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**PRUSSIAN CITIZENS ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR IN THE
ELECTIONS TO THE LANDTAG (1849–1918)**

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Abstract

The study provides a scientific analysis of the electoral behavior of Prussian citizens at the elections to the Landtag in 1849–1918 and the legal culture of the inhabitants of the kingdom is characterized. The author tries to find out the reasons on the basis of which the same citizens took an active part in the elections of the all-German representative bodies, but ignored by their participation the election of the deputies of the Prussian Landtag. This circumstance allows us to conclude that the electoral behavior of the Prussians was largely influenced by the internal perception of the unfairness of the elections to the Landtag. Describing the Prussian three-class electoral system, its opponents noted that under it active suffrage was granted not to persons, but to money. The article substantiates the conclusion that the main dissatisfaction of the Prussians was concentrated not around the existing electoral qualifications (which were recognized by a significant part of the population as natural and necessary), but around a three-class electoral process involving open voting and a dubious procedure for distributing deputy mandates, creating a significant inequality of statuses and votes of voters. It is not possible to say that the majority of the inhabitants stood behind the Landtag of Prussia. On the contrary, it can be concluded that about two-thirds of the people entitled to vote did not vote. Mass protests against the three-class electoral system and the very low voter turnout testified primarily to the dissatisfaction of the population with the existing situation.

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1. Introduction

Currently, the phenomenon of political activity of citizens in the 19th – early 20th centuries in upholding and realizing political, especially electoral, rights and freedoms looks somewhat surprising. Citizens massively participated in political demonstrations, the work of political parties, and elections. Many residents spent several hours, and sometimes days, getting to the polling station, and then stood in huge queues in order to exercise their right to choose, but this behavior could not be traced in all elections. Activity and indifference depended on many factors, the most important of which were electoral views and the level of electoral culture. Electoral behavior is explained through the level of culture and consciousness, which allowed the Prussian not to participate in the elections to the Landtag, but to take part in the elections to the Reichstag.

2. Problem Statement

The problems of the Prussian three-class electoral system became the most important in Prussia until 1918. The presented research is devoted to the scientific analysis of the electoral behavior of the Prussian in the context of legal regulation and the level of legal culture of society. The author made an attempt to analyze the mutual influence of legal culture and voter consciousness on electoral behavior, and vice versa; the work of the rational voter model. It is proved that in the implementation of legal regulation of the electoral process, the government took into account the legal culture and consciousness of the voter in its own interests.

3. Research Questions

In the course of this study, the provisions of Prussian regulations governing the elections of the Landtag in the period from 1849 to 1918, materials from periodicals, archival documents, and monographic literature were studied. The influence of legal culture on the electoral behavior of the Prussians was investigated.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the presented research is a scientific analysis of the electoral behavior of Prussian citizens in the elections to the Landtag in 1849–1918. through the prism of a wide range of communication processes and electoral culture.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on the principles of scientific objectivity and historicism, which contributed to a more or less complete study of the electoral behavior of the Prussians. The author uses various special-historical research methods, the use of which made it possible to identify the general and specific characteristics in the voting of representatives of various electoral classes. The formal legal method

provided opportunities to explore the legal basis of the Prussian three-class electoral system. The work analyzes elaborations on the problems of ensuring the principle of equality in elections. Great importance is given to information from archival sources of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (hereinafter – RGASPI), periodicals of the period under study, on the pages of which one can find a discussion of the issues of the Prussian three-class electoral system and the attitude of voters towards it ("Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger", "Königliche privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung von Staats – und gelehrten Saachen", "Neueste Mittheilungen", "Provinzial-Correspondenz ", "Vorwärts ").

6. Findings

By the decree of the king of May 30, 1849 (Verordnung betreffend die Ausführung der Wahl der Abgeordneten der 2. Kammer vom 30. Mai 1849) in Prussia for the election of the Landtag – the lower house of the Prussian parliament, a three-class suffrage ("Dreiklassenwahlrecht") was established, which, with minor changes, existed until 1918. Active suffrage was granted only to male citizens of Prussia who simultaneously met the following requirements: 1) who had reached the age of 24; 2) those who have an independent income, do not receive assistance for those in need from public funds and are not economically dependent; 3) not limited in rights on the basis of a judicial act; 4) residing at the place of residence or place of stay in the territory of the local community for at least six months permanently.

