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Social Political Differentiation of Electoral Moods of the Population of the Ukrainian SSR after World War II

Summary: In this paper, the main manifestations of the electoral moods of the population of the Ukrainian SSR during the elections to the Supreme Soviets of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR and local authorities in 1946–1947 are considered. The generally low level of interest of the population in political actions, such as election campaigns, is emphasised due to the difficult social political and economic situation in the state. The factors that determine the electoral behaviour of voters and the causes of social deviations are analysed. The paper presents the stratification of citizens' electoral moods according to socio-political indicators and in the regional dimension, describing in detail the attitude to the elections of such social groups as workers, peasants, petty bourgeois, intelligentsia, women, etc. It is noted that the geography of critical statements proves the similarity of the electoral moods of the population in different regions of the Republic. However, the motivation for the protests and their public manifestation by the residents of 'Great Ukraine' (i.e., eastern and central Ukraine, which was under the rule of the Russian Empire and the USSR) and the western region are radically different. If, in most of the territory of the Ukrainian SSR, citizens accepted the demands of the authorities and were included in the electoral process, Western Ukrainians massively boycotted them. The boycott of the elections by the Western Ukrainian population was caused by a protest against the repeated forced Sovietisation of the region, the predatory economic policy of the authorities, as well as repressions against participants in the national liberation movement. Equally, Western Ukrainians protested primarily for ideological reasons, not accepting the values of the Soviet power and considering it an occupational force, while for the inhabitants of Great Ukraine, the everyday, material aspect turned out to be the most critical issue.

Keywords: Ukrainian SSR, post-war period, population's electoral moods

The efforts of modern researchers resulted in the shuttering of the Soviet mythology of the 'political monolithic nature of the Soviet society'. The said myth was based on the results of elections to the representative branch of power in which Soviet citizens repetitively provided almost 100% support for government initiatives. In fact, the political moods of the Soviet people were very diverse – from active approval of the regime to its complete rejection. However, none of the researchers dares to single out the percentage of the authorities' supporters and opponents, which is understandable, because the results of the elections never reflected the actual public political moods of citizens. In the Soviet Union, with its powerful punitive repressive system, not everyone dared to express their thoughts. Equally, the Soviet party's reporting records stored in the Central Archive of the Supreme Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (TsDAVO of Ukraine), the Central State Archive of Public Organisations of Ukraine (TsDAGO of Ukraine), and regional archives are not objective due to the ideological and stereotyped process of preparing documentation in the USSR.

The first post-war election campaigns for the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and the Union republics of 1946–1947, of course, occupied a special place in the system of the 'model' Soviet democracy.[1] The population's unanimous support for the Communist bloc and non-party candidates was supposed to be proof of the pre-war strength of the Communist regime and an act of its unconditional legitimation. However, holding elections turned out to be a difficult task for the Stalinist leadership due to the significant likelihood of their failure due to difficult socio-political and economic circumstances and the problematic high crime rate in the country at that time, which caused absenteeism.

As a result, the mechanism for conducting elections throughout the entire territory of the USSR, which was not very constitutional in nature, was even more at odds with the letter of the law because the political goals of the Soviet leadership could not be achieved within the framework of the existing constitutional order.

A particularly difficult situation with elections developed in the Western Ukrainian regions, the population of which – having experienced severe repressions in 1939–1941[2] – actively opposed the attempts of Sovietisation, including those involving the use of armed forces. Despite a powerful propaganda campaign, administrative pressure and repressive actions, in the first post-war elections, the authorities failed to make Western Ukrainians active participants in this process.

People refused to participate in pre-election events, relying on the support of the Ukrainian anti-Communist rebels. On election day, they did not appear *en masse* at polling stations, jeopardising the voting. In particular, during the elections to the Supreme

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1 More about elections and electoral law: Hazard J.N. 1949, 9–11; Palazyan A.S. 2012; Zvyagolskiy A.Yu., Turitsyin I.V., Uporov I.V., Epifantsev A.A. 2016; Stasiuk O. 2018.

2 Tesliuk R. 2023, 41–42.

Soviet of the USSR in February 1946, no more than 10% of the population of the Western Ukrainian regions voted voluntarily, 30% voted under duress, and 60% did not vote at all. However, due to the fact that the Communists controlled the bureaucratic apparatus, the election results were grossly rigged.

This was the result of unlawful actions of public authorities and individual officials, who, in fact, created a certain sphere of 'limited legality' in the country, in which the regulatory legal acts in force at that time were inactive, or their provisions were deliberately not applied. Despite the fact that the inhabitants of 'Great Ukraine' showed more loyalty to the existing regime, their attitude towards the elections was far from unambiguous. A deeper study of the electoral moods of Soviet citizens makes it possible to single out 4 groups of voters depending on their attitude towards the electoral process:

1. 'activists' – who fully supported the government and were actively involved in the campaign;
2. 'calculating', or 'activists with a personal interest' – who participated in the campaign, hoping to settle their daily problems in this way;
3. 'evaders' – some of them tried to avoid participating in the elections using all means, and some openly or indirectly expressed their negative attitude, without opposing the system as a whole; and
4. 'conformists' – who came to the polling stations and voted 'properly' without showing any other political activity.[3]

It should be noted that the first group – the 'activists' – was not the largest one in Soviet society. It included government officials, party activists, Komsomol members, and trade unionists, namely, people who enjoyed certain privileges and benefits under the existing regime.

