

Quality of Life and Electoral Behavior of Residents of the Moscow Region with Higher Education

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Abstract

The current decade for the Russian Federation is characterized by many socio-political events. 2018 will be included in the country's chronicle as the year of the successful World Cup, the year of the election of the President of the country and the year of important state reforms. The high credit of trust expressed to the President of the Russian Federation during the elections was manifested in high electoral activity and voting for incumbent President V.V. Putin, including among representatives of intellectual elite. It was the political situation that made it possible to implement one of the most unpopular social projects in the recent history of the Russian Federation – pension reform. The disappointment in the President and the Government of the Russian Federation, the lack of positive results on the decrees adopted, caused a sharp decline in electoral activity, an outflow of supporters of the ruling party and an increase in the protest vote, which manifested itself not only in voting for opposition leaders, but also in demonstrative support for outsiders. The Moscow region is the largest region of the country, which elected its leader in September 2018. The events, that unfolded subsequently, strongly influenced the political behavior of the representatives of this group in the Moscow region. The disillusion of the intellectual elite with the performance of the government, especially the federal one, with the realities of the electoral process have led to that only 48 % of this group's representatives supported current governor A.Y. Vorobyov, and the leaders were the most skeptical. There was no clear consolidation of opposition forces around any political leader. The votes were almost evenly distributed among the candidates competing with the current governor of the Moscow region. This result proves the so-called "signal" nature of the vote of intellectual elite. In the absence of other forms of expression of political will, this method of conversation with the authorities was the only possible one. Analyzing the events of last autumn, political experts have developed a "theory of black glasses", which put on the population, perceiving today's reality. It describes not only the disappointment with the performance of the government, but also some nuances of social and political sentiments of Russians.

Key words: *quality of life, electoral behavior, political situation, protest vote, intellectual elite, Moscow region, "theory of black glasses".*

The current decade for the Russian Federation is characterized by many socio-political events. 2018 will be included in the country's chronicle as the year of the successful World Cup, the year of the election of the President of the country and the year of important state reforms, affecting the quality of life of all groups of the population and trust ratings to all branches of government.

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The high credit of trust expressed to the President of the Russian Federation during the elections was manifested in high electoral activity and voting for incumbent President V.V. Putin, including among representatives of intellectual elite. The traditional skepticism and social criticism inherent in this group of the population were supplanted by patriotic feelings against the backdrop of foreign policy challenges and the lack of a real alternative. The general consolidation of Russians around the figure of V.V. Putin made him one of the most legitimately elected leaders in the world.

It was the political situation that made it possible to implement one of the most unpopular social projects in the recent history of the Russian Federation – pension reform. The need to increase the retirement age has been obvious for a long time. The Russian Federation is the only state in the world whose citizens retire in the case of women at the age of 55. Given the gender bias at this age towards an increased share of women and an ever-increasing average life expectancy, it makes the group of pensioners the largest and the economic burden on the working-age population close to critical. However, changing conditions for retirement, affecting every adult, is a serious social shock and is fraught with negative consequences. Only a government with a high credit of public trust can retain its influence after the implementation of such a reform. The calculation turned out to be correct and, despite the fact that during the post-Soviet period, paternalistic sentiment has decreased significantly and the number of citizens counting only on themselves and their closest environment, rather than on the state, has increased significantly, the reform was adopted, however, leading to a significant drop in the rating of the authorities.

All these processes were especially clearly reflected in the electoral behavior of the residents of the regions of the Russian Federation, where the elections of senior officials (governors and mayors of large cities) were held.

The disappointment in the President and the Government of the Russian Federation, the lack of positive results on the decrees adopted, caused a sharp decline in electoral activity, an outflow of supporters of the ruling party and an increase in the protest vote, which manifested itself not only in voting for opposition leaders, but also in demonstrative support for outsiders.

The Moscow region is the largest region of the country, which elected its leader in September 2018. Its multicomponent nature and complexity of the social structure makes the analysis of the current situation especially important, since this subject of the Russian Federation is a kind of model of a country with large industrial cities and rural territories, science cities and military towns. Nevertheless, in the Moscow Region, we can speak of an increased share of the intellectual elite as long as the military-industrial complex and pilot farms, high-tech industries and high-tech troops, including space forces, have historically been concentrated around Moscow. In this regard, the identification of features in the socio-political behavior of residents of the Moscow region becomes the most significant for the study of modern Russian intellectual elite.

On the eve of the presidential elections in the Moscow region, a sociological study was conducted by the method of personal interviews, which represented the residents of each municipal district and urban district of the Moscow region. 10300 people were interviewed during it.

To analyze the electoral behavior of the intellectual elite, we formed a subarray that included groups of professions that require higher education and are engaged in intellectual work: managers, specialists, office workers and students who expressed their willingness to vote (active electorate). It amounted to 2487 people.