The skills of electoral behavior were formed only among a small number of inhabitants of the Prussian state. If at present we can assess the formation of electoral habits and electoral and legal culture among 16-year-old voters (Bronner & Ifkovits, 2019), earlier this was considered something completely unnatural. At the same time, the majority of the population approved of the slogan which sounds wild today: "Votes for Women, Votes for Donkeys, Votes for Dogs!" (Bauer & Ritt, 1979). People demanded the granting of universal suffrage, but they meant by it such a suffrage that cannot be called universal today in terms of the degree of citizens' involvement in electoral procedures.

The deputies were elected indirectly, that is, through electors. Primary voters were divided into three classes depending on the direct government taxes paid (income tax, property tax and construction tax, trade tax plus company tax). Only from April 1, 1895, direct municipal, district and provincial taxes were also taken into account by the electoral law. For each person not subject to state income tax, a notional amount (allegedly paid payments) equal to three marks was used for the calculation. The existence of electoral procedures linking tax payments to electoral rights created opportunities to bridge the gap between industry and agriculture over tax burden sharing and fostered a political consensus with respect to fiscal innovations. The political coalition supporting the adoption of the income tax included higher-income industrial and agricultural elites who expected the financial and electoral successes associated with the new tax. The introduction of a highly complicated income tax in 1891 shifted the tax burden from agriculture to industry and weakened the political influence of the middle class (Mares & Queralt, 2020).

Prussian Minister of the Interior F. Eilenburg, trying to find at least some advantages of the current electoral system, pointed out: "The system is based on the most important idea: in relation to elections, he should have more powers, who pays more taxes" (Provinzial – Correspondenz. 1869. No. 6). The logic behind establishing the relationship between suffrage and property or taxation reflects the belief that there

is a need to grant voting rights only to individuals with a longer-term interest in the welfare of society, akin to corporate shareholders (Aidt & Mooney, 2014).

The citizens of Prussia greeted the introduction of the three-year electoral right extremely negatively, considered the tightening of legislation unfair, and began to boycott the elections to the Landtag. An electoral leaflet entitled "The Three Classes of Voters" ("Die drei Wählerklassen"), published by the Social Democratic Party for the 1908 elections, caricatured the injustice in classifying voters in Prussia. The leaflet depicts a bag with the money of a large taxpayer belonging to the first class, and on this bag the number 10,000 is indicated, meaning the amount of money he owns and, accordingly, votes in the elections. The following is an image of a representative of the second class with a smaller bag with the number 1000. A representative of the third class is depicted with a bag on which the number 1 is visible (RGASPI. F. 215.Op. 1. D. 171). The electoral right granted on the basis of this system was actively called "penny right" (Groschenwahlrecht) among the common people, and the Landtag elected on its basis was called "penny Landtag". On March 7, 1910, the largest demonstration in history, demanding a change in electoral legislation, permitting to support the Junker rule, was held in Berlin. The demonstration was attended by approximately 50,000 – according to the police (Königliche privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung von Staats – und gelehrten Saachen. 1910. No. 111) and up to 150,000 people – according to the Social Democratic Party (Vorwärts. 1910. No. 55a).

The perceived unfairness was effectively influenced by the socio-economic and political status of a particular group of voters (Flesken & Hartl, 2020). Voters of the third class took part in elections much more passively than voters of the first and second classes. The rational voter model assumes that the choice between voting and abstaining mainly depends on the expected benefits and costs (Colomer, 1991). Voting may well be a rational act arising from an individual cost-benefit analysis (Schram & Winden, 1991). The voters of the third class did not see the rationality of their participation in the elections. The existing electoral law also contradicted the socio-cultural development of Prussian society (Ritter, 1975), which also contributed to the rejection of this electoral system by the subjects.

In the elections to the Prussian Landtag, in some constituencies one deputy was elected from 370,000 inhabitants, and in other constituencies – from less than 40,000 inhabitants. Here is the greatest injustice, there is no remote trace of equality. It is difficult to imagine how the Prussian three-class electoral system could be further worsened. All the monstrous possibilities of minimizing the will of the voters were laid in the foundation of the created electoral system. All dependent officials in the course of an open vote are forced to support the ruling party and dare not vote to the opposition. In establishing an open vote, the king certainly took into account these qualities of human nature. During the existence of the Prussian three-class electoral system, half of the voters even did not use their suffrage. This is not an accident, but is related to the condemnation of this system (Ritter, 1975).

