elections; the group of experts notes the conditions, in which it will not be necessary to introduce a fine for failure to appear at the elections («should not be introduced in those regions where the electorate is quite active»); and finally the group of experts does not see the prospect of a legislative initiative on the introduction of a fine for failure to appear at the election.

Keywords: voters, elections, absenteeism, electoral campaign, voter turnout.



AVALIAÇÃO DAS OPINIÕES DE PERITOS SOBRE A POSSIBILIDADE DE INTRODUIR UMA PENA POR NÃO PARTICIPAR DE ELEIÇÕES NA FEDERAÇÃO RUSSA

RESUMO

O objetivo do artigo é realizar uma análise de conteúdo das opiniões de especialistas russos sobre a possibilidade de introduzir responsabilidade por não participação nas eleições na Federação Russa. Os autores utilizaram um subgrupo especializado de análise de conteúdo - análise de conteúdo de mídia - como método de pesquisa científica. Os autores do artigo concluem que, na Federação Russa, a introdução de uma multa por não comparecimento a uma assembleia de voto é discutida apenas ao nível de uma ideia. As opiniões dos peritos podem ser divididas em 4 grupos: o grupo de peritos tem uma atitude positiva quanto à aplicação de uma multa por não comparecimento às eleições; o grupo de peritos tem uma atitude negativa quanto à aplicação de uma multa por não comparecimento às eleições; o grupo de peritos toma nota das condições em que não será necessário aplicar multa por não comparecimento às eleições («não deve ser introduzida nas regiões onde o eleitorado é bastante activo»); e finalmente o grupo de peritos não vê a perspectiva de uma iniciativa legislativa sobre a introdução de uma multa por não comparecimento às eleições.

Palavras-chave: eleitores, eleições, absentismo, campanha eleitoral, participação eleitoral.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are not so many countries in the world where the legislation provides for liability for non-participation in the elections. At the present time, the introduction of a fine for citizens who do not take part in elections is being discussed in Belarus, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan (Anna et al., 2020; Antunes de Souza & Soares, 2021).

I. Marzalyuk (a deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus) in 2019 said that “responsibility for abstention for voting, taking into account the progressive European experience, should be introduced; thus, saving money that we spend on elections” (Marzalyuk, 2021; Akemu Kuroiwa et al., 2022).

M. Nazarmatov (an activist) stated that “the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic must establish the duties and responsibilities of citizens during elections, due to the fact that during the last parliamentary elections on October 4, 2020, about 1 million people did not come to vote” (Nazarmatov, 2021; Garay et al., 2022).

In 2018, advertisements that residents would be fined for non-attendance the elections, appeared on the streets of Smolensk. Advertisements were placed on the entrance doors. The official mass media noted that “responsibility for abstention for voting is not provided for in Russian legislation” (Anna et al., 2020; Borichev et al., 2022). In the Russian Federation, participation in elections is a voluntary matter for each voter. If the Russian legislator reconsiders the issue of imposing fines for non-participation in elections without a valid reason, the problem of apathy of the Russian population and distrust of political parties, public

institutions and elections in general will probably be resolved (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018; Bilyalova et al., 2019). In this regard, interviews with experts who are considering the issue of imposing fines or other sanctions in Russia for non-participation in elections periodically appear in the mass media (Akhyadov et al., 2022; Pogosyan, 2021a; Pogosyan, 2021b; Doskeyeva et al., 2018; Zhamkeeva, 2012).

We assess the opinions of experts on the possibility of introducing personal responsibility for non-participation in elections in the Russian Federation by conducting a content analysis of the official media.

We wanted to find an answer to the question: "Is it possible to introduce a penalty in the Russian Federation for non-participation in elections?" "How can voter turnout be increased if a penalty is introduced for non-participation in elections in the Russian Federation?".

2. METHODS

Design: In our research, we used a specialized subgroup of content analysis - media content analysis. It is a robust method that allows you to generalize information and test hypotheses. This type of analysis is widely used to analyze interviews in social and humanitarian research. We adhered to the point of view of humanist scientists who turned to media content analysis in order to reveal the "truth" about socio-political processes in society.