Representatives of this social group, conventionally called by us, the intellectual elite, are characterized by a more positive perception of the situation in their municipalities. So, if on average in the array, 55.7 % people were satisfied with the state of affairs, then among the intellectual elite this opinion was held by 59.5 %.

One of the reasons for this assessment of the situation may be a higher level of material well-being. In our group, 13.4 % attributed themselves to the most affluent segments of the population

with incomes “high” and “above average”, while 7.8 % gave such a self-assessment of their well-being in the region as a whole. The gap between the share with the “average” income among the entire population and the intellectual elite is quite significant. So, for example, among the intellectual elite, two-thirds (66.6 %) attributed themselves to the average income level, 59.4 % - region wide. If we consider in more detail the membership of the studied group, then, naturally, the managers (24.4 % with an income level above the average) and, oddly enough, students (17.6 %) consider themselves the most wealthy.

The intellectual elite not only has a higher income level, but also strives to earn more. Higher needs form special ideas about the minimum necessary subsistence level. If on average in the Moscow region 50% of respondents are ready to be content with an income of up to 30 thousand rubles per month, then among the group selected by us, only 38.0 % are oriented to this level, and 54.3 % would like to earn from 30 up to 70 thousand rubles, i.e. for every second representative of the intellectual elite, this could be called an adequate payment for his work. Moreover, the most unpretentious requests are typical for students (54.2 % seek income of up to 30 thousand rubles). Heads of Moscow Region evaluate their work, of course, more significantly – 56.5 % would like to have an income of over 40 thousand rubles.

The material well-being of the intellectual elite was also reflected in political predilections. It would not want to lose the accumulated basis in the process of the next breakdown of the system; therefore, it is characterized by the support of the party in power, whatever it may be at any given time. At the beginning of 2018, on the eve of the presidential elections, the intellectual elite was characterized by a higher level of electoral support for the United Russia party – 46,9% versus 42,5% on average in the region. Probably, for this group of voters, the party in power was a certain guarantee of stability in the face of accumulating difficulties.

The electoral preferences of the intellectual elite and other groups in relation to other political entities did not differ significantly. But the intellectual elite were less willing to articulate absenteeism.

Increased protest activity is not characteristic of the studied group. On the eve of the presidential election, more than three-quarters of the intellectual elite did not allow themselves to participate in any protests (77.5 %).

The youngest of the group of electoral active intellectual elite were least confident in their participation in the vote, but nonetheless 77.8 % of them were quite stable in their desire to fulfill their civic duty.

The electoral preferences in the presidential elections in the group of active electorate in the general regional array and among electorally active intellectual elite practically did not differ. 63% of the intellectual elite and 65% of the entire population of the region were ready to vote for V.V. Putin. The declared support of the incumbent President among students was slightly higher (66.3 %).

The demagogic motivation for voting “*I want to realize my suffrage*” for the intellectual elite is more characteristic than for other groups of the population. For this reason, 35.8 % were ready to go to polling stations, while only 30.5 % expressed such readiness among the entire population. But for the participants of the upcoming election campaign, it was important, first of all, to support a particular candidate (respectively 39.4 % among the intellectual elite and 44.1 % among the entire active electorate of the Moscow region).

Thus, in the Presidential elections of the Russian Federation, the intellectual elite practically did not manifest itself as a specific group with any active requests for change. To a greater extent, they could be classified as the conservative group of voters, not seeking radical changes, and expressing a desire to quietly accumulate wealth and achieve material well-being. The results of

the vote expressed a certain need to confirm the correctness of the development policy of the country, directly associated with the person of V. V. Putin.

The events, that unfolded subsequently, strongly influenced the political behavior of the representatives of this group in the Moscow region. The growth of dissatisfaction with the work of landfills and waste disposal enterprises in the region got into the most popular communication channels among the intellectual elite: messengers, social networks, information and political blogs. It has made this group of the population the most informed about the environmental problems not only of the territories close to them, but also of the remote municipalities of the Moscow region. Add to this the dramatic reaction to the announcement of the increase of VAT, the cost of petrol and the retirement age during the first victories of the Russian national team at the World Football Cup, expressed exclusively with the use of the definitions of "betrayal", "cowardice", "meanness", "dishonesty", and it becomes clear how the most thinking part of society ceased to value stability and joined those who were ready to vote for spoilers. The tendency to reflection and social criticism made the members of this group very determined. This resulted in the fact that even that part of the electorate, which usually stayed at home and discussed the activities of the government only in the kitchens, came to the polling stations, thus deciding to enter into a conversation with the authorities. The numbers tell the stories best: the representatives of the intellectual elite in voting for the governor of the Moscow region did not try to support their candidate, but more often than other voters, they thought about the possibility of using their vote and voting right as a specific way to declare to the current government their disagreement with its decisions and actions.

