

SCTCMG 2018
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural
Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

VICTORIOUS STRATEGY IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF
2018: POLITICAL TECHNOLOGIES AND ELECTORAL
FACTORS

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Abstract

The article studies the reasons for the victory of Vladimir Putin in the presidential election of 2018, political technologies and factors that influenced the choice of Russian voters. The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the electoral behavior of Russians and political culture, suggestive and manipulative technologies that influenced the formation of public consciousness and relate to the research topic. Such questions as the nature and specifics of power, the political culture of Russia, and political leadership are raised in the article, which are directly related to the electoral behavior of Russians, as well as the myth of falsification and the exceptional importance of the “administrative resource” at federal elections. These problems are studied in the context of the Russian political process, the nature of the political system of Russia. A conclusion was made that the state of political competition, moods, preferences and values of Russians, as well as political tendencies that are formed under the influence of domestic and foreign political factors, which makes it possible to correctly explain and predict political processes in the Russian Federation. In their research, the authors rely on theses of leading experts in the field of sociopolitical sciences, such as G. Almond and S. Verba, V. Fedorov, Y. Levada, and others. For these purposes, a number of research methods are used, including content -analysis, political analysis of historical and political prerequisites for the formation of the political regime of Russia, the classification of electoral technologies, comparative, historical and sociological methods.

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Keywords: Presidential elections of 2018 in Russia, Vladimir Putin, managed democracy, guided democracy, public opinion, electoral behavior of Russians.



1. Introduction

The article is relevant due to the relatively recent end of the election campaign in Russia, and the lack of quality research. The results of the elections are not fully understood by the society from the position of strategic choice of further development of Russia. The presidential elections of 2018 are of great importance for the country and the world and affect the vectors of world development.

2. Problem Statement

The main purpose of the present work is to link the analysis of the peculiarities of the formation of electoral behavior of Russians with the analysis of the causes of Putin's victory, to determine the specifics of the political technologies used for this.

3. Research Questions

The object of this study is the election campaign of 2018 in Russia. The subject of the research is much narrower and consists in the study of electoral behavior of Russians and technologies of decision-making.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the work is to explain the political events and processes in Russia related to the results of the 2018 election campaign in Russia.

5. Research Methods

- 1) General logical methods (political analysis, classification of electoral technologies and historical background);
- 2) Methods of theoretical research (system method structural analysis, comparative-historical method, behavioral);
- 3) Methods of empirical data selection (observation, content analysis of sources, method of expert evaluation, sociological methods).

The results of the work are as follows:

- - Presidential elections in Russia in recent years have been won by Vladimir Putin due to the compliance of his candidacy with the peculiarities of the political culture of the Russians, and the need for election fraud has disappeared;
- - The state's ability to protect and promote a presidential candidate from the "party in power" is enormous and comprehensive;
- - Post-Soviet political transformations show a tendency to strengthen the presidential vertical of power, "personification" of the system by Putin.

6. Findings

The manuscript is devoted to the analysis of the presidential election campaign in Russia in 2018, and the results are a useful research of political processes in Russia.

Presidential elections in the Russian Federation are of particular value for researchers not only in Russia, but also abroad. According to the German sociologist N. Luman (deutsch Niklas Luhmann), “at the moment of voting, all the power is concentrated in the hands of the voters” (Luhmann, 2001). When it comes to Russia, as a country with a unique territorial and geopolitical location, a country with nuclear weapon, these words have special significance. The article analyses the presidential elections in Russia in 2018 from the point of the characteristics of the prerequisites and the specifics of the technologies used.