Sample: In order to conduct a content analysis of the mass media, we looked in the official media in the Russian Federation for statements by scientists and experts in the field of political science about the possibility of introducing a fine for not participating in elections in the Russian Federation.

Data collection: To conduct media content analysis, we used the following statements of 1) we selected just the experts point of view; 2) the statements concerned the issue of the possibility of introducing a penalty for non-participation in elections in the Russian Federation. The scientists, and experts, whose statements have been summarized and analyzed, work in the following state and research institutions: in the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, in the State Duma Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Construction, in the Expert Council under the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation, the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Office the affairs of the Government of the Saratov region and others.

Instrument: Media content analysis of the experts' statements made it possible, through a systematic and objective analysis of the text, to draw reliable conclusions on the research questions of interest to us. It was revealed that this research issue is not only in the Russian Federation, but also in the CIS countries. We were able to find an answer to the question: "Is

it possible in Russia at present to impose penalties for non-participation in elections?" We identified 4 groups of scientists' opinions on the possibility of introducing a penalty in the Russian Federation for non-participation in elections.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The scientists consider various aspects related to the possibility of introducing personal responsibility for non-participation in elections in the Russian Federation and abroad.

S. Wilcox explores how we can understand educational reform and policy implementation and the unintended consequences of those interventions through the local from a historical context (Wilcox, 2020).

S. Ajaps, A. Obiagu say that there is a growing need for increased civic engagement in developing countries. However, for civic education reforms, we need to understand the relationship between sociodemographic factors and civic engagement. The implications of these findings for a critical civic education aimed at increasing critical consciousness and civic action are discussed (Ajaps and Obiagu, 2020).

W. Bekele, F. Ago note that their study sought to assess the practice and challenges of good governance in Bonga Town Administration. In sum poor service delivery, the gap between local government representatives and the town people, weak political leadership, lack of timely response for a public interest, and public disengagement in shared affairs were found to be challenges of good governance. This research argues for the existence of governance which ensures public engagement in decision making and prioritization of shared problems, accompanied by transparent and accountable administration (Bekele and Ago, 2020).

Soloviev studied "the problem of involving people to legal responsibility for non-attendance at elections, studying the history of the electoral process in various countries" (Soloviev, 2016). Vasilieva et al. considered "the problem of the absence in the legislation of responsibility for non-participation in voting in elections to government bodies and local government bodies or officials of constituent entities of the Russian Federation or municipalities" (Vasilyeva et al., 2020).

In the Russian expert community, the initiative to introduce personal responsibility for non-participation in elections has been repeatedly discussed. In 2003, S. Shoygu proposed to deprive of the Russian citizenship those people who do not come to the polls three times without a valid reason, and this is at least a third of all voters, or a fifth of the inhabitants of Russia. This statement was not supported by the federal law, since according to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, "the right to vote refers to the constitutional right of a citizen, and not to his duties." If it becomes necessary to introduce this norm into the Constitution of the Russian Federation, then for this it is necessary to hold an all-Russian

referendum. A number of experts are positive about the introduction of a fine for abstention for voting (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018).

V. Grib (Deputy Secretary of the Public Chamber of Russia) in 2013 said that “you can think and fine citizens for the non-participation in elections, as it is done in a number of countries” (Kapustin, 2021).

A. Kobrinsky (a member of the expert council under the chairman of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation) in 2014 said that “the problem of apathy of the Russian population and distrust of political parties, public institutions and elections in general can be solved by revising the introduction of a fine for non-participation in voting without a valid reason” (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018).

R. Grinberg (Scientific Director of the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences) in 2016 made a proposal to introduce a fine for citizens of the Russian Federation who do not take part in the voting. He considered that “such a measure can contribute to an increase in the level of civic and electoral activity of the population”. A similar proposal was made by the chairman of the Moscow Region Election Commission, I. Vildanov (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018).

