

# Participation in political elections as a factor in the sustainable development of a cross-border region on the example of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

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**Abstract.** This article considers political participation in presidential elections, the most important elections at the federal level in Russia, as the phenomenon of sustainable development of a cross-border region (Yakutia). Material of a sociological study on the readiness for political participation as a preliminary analysis of the election results are presented and rigorously discussed.

**Keywords:** election, presidential elections, participation, political participation

## 1. Introduction

Yakutia is one of the largest transboundary territories of the Russian Federation, accessing the northern borders of the country. The subject is part of the circumpolar world, which includes 8 countries of the Arctic zone. The total length of the region's access to the Arctic Ocean is more than 4.5 thousand km. Here such regions of the republic are located as Anabarsky, Bulunsky, Ust-Yansky, Allaikhovsky, and Nizhnekolymsky. As a rule, cross-border areas are subject to certain risks of centrifugal tendencies. One of the most important factors for the sustainable development of such territories is the political activity of citizens, including participation in national elections as an institution of legitimization and the formation of power.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This paper uses the general scientific methods and methods of the social sciences and humanities, as well as relying on an integrated approach. Using a *system method* allows to consider elections as a set of legal and political processes, which includes an electoral system based on certain legislation and citizen participation in elections. The results of a *sociological survey* conducted in 2017 on the territory of the Bulunsky, Zhigansky, Kobyaysky districts and Yakutsk served as materials for this study. A *comparative method* will provide an opportunity to compare results of different electoral cycles that took place in Yakutia. Also, we would like to mention that the research could further use quantitative *statistical methods*. Thus, the main conclusions of the study will be based on data from the CEC of the Russian Federation and the RS (Y) on the turnout and voting of citizens.

## 3. Results

Population's political participation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is characterized by specific

features that we attempt to reveal in the course of our sociological research. The sociological survey conducted by us, during which residents of Bulunsky, Zhigansk, and also non-arctic regions of the republic (Kobyaysky district and Yakutsk) were surveyed, shows that the population's interest in political life decreases in direct proportion from the center of the republic to the periphery. At the same time, the survey results on Yakutsk look different, because respondents express their in 37.5% of cases. Perhaps in Yakutsk, the peculiarity of the political activity of the population of large cities is manifested in this ratio. In big cities, a citizen feels a certain detachment from political life, shows particularism of political culture.

Such criterion as a degree of trust in the government gives an inverse relationship, increasing from the center to the periphery. It should be noted that the maximum degree of trust in the authorities was revealed in small localities. Yakutsk and Zhigansk are knocked out of this series, where Yakutsk has average results, and Zhigansk shows certain features. Thus, there is an inverse proportion between the interest in politics and the degree of trust in the government. The coefficient increases from the center to the periphery. So, Yakutsk demonstrates 37.5% (interest) / 42.5% (trust), and it is 30% / 55% in Tiksi.

Respondents evaluated the role of politics in their lives, ascending from the center to the periphery. However, indicators from the village of Tiksi of the Bulunsky district diverge from this trend. Presumably, this may be due to the decline in the economic and geopolitical status of Tiksi, which in the past was the stronghold of the Northern Sea Route. Since the 1990s, the village has experienced serious socio-economic and demographic problems, such as declining living standards, collapsing economic objects, population migration, etc.

Our survey results also show that the non-political nature of many issues is not related to the geographical location of a person. Rather, it is associated with certain activities of state bodies and local authorities. Often, it is politically inversely proportional to the trust in higher authorities [1].

In the areas studied by us, interest in general elections is higher than in republican elections (on average, by more than 20%). From this we can conclude that there is a difference in the level of interest in the federal and republican elections. Nearby localities yielded similar results, so readiness for participation in elections may also be due to territorial factors.

At the same time, we can assert that there is a complex spatial factor enriched by other reasons (the activities of local authorities, etc.). In Zhigansk, effective work in local government bodies is underway, one of the major social groups is the Evenki group, which is distinguished by high activity. There is a high mobility of both gender groups whose activities are based on tribal communities. And, in contrast, Tiksi shows low interest in regional elections due to several social and historical reasons. First, this is the island with a different mentality (definitions of the type Big land and continent are used in relation to the whole of Yakutia). Second, the ethnic factor is certainly erasing in Tiksi. Third, there are many visitors in those places, which are still very much affected by the socio-economic.

At the rural level, population is actively interested in both federal presidential elections and the regional ones. According to the typology of G. Almond and S. Verba, the features of a subservient political culture are manifested here. This can be explained by several factors: (1) political elections are an important event for the villagers' unsaturated life; (2) the villagers may exhibit particular subjects of a political culture in which private interests are connected with family and community [2]. In general, there is a certain dependence in an arctic person's mentality on the activities of government bodies and local self-government, on their effectiveness.