As a result, a post-electoral study, conducted with the preservation of the method and series of pre-election measurements, revealed that more than half of all votes cast in support of any candidate other than the representative of the current government were a manifestation of reluctance to vote for the candidate from the party in power.

The disillusion of the intellectual elite with the performance of the government, especially the federal one, with the realities of the electoral process have led to that only 48 % of this group's representatives supported current governor A.Y. Vorobyov, and the leaders were the most skeptical. As we can see, the youth, to a greater extent than other groups, voted for the representative of LDPR (the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) Zhigarev K. S. The support of youth is usual for this party. It is in its electorate that there are the largest number of people aged 18 to 29 years, attracted by the outrage of its leader V. F. Zhirinovskiy. The support of the representative of ecological party "Green Alliance" was for the first time. She predominately carried out on-line activity: the campaign was conducted exclusively by means of Internet resources and became the domain of only active users of social networks and telegram channels. At the last elections in the Moscow region, the group of leaders, as well as the mass stratum of office workers and specialists clearly expressed a tendency towards strengthening nostalgic "left" sentiment, as evidenced by the vote for the representative of KPRF (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation) K. N. Cheremisov. The gubernatorial elections in the Moscow region ended as follows:

As can be seen from the above data, there was no clear consolidation of opposition forces around any political leader. The votes were almost evenly distributed among the candidates competing with the current governor of the Moscow region. The representative of the KPRF Cheremisov K. N., who received the largest number of votes of the opposition, was almost 50 % lead over the opponents. This result proves the so-called "signal" nature of the vote of intellectual elite. The essence of it is not to change the head of the region, but to inform the federal government about their dissatisfaction with its actions, the lack of due attention to domestic political problems, inability to offer a clear scenario for the future of the country and its people. In the absence of other forms of expression of political will, this method of conversation with the authorities was the only possible one.

In addition to a fairly prosperous Moscow region, in September, 2018, the elections of heads of the constituents were held in 21 regions of the Russian Federation. And the resentment over socio-political decisions of the administrative nomenclature in some of them led to the authority of almost random people, voting for which was not in order to support them, but in order not to keep the current governor in office.

In four of the 22 regions, the elections of September 9, 2018 were unsuccessful for the incumbent nominees. In another 3 constituents, the current leaders scored the lowest possible percentages for victory. Amid the growing discontent, such results may be considered natural. The rush of growing anti-establishment found expression in some regions in the form of reduced turnout, where only a third of voters went to the polls. In others - in voting against incumbent governors. Arguments about "wrong", "unprepared", "carried out carelessly" election campaigns yield to the conclusion that the population has declared its disappointment with the policy of the ruling elite. But if the majority of voters voted with feet, not coming to the polling stations, on the part of the intellectual elite, it was a conscious vote against the current government responsible for reducing the quality of life of the population.

Analyzing the events of last autumn, political experts have developed a "theory of black glasses", which put on the population, perceiving today's reality. It describes not only the disappointment with the performance of the government, but also some nuances of social and political sentiments of Russians. Such as the presumption of guilt of the government: *"everything that is done by its representatives is obviously bad"*, *"even if something is good, it is too expensive, for sure, most of it was stolen"*; lack of confidence in the future; decrease in the sense of personal security; weariness from existing political parties and leaders, including opposition ones; a sense of permanent economic crisis and military threat; conviction that the government is trying to solve economic problems at the expense of the population. Guided by this theory, an attempt was made to reduce negativity through the theses of the message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly, focused on the domestic political agenda, filled with proposals to address the most pressing social problems affecting the quality of life of citizens.

The specialized study of VTSIOM (the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center) demonstrated a favorable attitude of the population to the message. Most of his theses were perceived positively. However, even in this case, the intellectual elite showed social criticism, expressing skepticism about the feasibility of the declared promises from the authority.

Notes

¹ Official site of Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (Founder RISS is the President of Russian Federation) <https://riss.ru/demography/demography-analytics/33499/>

² Andrei Margolin article "The Development of Urban Agglomerations as a Factor in Increasing the Global Competitiveness of the State". Moscow 2015 <https://pa-journal.igsu.ru/articles/r102/3590/>

³ An article on the speech of the Moscow Mayor at the board of the construction complex of the city "Sobyanin: Provision of housing in Moscow is the worst in both the country and the world" dated 11.08.17 <https://rg.ru/2017/08/11/reg-cfo/sobyanin-obspechennost-zhilem-v-moskve-huzhe-vseh-i-v-strane-i-v-mire.html>

⁴ Gololobov I., Pilking H., Steinholt Y. (2014) Punk in Russia: Cultural mutation from the «useless» to the «moronic» (Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series). London: Routledge

⁵ Romir Research Holding . Press release 12.04.2012] [http://romir.ru/studies/328_1334174400/]

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