It is important to start with the actualization of the past. Electoral behavior of Russians directly depends on the historical features of the political system. The first President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, created an eclectic political regime: in appearance it resembles a liberal-democratic one, but in essence it is autocratic-state regime. In this regard, such tendencies as absenteeism, nihilism, servility, dependent attitudes and paternalism in Russia the mid-1990s (Fedorov, 2010). Having come to power at the beginning of the 21st century, Vladimir Putin created a model of democracy that can be called “plebiscite-leadership” as opposed to “parliamentary-representative”, which exists in Western countries (Fedorov, 2010). The Russian ruling elite realized the destructiveness of the libertarian model in the absence of a political culture in society, thereby reaffirming the theoretical conclusions of G. Almond and S. Verba about the impossibility of building democracy without the existing political culture (“participatory political culture”) (Almond & Verba, 1963).

As a result of the mixing of antagonistic types of political cultures, paternalism prevails in Russia. According to Russian sociologist and political scientist, head of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center VTsIOM Valery Fedorov, the adaptation of the classification of political cultures of Almond and Verba makes it possible to determine the Russian political culture as “statist” (Fedorov, 2010 p. 58). Vladimir Putin made a return to the traditionalist model of political culture with Soviet elements, which marked the ousting of the Anglo-Saxon competitive model of the Russian plebiscite election culture. It led to a “change in the model of electoral behavior of Russians, fundamentally changing the political landscape of Russia” (Fedorov, 2010). In this context, it is also very important to mention a number of institutional reforms, namely the adoption in 2001 of the federal law No. 95-FZ of July 11, 2001 “On Political Parties”, which meant cutting off “extra” parties from participation in the political process to strengthen the role of large parties, raising the minimum threshold for passing to the State Duma of Russia in 2007 (Federal Law of January 10, 2003) The famous reform of 2004 led to the cancellation of regional leaders' direct elections and the possibility of their actual appointment as president of the Russian Federation (Dolenko, 2009). In the historical retrospect, the reform of 2004 fits a rational framework: the lack of subordination of the republics' leaders to the federal center is comparable to the fragmentation of the Russian state in the 11th - 15th centuries, and this is the beginning of the destruction of the political regime that has developed over the centuries. In other words, “weak power was never successful in Russia” (Fedorov, 2010). This type of political culture was most relevant to such qualities of Russians as “lack of citizenship, conformism to authorities, permissiveness and resignation” according to the opinion of the

Russian sociologist T. Zaslavskaya (cited in Fedorov, 2010), that was also expressed in the prevailing "consumer" culture and hope for the state, and not for one's own strength.

Political and social crises, conflicts of the second half of the 1990s (for example, the First and Second Chechen campaigns, the terrorist attacks in Buinaksk, Volgograd and Moscow) caused a public demand for the strengthening of the state, which was satisfied when V. Putin came to power (Fedorov, 2010). In the late 1990s - early 2000s Russians were disappointed in the model of Western democracy and the proposed formats of liberalism. Attempts to force the US domination as "the only superpower", accompanied by a clash of Russian and American interests in complex geopolitical processes. These processes, by the early 2010s, led to domestic consequences in Russia, in the form of a rise in the statist, nationalist and anti-Western tendencies. According to the Norwegian international relations expert Iver Brynild Neumann: "The West is no longer unequivocally something to be copied" (Neumann, 1999). It was because of this that the idea arose that democracy in Russia must conform to the traditions and peculiarities of the country. In the Russian scientific and journalistic environment, this alternative model of democracy since 2005 has been called the "sovereign" (concept of the Russian presidential aide Vladislav Surkov), the causes of which lie in the unwillingness to make concessions to the West to the detriment of independence and protection of the national idea (Fedorov, 2010).

As a result, Vladimir Putin's reforms of the 2000s led to the approval of the Russian plebiscitary election culture, which resulted in a change in the model of electoral behavior of the Russians. Due to the lack of real competition, the 2004 elections marked a transition from parliamentary to plebiscitary democracy, which in turn caused a reanimation of a number of elements of the Soviet electoral culture: the elections were again reformed, as noted by Russian sociologist Valery Fedorov, in the "ritual of confirmation sent from authorities" (Fedorov, 2010). The model of electoral behavior began to correspond, according to Robert Merton, to the "conformist model of adaptation" (Merton, 1968).