Willingness to participate in political elections and active citizenship are significant indicators of sustainable development of territories. For all regions of Russia, the most important are elections at the federal level (President and the State Duma of the Russian Federation). Participation in these elections is the most important indicator of the involvement and synchronization of the political process of cross-border regions with all-Russian tendencies. The rest of the paper considers original data on the participation of residents of Yakutia in the election of the President of the Russian Federation.

In 1991, voters of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) participated in national presidential elections for the first time. If the turnout in Russia as a whole was 76.66% and B. N. Yeltsin scored 57.3%, then the

winner received 44.9%. in Yakutia. Relatively low results can be explained by incompleteness of the institutionalization process of the Russian government and the struggle of regional political elites, who have not yet decided on their political positions at that time.

The first full-scale elections of the President of the Russian Federation in 1996 already demonstrated the electoral potential of the voters from Yakutia. In particular, they showed a high turnout (above the all-Russian) and significant support of the current President (turnout was 75%, 64% of them is the share of the winner) [3]. In the 1990s, despite a difficult socio-economic situation, Yakutia under Yeltsin was characterized by relatively stable development of political, economic, and other institutions. For the first time, the Republic of Sakha was formed on the basis of state sovereignty, the right of the Yakut people to receive preferences from the extraction of natural resources in the region turned out to be realized, active construction of objects of mass importance was deployed, etc. At the same time, B. N. Yeltsin and the first President of Yakutia M. E. Nikolaev maintained close business and personal contacts, which could not fail to attract a local voter.

In presidential elections of the Russian Federation in 2000, the tendency to decrease results is manifested in the subject (turnout is 72%, 54% of them is the share of the winner). Gradually, the process of synchronization of cross-border and national political processes is noted. The formation of Russian socio-economic institutions and the formation of national peculiarities of political culture is taking place.

In 2004, the Yakuts showed maximum turnout results (turnout was 82%, 69% of them were the leader's share). In Yakutia, as well as in Russia as a whole, Putin had a strong support due to the results of the first term policy. In the presidential elections of 2008, the support of D. Medvedev by the Yakuts was adequate to the support of Putin in the previous elections (the turnout was 75%, 67% of them the leader's share). In general, election results demonstrated the involvement of regional voters with the all-Russian political processes. In 2012, the tendency for a gradual decrease in turnout and votes for the winner persisted in Yakutia (the turnout was 74%, 69% of them were the winner's share).

In 2018 elections in Yakutia, finally, the downward trend in support is determined (turnout 70%, 64% voting in favor of Vladimir Putin). Having reached its peak in 2004, turnout and vote for winners over three election cycles has begun to decline gradually in Yakutia.

#### **4. Discussion**

During the entire study period, the voting core of the Yakut electorate quite definitely supported representatives of the current leaders. Personal contacts (Yeltsin and Nikolaev), all-Russian synchronization, the growing influence of the United Russia party and active involvement of "administrative" resources acted as support factors. The decline in indicators has begun since 2008, which quite convincingly coincides with the growing criticism of the President of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Shtyrov and the general discontent of Yakutsk regarding the reduction in percentage deductions from mining. After changing the vector of Russia's geopolitical interest after 2014 in the South-West of the country could also contribute to increasing risk factors for the region's sustainable development.

In presidential elections, Yakutia regularly prevails in turnout over the national average. This can be explained by the relatively higher interest in establishing strong links between the cross-border region and the federal center. Presidential elections in 2018 stand out, when the opposition candidate Pavel Grudinin received the greatest support of 27.25%! Experts attributed this to the Northerners' commitment to traditional socialist values and agricultural interests, as well as to the wide use of social networks by the candidate's headquarters (WhatsApp, VK, Odnoklassniki, etc.). Social networks often play the role of the only communication channel between civil society members in conditions of low density and dispersion of population. At the same time, experts point out the particular perception of the candidate by the residents of Yakutia, "The director of the state farm named after Lenin fit into the image of an ideal candidate in the minds of some Yakuts. Nobody was interested in what his real motives were..." [4].

## 5. Conclusion

The electorate of the republic demonstrates a constantly manifesting and increasing interest in the election of the President of the Russian Federation. This provision can be explained by various factors, such as cognitive understanding of the importance of the office and a historical significance of the head of state, political identification, including through the prism of regional interests, etc. Geopolitical remoteness and the transboundary nature of the region serve as factors in a certain risk of political stability. Under these conditions, participation in elections of federal authorities is the basis for characterizing sustainable development in the region.

## References

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