

Factors and Determinants of Political Participation of Ethnic Groups

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Abstract: This paper discusses the problem of identifying factors and determinants of the political participation of ethnic groups in politics. Analysis of scientific literature allows us to identify several approaches to solving this problem. Some people view the political participation as an activity by which individuals try to influence the government through ethnic groups so that it takes the actions they want. This impact on the processes of political decision-making and the implementation of political programs related to them. Others believe that the driver of political activity is the need for internal improvement of an individual, when political participation contributes to their full functioning in the life of the state and gives them a sense of involvement in political processes. A comprehensive approach to determining the essence of the political participation of ethnic groups will be justified, according to which the institution of political participation is a multifaceted sociocultural phenomenon that affects many aspects of the socio-political dynamics of modern society. In accordance with this approach, political participation is equally manifested in both democratic and non-democratic political regimes; at the same time, the trigger of political mobilization can be not only the impact of political leaders, but also their own need for people to actively participate in political processes.

Keywords: Neoinstitutionalism, Political Participation, Social Groups, Ethnic Groups, Ethnic Interests, Mobilization.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important functional features of a political system is the involvement of social groups in the political life of society. The study of these processes is reflected in the works of many representatives of the modern Russian scientific community (I.R. Aminov, G.G. Arkhipova, I.I. Bolotina, A.I. Kirichek, M.E. Popov, K.A. Sulimov, M. Kh. Farukshin, D.I. Uznarodov, S.N. Chirun, and others), in the works of foreign experts in political science and sociology (G. Almond, R.K. Merton, J. Nagel, and others); interdisciplinary research and materials from specialized scientific conferences are devoted to them.

At the same time, one cannot fail to note the existence of different approaches to assessing the extent and effectiveness of political participation in the life of the society of social groups identified according to various criteria, including their ethnicity. The issue of the content of the “political participation” concept remains debatable. In this regard, since there is no unified or universal approach to understanding the essence of such participation, it is urgent for us to clarify the conceptual apparatus associated with political activity within society and the activity of ethnic groups.

It seems to us that the most general is the definition of “political participation” given by J. Nagel: “These are

actions by which ordinary members of any political system influence or try to influence the results of its activities” (Kholmskaya 1999).

In furtherance of such a definition, G. Almond and S. Verba consider a political participation as “the actions of separate citizens with the aim of direct or indirect influence on the selection of state managers and their activities” (Almond 1992, Tai *et al.*, 2020).

An important substantive characteristic of political participation given by various authors is active people involvement, their “embeddedness” in political life, and, as a result, personal and psychological involvement in political processes. For example, H. McCloskey characterizes political participation as a subjective “feeling of involvement in the processes of political life” (Kholmskaya 1999, Vitaly, *et al.*, 2020).

Indeed, various social groups get the opportunity to realize their own political will and participate in political processes through such participation. So, in accordance with the approach of Robert King Merton, a classic of structural functionalism, the very involvement of certain groups of people in the political life of society is an indisputable functional sign of an effective political system, where such participation is the most important mechanism of the “political machine” of the state that ensures democratic processes (Merton 1996).

An analysis of the scientific literature allows us to single out the following most general groups of approaches to the essence of political participation: the

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so-called “instrumental theories” and “development theories”.

The former represent political participation as the activity by which individuals try to influence the government so that it takes the actions they desire. In other words, this also affects the processes and the adoption of political decisions themselves, and the implementation of related political programs (Biancone *et al.*, 2020; Buana *et al.*, 2020).

Within the framework of “development theories”, the driver of political activity is the need for the internal improvement of individuals, when the political participation contributes to their full functioning in the life of the state and gives them a sense of involvement in political processes.

It seems to us that the justified comprehensive approach to determining the essence of political participation will combine the elements of both conceptual groups, and in accordance with which the institution of a political participation is a multifaceted sociocultural phenomenon that affects many aspects of the socio-political dynamics of modern society. In accordance with this approach, the political participation is equally manifested in both democratic and non-democratic political regimes; at the same time, the trigger of political mobilization can be not only the influence of political leaders (the “vector from the outside”), but also people's own need for active participation in political processes (the “vector from the inside”).