Due to the incompleteness of democratic changes, the modern Russian electoral culture "is oriented towards the figure of a politician-national leader and the country's development course personified by him" (Fedorov, 2010 p. 78). In the presidential election of 2018, Vladimir Putin won with a record result of 76.69% of the vote in his support at a turnout of 67.49%, which exceeds the results of the previous campaign (Dukhanova, 2018). Elections, in some sense, became like a plebiscite, and acclamation. Commenting on this result, we note that the president approval rating were a stable 57.7% as of December 2017, and his activity approval rating was 83.6% (VTsIOM, press release No. 3552). The survey of another Russian sociological center, Levada Center for the approval of activities, is practically the same, respectively - 81% (Levada Center, a press release of 03/29/18 "Ratings"). We agree with the position of the Russian political analyst Irina Glebova that, both in the past and now, "the chain of command has a safe basis - the position of the majority of the electorate", and the elections "gain the meaning of a plebiscite" (Glebova, 2006).

It is important to answer the most important question that reflect the subject-matter of the article: what factors and technologies influenced the victory of the Russian leader?

Firstly, the domestic political factors. The thesis about the features of Russian political culture, paternalism, should be referred to again. We can observe the relevance of these trends in the presidential elections of 2018. Thus, at polling station No. 667 (Republic of Mordovia) on election day, an elderly woman asked to help her fill out the ballot, saying: "We vote for the present president and we do not hide

it, Putin paid us the pension and let him pay it further on” (Atasuntsev, et al., 2018). This quote vividly demonstrates the paternalism tendency: society has given freedom authorities in exchange for social transfers.

Television has high influence on the electoral preferences of Russians. TV-culture contributes to the formation of a sense of unity and commonality with the country, and illusory participation, as Russian political scientist Irina Glebova specifies - “audience participation” (Glebova, 2006). Observing what is happening in the world of politics during the election campaign makes it possible to note the continuity of such trends. For example, a popular joke on the Russian Internet a few days before the election: “They said if you vote for Putin, you cannot go: just nod in front of the TV and that's it” (Filippova, 2018). But voter turnout for Russian elites is of sacred significance - this is “the fundamental ritual for the people to recognize the ruler’s right to power” (Fedorov, 2013). The greater the turnout, the more legitimate the power. In other words, “low turnout is a blow to legitimacy” (Galimova, 2017). In this regard, it is impossible not to note the fears of the elites not to realize this legitimacy, as a result, more than a year before the elections, they developed the predictive formula “70 to 70” and electoral technologies that would help to implement it (Mukhametshina, 2017b). Experts noted the apathy of the electorate, the focus of the President’s attention on foreign policy and building a dialogue with Russian elite.

The authorities used various tools to ensure the legitimacy of the turnout. It is worth noting that Russia has quite a different presidential election campaign in comparison with the United States. The electoral technologies used in the 2008 presidential election in the United States were large-scale and “turned the voter into a spectator, an enthusiastic consumer of a bright, dynamic visual show filled with heroism and irony” (Moskvin, 2016). In our opinion, the adaptation of Western electoral technologies to the conditions of the Russian political environment led to their partial “hybridization”, since there is no need in the conditions of the “referendum scenario”.

The first technology can be called the “electoral trip”. It has already been noted that the distinctive feature of Russia as a state in the historical retrospective is high degree of power' personification. The development policy and the actions of the government commonly began to be identified with the President himself. It is for this reason that presidential “trips around the country” were the main PR technology during past federal election campaigns. According to the opinion of Russian sociologist Valery Fedorov, the remaining candidates “arrange a bazaar” (Fedorov, 2010). The same thing happened to the election campaign of 2018, as according to the candidate for the presidency of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) Pavel Grudinin, candidates arrange a “balagan” (Galimova, Gavrillo-Alekseev, & Dergachev, 2018).