The 'calculating' and the 'evaders' were equally few in number, because not many individuals wanted to resist the regime even within the framework provided by the constitution. The largest group were the 'conformists', who voted hard in exchange for the regime's loyalty to them. The strategy of social mimicry, assumed by the majority of Soviet citizens as an adaptive form of cohabitation with the authorities, is explained by the consequences of the mass terror that, for many years, had broken the backbone of any form of public resistance.

However, when we consider the situation in the Western Ukrainian regions, the above scale of gradation of the electoral sentiments of Soviet citizens seems to be incomplete. In this case, we should add the following to the above-mentioned groups of voters – which, of course, also existed in Western Ukrainian society, although in different proportions:

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3 Kimerling A. 2016, 109.

5. 'protesting element' – voters who were under the influence of the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) and UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and refused to vote for ideological reasons, despite terror and coercion by the authorities;

6. 'rioters' – the largest group who not only refused to vote but also encouraged others to do so, detonating a chain reaction of protests. They resorted to the use of force in response to state terror. For instance, they beat up representatives of the authorities, committed actions compromising the authorities;

7. 'victims' – who voted under the terror of the authorities or refused to vote for fear of being destroyed by the anti-Communist rebels; and

8. 'members of the nationalist underground' – who carried out numerous anti-electoral actions and also tried to actively interfere with the elections, wielding weapons in their hands.

The first above-mentioned four groups of voters in Western Ukrainian regions had their own characteristics. In particular, the 'activists', i.e., the voters who consciously and willingly voted in the elections in Western Ukrainian society, were represented primarily by members of the administration and representatives of law enforcement agencies, chairmen of collective farms, Red Army soldiers, and Komsomol activists. Considering that there are few locals among these categories of the population due to the specific personnel policy pursued by the Soviet authorities in Western Ukrainian regions, it becomes clear that this group of voters in no way reflected the attitude of the 'native' Western Ukrainians towards Soviet democracy. Likewise, there were only a few 'calculating' and 'conformist' voters among Western Ukrainians because, given the activities of the OUN underground at that time, collaboration with the new government was simply life-threatening.

Ukrainians' objections to participating in the elections or their protest against them were motivated by political, economic, social, as well as moral and psychological aspects, which varied across the regions of the Republic. While Western Ukrainians protested primarily for ideological reasons, not accepting the values of the Soviet power, considering it an occupation, for the inhabitants of Great Ukraine, the material and everyday aspects of economic and political realities turned out to be the most critical. Interruptions in the supply of bread, lack of food, and other essentials caused people to have a negative attitude towards the government and its leaders. In particular, the administrator of the theatre in the city of Proskurov (now Khmelnytskyi) turned off the radio that was broadcasting a program about the elections and said irritably: '[I'm] tired, a whole month before the elections, and they are barking. The Communists have gripped us with their fist, there is nowhere to get a piece of bread, and everyone is talking about a good life, chicken's laugh'.[4] A violent emotional reaction among people was also caused by the authorities' indifference to solving

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4 CSAPAU. file 1. op.70. case 1048, 279.

their daily problems: 'Why don't you ask us if we have anything to eat, but only tell us who we should vote for? Who are we going to vote for? Is it the one who took our bread?'[5] – the peasants of the Khodaki village of the Ternopil region asked the representatives of the authorities.

The protests also had a clear social distinctiveness. While the peasants mainly noted the predatory economic policy of the Soviet government and demanded an end to illegal repressions, the intellectuals pointed to the shortcomings of the Soviet electoral system, its inconsistency with constitutional norms, and violation of the electoral legislation by the organisers of the electoral process.

In particular, the accountant of the Lviv State University, S. M. Ukrainskyi, expressed his dissatisfaction with the Soviet electoral law, which, in his opinion, did not provide freedom of choice: 'Our election campaign turns into a real comedy, nowhere, except for the USSR, do the authorities interfere in the conduct of elections. In other countries, each party nominates its own candidate, criticises others, but try to criticise in our country. This is not a democracy'.[6]

Equally, criticism of the Soviet electoral system was voiced in the statements of N. Kimanov, engineer of the Yenakyivsky metallurgical plant, according to whom it had nothing to do with democracy: 'Apparently, we will not wait until the time when truly democratic elections will be held in the Soviet Union. There is nothing democratic about these elections. You have to vote for someone who is already on the list'.[7]

Having experienced participation in the parliamentary structures of Western European states, Western Ukrainians compared the Soviet electoral system with European electoral practices, which allowed them to clearly see the shortcomings of the Soviet electoral reality.