A. Dunaeva in 2017 wrote down proposals of young politicians of the Rostov region on the introduction of personal responsibility for “absenteeism” in the elections: “for non-participation in municipal elections, young politicians proposed a fine of 500 rubles, and for missing federal elections, a fine of 1,000 rubles and a ban for traveling abroad. Young political scientists suggested borrowing from other states not only a stick, but also a carrot. In Georgia, voters are given discount cards, for example, to a pharmacy, and lotteries with expensive prizes are also held for voters” (Dunaeva, 2021).

Part of the expert community has a negative attitude to the introduction of a fine for non-participation in elections.

Chief Executive Officer of the Government of the Saratov Region said that he had “negative attitude to the initiative to introduce penalties for non-participation in elections, because it is a civic duty” (Ross, 2018).

V. Pligin (Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Building) in 2014 said that “in Russia there is no need for such a measure as the introduction of fines for voters for abstention for voting, the deputies have repeatedly discussed and studied the experience countries where sanctions for absenteeism are applied, but citizens should be attracted to participate in elections by the very diversity of political and party life in Russia” (Anna et al., 2020).

Some experts noted the conditions, the creation of which would not require the introduction of a fine for non-participation in elections.

S. Kotomin (Deputy Chairman of the Yaroslavl Regional Election Commission) in 2011 considered that “fines for non-participation in elections should not be introduced in those regions where the electorate is quite active” (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018).

D. Oreshkin (a political scientist) noted in 2011 that “before talking about the introduction of fines for non-attendance at the elections, we must first restore confidence in the elections as an institution. Such drastic proposals are made only because simple solutions are being considered. This proposal has no prospects. This proposal may be included in the bill, but no one will ever adopt such a law” (Pogosyan, 2021b).

A. Kucherenka (a lawyer, a member of the Public Chamber) in 2016 considered the elections, first of all, as “the expression of the will of citizens”, who independently decide whether to participate or not to participate in the elections. An increase in the level of electoral activity of the population is possible, in his opinion, by providing voters with complete and reliable information about elections and candidates (Pogosyan, 2021a).

A number of experts do not see the prospects for a legislative initiative to introduce a fine for failure to appear at the elections.

V.M. Platonov (a Russian politician) in 2011 noted that “there is no punishment in case of non-attending the elections. We really have the right of citizens to determine for themselves whether they want to use the right to choose or not” (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018).

In 2014, the CEC of Russia responded to the initiative to introduce penalties for non-participation in elections. S. Danilenko (member of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation) said that “such a proposal is possible only if the Constitution of the Russian Federation is changed. Currently, the Constitution of the Russian Federation does not oblige citizens to take part in voting” (Ross, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the statements of scientists, experts in the field of political science, we can answer our research questions. In the Russian Federation, the introduction of a fine for failure to appear at a polling station during elections is discussed only at the level of an idea. From time to time in the mass media there are statements of experts about the possibility of introducing a fine for non-attendance of voters, since this measure can increase the voter turnout by at least a third of all voters, or a fifth of Russia's residents. The opinions of experts can be divided into 4 groups: 1) the group of experts has a positive attitude to the introduction of a fine for non-attendance at the elections, and also believes that this will solve the problem of population apathy and distrust of the elections, and will also contribute to an increase in the level of civic and electoral activity of the population; 2) the group of experts has a negative attitude to the introduction of a fine for non-attendance at the elections; 3) the group of experts

notes the conditions, in the creation of which, it will not be necessary to introduce a fine for non-attendance at the elections (“should not be introduced in those regions where the electorate is quite active”; “first you need to restore confidence in the elections as an institution, before introducing fines for failure to appear at the elections”; “the increase in the level of electoral activity of the population is possible by providing voters with complete and reliable information about the elections and candidates”; 4) the group of experts do not see the prospects of a legislative initiative on the introduction of a fine for failure to appear at the elections, since” such a proposal is possible only in the event of a change in the Constitution of the Russian Federation” , and voters have the right “to determine for themselves whether they want to exercise their right to choose or not”.

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