Debates as a pre-election democratic institution became an imitation in Russia. To compensate the lack of political ideas and programs the personality and image of the party leader is used, and critical thinking about reform options and modernization plans is not imposed on the voter. This that leads to the transformation of politics into a show, debates into a process of imitating the existence of political competition, while the president and candidate at the same time made trips around the country to electorally significant cities as part of the election campaign. As part of his pre-election regional tour, Putin communicates with workers, takes part in the commissioning ceremony of the nuclear power station unit, meets with residents of the region, plays volleyball with students of the local lyceum (Galimova, Gavrillo-

Alekseev, & Dergachev, 2018). With a help of these suggestive technologies, the presidential power was legitimated.

The next "move" of Vladimir Putin's election campaign is the president's message. In Western democracies, a pre-election program, a phased plan and a development policy of the country are of great importance for the voter. Opposition spokesman Alexei Navalny described the election program as a "joke" at the same time "an unnecessary one" and which "no one reads" (cited in <https://2018.navalny.com/platform/>). In this case, this conclusion is confirmed by the thesis of American political scientists Stephen White, Richard Rose, Ian McAllister that due to the unfinished work in the 1990s, the process of forming a political identification program does not play a significant role in the choice of the Russian voter (Sakwa, 1997).

This is precisely the logic of V. Putin actions. Political scientists agree that his message to the Federal Assembly on March 1, 2018 was a program. The newest types of high-tech, ultra-modern and ultra-powerful weapons were of a great effect. According to some opinions, the message of the President was specially moved to 2018, which is closer to the elections. According to political analyst, editor-in-chief of the Moscow Carnegie Center, Andrei Kolesnikov, the message "had a mobilization value" (Kolesnikov, 2018). Political analyst V. Slatinov also noted that the message in the perception of voters "marked the priority of domestic problems" (Mukhametshina & Kurakova, 2018). An oppositional Russian journalist, M. Zygar, noted that these types of weapons were demonstrated specifically for the West, so that «The West would no longer be little Russia as it used to» (Zygar, 2018). To confirm these abstracts based on sociological data, it is necessary to refer to researchers of public opinion before the elections. Sociologist of the Levada Center, K. Pipia, stated that if every second Russian (according to Levada Center polls - 48%) is confident in the implementation of development programs announced during the Message to the Federal Assembly, this is "an indicator of credibility to the president" (Zygar, 2018).

Now it is necessary to highlight the technical methods of forming the maximum possible turnout of the electorate through the existing arsenal of technologies of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Russia and the election commissions of the regions. Institutions conducting elections in Russia are forming the electoral behavior (Moskvin, 2016).

The first technology among Russian political consultants is called "door-to-door". Its essence lies in the "door-to-door enquires of the population with the help of agitators" (Rybin & Fedorchenko, 2012). The second technology appeared only this year and received the name "mobile voter" (Russian "mobile voter"), namely the abolition of absentee ballots. Considering that many voters move around the country for various reasons and sometimes cannot vote at their place of residence, the abolition of absentee certificates has become abolished. Political analyst G. Kuznetsov, head of the expert council of the Expert Institute of Social Research, believes that "the CEC conducted an effective invitation campaign" (Mukhametshina & Kurakova, 2018). As early as February, on the eve of the elections, the Central Election Commission began sending SMS messages with information about new voting options at the place of actual residence. In this context, it is important to note that, according to political analyst D. Oreshkin, this has allowed to attract an additional 4 million votes (Mukhametshina & Kurakova, 2018). In addition to SMS distribution, according to media observations, checks in trading centers and viral videos on the Internet were also actively used.