The system for elections to the Prussian Landtag was the subject of serious contention between the liberal and conservative parties in Germany. Throughout Prussia, there were active protests against the preservation of the class system of elections (RGASPI. F. 215. Op. 1. D. 11. L. 199). Even supporters of the Conservative party, sometimes justifying the not very successful results for themselves, pointed to such an important shortcoming of the existing electoral procedure as the disproportionality of the election result and the real support of the party (Provinzial-Correspondenz. 1863. No. 24).

For example, as of January 15, 1866, according to the provisions of the Prussian three-class electoral system, 3,544,438 residents had an active right to vote, while only 1,096,519 voters came to the polling station. Supporters of the right-wing parties explained this only by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the people essentially agreed with the course of government, trusted the monarch and his government, and therefore did not consider it necessary to seek and choose other guardians for themselves (Provinzial-Correspondenz. 1866, no. 24). Following these considerations, one can draw an unjustified, one-sided conclusion that a high voter turnout testifies solely to distrust of the government, disagreement with its policy. Why, then, did the government call for a turnout? In order to get an expression of distrust by this turnout?

A significant number of articles on election campaigning and aimed at shaping public opinion periodically appeared in Prussia on the eve of the elections. Pro-government publications played a significant role, with relatively high circulations. The semi-official newspaper of the Prussian government was "Neueste Mittheilungen". Note some of the materials published in it. "The three-class voting system for the Prussian House of Representatives was not based on pay, but only on a class tax scheme. A division of the population by income can exist and be very useful without having to pay taxes. In fact, neither class tax exemptions nor tax breaks have in any way shaken the right to vote or the electoral system. The class tax cannot be ignored in state building, since it is, without exaggeration, the most important pillar of modern constitutional life" (Neueste Mittheilungen. 1882. No. 19). "On Tuesday, Prussian voters must cast their vote, which will be decisive in forming the composition of the Landtag. Professional work, taking care of daily life, especially the work that farmers and artisans have to do, will probably leave many indifferent to the electoral process. But in the day of elections, every respectable subject is obliged to give his business a rest, come to the polling station early and punctually and choose a person whom he trusts, who guarantees that he will be a truly monarchical deputy who will promote the policy of preserving the state. There have been many elements in the electoral campaign that either work openly in the opposite direction or use beautiful idioms to try to deceive voters about their real intentions. On the election day, keep your head and eyes open, visualize what is at stake ... If we want further improvement, we need to maintain enough weight of conservatives. If voters, who previously voted conservatively, tried to do otherwise this time, they would not only conduct a very unsafe experiment, but also lead to the fact that the previous positive development of the situation in our state would be questioned and completely changed. Does the voter want to do this for himself, for the Fatherland and our great emperor? Well, you voters, go vote!" (Neueste Mittheilungen. 1888. No. 98).

The liberal press also actively participated in the election campaign. In an electoral call for the third class, "Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger", encouraging voting, appealed to the conscience and love of freedom of citizens, calling suffrage a serious duty of citizens: "As ever, today it is a serious duty of all free citizens of our city to stand firmly together and unite their efforts to prevent the supporters of Ultramontanism from winning their candidates in the upcoming elections. Everyone should strive to induce friends and neighbors to vote for our candidates, thus bringing joy to all of us (Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger. 08.11.1881. No. 39. S.1).

Note that the results of modern studies do not confirm the unconditional truth of the thesis that there are more right-wing supporters among the voters who did not show up. Right-wing governments

tend to have lower voting shares when turnout is higher. The hypothesis of responsibility is also substantiated, according to which the turnout in more important elections is higher and that various economic variables have a non-linear effect on the turnout, implying that it is higher in excellent and bad periods of economic and social development, but lower in times of mid-level development. (Martins & José, 2014). In addition, voters are on average much less inclined to take risks (Tiemann, 2019), but when people perceive high or low polarization of certain issues, they support actions that are aimed at changing the situation (Pogge & Smith, 2020).

The clergy expressed loyalty and confidence to the government, convincing the king's loyal subjects to take part in the elections. They argued their position by the fact that the elections were arranged by the sovereign in order to enable his people to express their will and mood. It is the duty of every Prussian to support the ruler. If you do otherwise and do not take part in the elections, then the deputies will be elected who will cause trouble for the king. It is important to put the opponents of the king in a minority and create a Chamber of Deputies, which, hand in hand with him, will realize the only goal – to defend the welfare, security and honor of Prussia. (Provinzial-Correspondenz. 1866. No. 24). One of the most important theoretical explanations for why religion is associated with party choice is that religion influences citizens' moral values, which in turn affects party preferences. On average, about ten percent of religious voting is mediated by moral traditionalism (Egge, 2019).