In particular, one of the 5th-year students of the Lviv Polytechnic Institute compared the Soviet elections with the elections to the Polish Sejm and spoke in favour of the latter: 'Elections to the USSR Armed Forces are held in such a way that a predetermined candidate is chosen. Moreover, only this one candidate is placed on the ballot. Here, during the elections to the Polish Sejm, there were many more candidates than needed to be chosen. Therefore, it was possible to strike out an undesirable candidate. Under the Polish government, only those who wanted to vote voted, and those who didn't want to vote didn't even go to the polls'.[8]

Women were especially active during the protests, which was explained not only because the post-war society was largely feminised but also because of the special role of women seen as mothers and wives, programmed to be the keepers of the hearth.

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5 SSA SSU. file 13. case 376, 39, 131.

6 SSA SSU. file 16. op. 1. case 560, 10–11.

7 CSAPAU. file 1. op. 23. case 1424, 5.

8 SSA SSU. file 16. op. 1. case 560, 10–11.

Women could not forgive the authorities' representatives for the predatory policy of grain deliveries, which doomed their families to starvation. They were the first to speak at rallies, raising anti-government riots, beating government officials, and destroying ballots. Western Ukrainian women were especially aggressive and continued to protest even in the face of the threat of arrests or deportations: 'Don't scare me with Siberia, it won't be worse for me there, but I won't go to vote. Get out of the house'.[9]

Red Army soldiers and disabled veterans of the Great Patriotic War, who were left by the authorities to their fate after the war, as well as clergy, actively joined the protests, explaining their position with religious beliefs or public sentiments. The latter were also fully aware of the anti-democratic nature of the Stalinist elections. In particular, one of the priests said: 'Elections – this is only blackmail that the Soviet government uses in relation to its population, since in reality only the party votes and the rights of the population are ignored'.[10]

Massive resistance to the Soviet election campaigns was shown mainly by people in rural areas. In cities, the protests were less intense due to the presence of numerous military garrisons, a large number of employees dependent on the party administration, weaker cohesion of the urban community, insufficient influence of the OUN, etc. Most often, the townspeople agreed to participate in the 'electoral comedy' because they feared losing their jobs and had no other way to provide for their families except for a salary. Others did not want to leave their favourite profession, which for them was the sense of life. In particular, speaking at the pre-election meeting of the staff of the Ivan Franko University in Lviv concerning nominating candidates for deputies of workers in the USSR Armed Forces on 3 January 1946, Miron Zarytskyi, a professor of mathematics, said: 'In today's solemn wave, when our university staff stands as the first in our constituency exercising its honourable right to nominate candidates for deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, allow me to express the ardent desire not only of our team but of the entire population of the Lviv region, for our father, Comrade Stalin, to become our deputy. The human language is weak in order to fully express in words the gigantic greatness of our brilliant leader's life and work and our love for him'.[11]

It is clear that the text of the speech was written for the Professor in the regional committee. He was forced to read it by the authorities because it is hard to believe that the father of the OUN activist Kateryna Zarytska (who was already convicted by that time) could voluntarily deliver such panegyrics to Stalin. To emphasise the forced nature of such speeches, we should note that most of the speakers who belonged to the former nationally oriented milieus read the texts from a sheet of paper.

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9 SSA SSU. file 13. case 376. 39, 131.

10 SSA SSU. file 16. op. 1. case 560, 36.

11 SSA SSU. file 16. op. 1. case 560, 36.

However, there were also those who, having understood the rules of the game, curried favour with the authorities in exchange for advancing their career or material benefits.

Therefore, taking into account the 'ritual' relations established in the Ukrainian SSR between the government and the population, which over time became an integral part of the political culture of the Soviet people, it is impossible to clearly identify the political mood of society. However, recent studies by Ukrainian and foreign scientists point to the existence of broad opposition and anti-Communist sentiments not only in the Soviet society liberalised after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, but also still under Stalinism. Despite the terror and repressions, people found a way to overcome the suffocating atmosphere of ideological uniformity and political unanimity imposed by force by the regime by expressing their true attitude towards the Soviet reality in a narrow circle of like-minded people or using covert forms of protest. They emphatically reject the image of the Ukrainian SSR as an unshakable ideological monolith, especially given the events that were taking place in the Western Ukrainian region, whose inhabitants in the post-war period not only did not hide their negative attitude towards the Soviet regime, but also actively opposed it. Furthermore, their forced integration into the Soviet political system resulted in the emergence of various forms of 'dual consciousness', which allowed Western Ukrainians to maintain their national and regional identity for a long time.

However, the long integration of Ukrainian territories within the boundaries of a foreign socio-cultural and civilisational sphere [of the USSR] led to a distortion of the basic values of the Ukrainian mentality, provoked a deep social existential crisis, and Ukrainians' problem with self-identification.

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