Special attention should be paid to foreign policy factors that have had a significant impact on the course of elections in Russia. According to experts, the charged foreign policy situation in the country played a big role in supporting Putin, and not that the authorities used to strengthen the statist and patriotic tendencies. It is known that the “the anti-Russian conspiracy theory” and the creation of an “image of the enemy” are actively used by the authorities to influence the mood of voters (Kozyrev, 2009). It should be noted that at that time, other forms of foreign policy pressure had a certain effect, such as the situation with the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, the sanctions policy of the West, the heightening of tension with Ukraine (The expert explained that the Russians...) In this context, the West acted as the main *bête noire* (English “Black beast”) of Russians on the entire agenda in the media. All this indicates that the authorities deliberately manipulated these sentiments, using anti-Western stereotypes. In this regard, it is preferable to quote the words of the Western European diplomat, British ambassador Roderic Lyne: “historical emotions deeply rooted in the subconscious of nations, are easily ignited under the influence of relevant events” (Line, 2007). Russians, who form the main electorate, do remember numerous national humiliations, resentments and defeats, which played the role during the elections. In this regard, a demonstration of force during the President’s Address to the Federal Assembly looks completely different: Putin begins to embody the country’s defender from US aggression, international terrorism, the only obstacle to the expansion of NATO to the East. In the article for Time magazine, the opposition Russian journalist M. Zygar noted that since the initiation of Crimea’s entry into the Russian Federation, V. Putin began to personify the idea that he is “the only one who can restore the greatness of Russia” «State propaganda started to spread the idea that Putin is the only one who can restore the greatness of Russia») (Zygar, 2018).

V. Putin’s “political figure”, which expresses the sacredness of his power and the theses about the personification of the system, is confirmed by M. Zygar "And if Russia is God’s chosen nation, it follows that Putin is God’s chosen leader" (Zygar, 2018). We will not exclude the biased orientation of these provisions and their focus on the formation of the western people’s negative attitude towards Russia, but they closely correlate with the “people-ruler” Russian traditional tendency (Fedorov, 2013). In this context, it is necessary to extrapolate statements from medieval political theology, namely from the work of the German and American medieval historian Ernst H. Kantorowicz “The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology” (Kantorowicz, 1957). In this context, it is necessary to extrapolate provisions from medieval political theology, namely from the work of the German and American historian-mediievalist Ernst H. Kantorowicz. V. Putin’s “political figure” is a sacral expression of state power, which the president personifies. In this regard, the following comparison is relevant. In January 2015, Soviet and Russian singer Iosif Kobzon, who is close to the Russian elite, said that the president had married a second time “to Russia” (Voys, 2015). He practically literally quotes the words of the medieval lawyer Luke de Penn "Prince joined to himself as his sponsa the state" (Kantorowicz, 1957). The above statements are once again confirmed by the following circumstance: even abroad, the overwhelming majority of those who voted - 85% - cast their votes for Putin (of the 475 thousand Russians who...). The evidence of the personification of the political regime is a sociological survey conducted in September 2017 by the Levada Center. According to the poll, 18% of Russians are ready to vote for the non-existent presidential candidate A. Semenov, who was allegedly supported by Vladimir Putin (Mukhametshina, 2017a). This suggests that citizens show an interest in the elections, but at the same time they are suspicious of them.

In conclusion, the election fraud in modern Russia through the so-called “administrative resource” is not a completely correct wording, the institutions involved in the formation of power function in the traditional-political Russian society. V. Fedorov admits that due to the lack of confidence in the victory of the candidate from the authority of B. Yeltsin, the 1996 presidential election was rigged (Fedorov, 2010). But later, in connection with the above-mentioned changes in electoral behavior, this situation changed dramatically. The Russian electorate “votes for who will win, the need for falsification simply disappeared. According to the results of sociological research, the Russians have no public demand for revolution and radical changes.

7. Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn:

- 1. The presidential elections in Russia over the past years have been won by Vladimir Putin due to his candidate’s compliance with the peculiarities of the Russian political culture; the established practices of political institutions; the need for large-scale election fraud is not rational;
- 2. The capacity of the state apparatus to support and promote a presidential candidate from the ruling elite has significant institutional and technological resources;
- 3. At the moment there is no opposition candidate who will become a real alternative to Vladimir Putin.
- 4. Post-Soviet transformations of the political regime demonstrate a tendency towards strengthening the “personification” of the system, preserving and reproducing historical and socio-political values.

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