The analysis of statistical data shows that a significant part of Prussia's candidates boycotted the elections in protest against the existing electoral law. The Social Democrats actively voted for candidates for deputies of the German Reichstag, but until 1900 they did not take part in the election of the Prussian Landtag (not only did they not nominate their own candidates but did not even take part in the election of electors). The proponents of innovative transformations to increase the political participation of citizens in public life categorically argue that elections do not encourage citizens to participate in public and political life. The importance of elections should not be underestimated in the pursuit of civil society (Khoban, 2019). Autocratic culture negatively affects social trust and political participation (Xu & Jin, 2018). Providing third-class voters with limited and ineffective suffrage prompted them to actively use other forms of political activity instead of elections.

Low electoral and legal culture of citizens is a significant problem and even a threat to democracy (Bokov, 2019a, pp. 112–117). The involvement of citizens in electoral procedures contributes to the development of the habit of voting, contributes to an increase in the level of legal culture. The voting process itself provides random knowledge (Sheppard, 2015) and thereby increases the level of legal culture.

7. Conclusion

The entire Prussian three-class electoral system was aimed at falsifying the true will of the electorate by establishing a special position for the privileged classes on the basis of higher income. The publications presented in the periodicals of that time clearly demonstrate the desire of their authors to influence the electoral behavior of citizens by appealing to their values and beliefs. Appeals to readers were aimed not only at supporting certain parties, but also at increasing the turnout at polling stations. Participation in the vote was presented as an active civic duty of a respectable citizen. It was obvious for

many third-class voters that practically nothing depended on their opinion in the elections to the Landtag. Appeals to civic duty and the integrity of subjects also failed to persuade a significant number of third-class voters to vote in elections that they considered unfair. The most effective means of increasing voter turnout is the most complete identification of the will of the people and taking it into account (Bokov, 2019b, pp. 110–111). Active campaigning was carried out not only by the government, but also by religious leaders who called not only to participate in the vote, but also to cast votes for the parties supporting the government.

Political participation is understood as the actions of citizens with the aim of influencing political, personnel decisions or participating in their making. The activeness and civic consciousness of the population, the level of legal, electoral culture, not only of an individual, but also of society as a whole, are of great importance. Communication among offenders is significantly different from communication of citizens who respect legal regulations. It should also not be forgotten that there is practically no sense in the voting of citizens if the majority of them are ignorant, incompetent, and have a low level of political culture.

The choice of forms of protection of the infringed right, forms of political communication was also influenced by the level of political and legal culture of the inhabitants of Prussia, their well-known habit of following traditionally established values, observing legal norms. The rational voter model was actively working. The broad masses of the population demanded the democratization of the electoral law, indicating that they are making a more significant contribution to the development of the country than the supporters of the three-class electoral system believe. For most of the population, universal suffrage as it is viewed today seemed to be a complete utopia. The authors of the pro-government publications assumed that there were more supporters of the king among those who did not show up than opponents. In addition, when campaigning for a turnout, it was taken into account that not everyone who came to the polling station would have the courage to openly vote for parties opposing the existing regime, against the king.

The inhabitants of Prussia took a more active part in the elections to the German Reichstag than in the elections to the Prussian Landtag. This circumstance clearly indicates that some residents did not accept the existing three-class electoral system and, by their boycott, tried to influence its democratization. In this case, the low voter turnout was not an unconditional consequence of the low level of electoral and legal culture of the Prussian population, but, on the contrary, may indicate a significant level of electoral and legal culture. Refraining from participating in the vote, the Prussians thereby tried to use mainly legal mechanisms to counter anti-democratic changes in electoral law – meetings, demonstrations, publication of campaign materials, etc. The conducted research makes it possible to assert the dual unity of the electoral and legal culture and political and legal communication at the elections of the Prussian Landtag (1849–1918). Culture can be viewed as a form of communication between people, electoral and legal culture as a form of political and legal communication. When implementing political communication, it is necessary to take into account the communicative nature of culture. Communication processes depend on the level of culture. In a society, institutions must be created that are the best possible for a given society. The creation of such institutions will contribute to the development of individuals civic consciousness, their involvement in public affairs. Rejection of the

existing situation leads to non-constructive, illegal political activity and a decrease in the level of participation of the population in elections. Establishing the legitimacy of elections among the entire population is vital to ensuring democratic stability.

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