METHODS

The main approach to the study of ethnic groups in politics was the neo-institutional approach, which considers the institutions of government, political parties, social organizations, as well as their relationships as the main elements of the political development of society. Important for our understanding is the assertion that institutions are “human-created constraints that structure political, economic and social interactions” (North 1991). According to the theory of neoinstitutionalism, constraints are understood as not only formal norms and external regulators: constraints are also formed by the institution itself, including the rational choice and behaviour of actors and their associations, which also include informal ones. Neoinstitutionalists study not only state authorities and legislation, but also societal institutions (in this case, ethnic organizations and

actors) that influence the interests of political actors and their relations with other groups (Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis 1992). Institutions, therefore, act as rules for the interaction between actors; the rules are based on “agreements” that contribute to the creation and development of forms for the participation of ethnic groups in politics. Therefore, institutions are external constraints on the behaviour of social groups and contribute to the achievement of these goals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Obviously, all social groups of the population are, to one degree or another, effective actors in the political life of society, both as an object of influence and as a subject of the action. In this regard, all of them are specifically included in competitive or “allied” relations regarding state power.

In general, the concept of “group” captures a certain similarity of people by signs, both inherent and acquired in the process of life: age, gender, territorial, etc., including ethnicity.

Ethnic groups are integral political actors along with other types of social groups distinguished by specific features. They often become key political players in a modern world prone to geopolitical shocks. This is largely due to the fact that some ethnic groups are already moving towards the creation of their own states or their own institutions within existing states, while others increasingly and publicly declare their political rights in those countries of the world where they are not an ethnic majority (Uznarodnov 2012).

In addition, only about 10% of states in the modern world have one ethnic group within their borders, while the majority are multi-ethnic, which creates the most difficult political problem of representing the peoples of a multi-ethnic state in government. Mechanisms for resolving interethnic conflicts based on institutions of democratic representation and providing opportunities for the active participation of ethnic groups in the public and political life of the state are called upon to contribute to the solution of this problem (Arkhipova 2006).

A characteristic feature of the political participation of ethnic groups in society is their stability and integrity. Actually, an ethnic community in a sociopolitical context can be considered precisely as a stable social structure that arises and exists as a result of the focused efforts

of people and the institutions created by them, but mainly by the state. Sustainability here is determined by the functioning of the group for a long time and in a certain territory. The integrity of such a community is supported by subjective processes of identification, i.e. the recognition by individuals of their belonging to this community. Thus, an ethnic group is a collective of people having a common history, language, customs and identity, and following common norms of behaviour in the process of social interaction and participation, both within the group and outside it.

The participation of such groups in public life allows the development of interethnic relations in the state and strengthens trust between the peoples themselves that inhabit the territory of the country. The involvement of ethnic groups in political processes allows them to exercise their political rights, represent interests, and thereby strengthen ties with state power. Finally, their political participation in the life of society and the state, that are expressed in civilized forms of achieving their political interests, helps to stabilize social relations and avoid ethnic conflicts.

An analysis of the works of modern authors and researchers reveals a variety of opinions on the subject of substantiating the political participation of ethnic groups in the life of society and the state, and the prerequisites for such participation.

So, in accordance with the concept of constructivism, the autonomy of the political sphere is established in modern society in relation to the economic and social spheres. Being guided by the interests of the ethnic whole, as well as narrow group or even mercenary goals (lobbying for their own interests), the leaders of an ethnic group can contribute to political mobilization. Moreover, the very ability to mobilize an ethnic group for political participation acts as the power resource of the ethnic elite to participate in the political game.

Supporters of the "theory of conflict", in turn, consider the political participation of ethnic groups within the framework of socio-economic determinism, where an ethnos acts as an independent political subject with its own interests associated with socio-demographic and ethnocultural reproduction (Denisova and Radovel 2000).

Significant attention to the determinants of the political participation of ethnic groups, and especially in the electoral process, is paid by representatives of the

American school of political science (M. Baretto, R. Browning, D. Marshall, D. Tabb, and others).

According to their research, a key determinant of enhancing political participation is the expansion of the political capabilities of ethnic minorities through the right to choose and the right to ethnic representation in the political arena. Ethnic groups increase their political activity in the case of group awareness that the ethnic factor can influence the political decision-making process - in particular, when nominating candidates in elections with the same ethnicity as the ethnic group whose interests they represent.

Another determinant of the political participation of ethnic groups is the number of those groups living in the same settlement. There is an increase in the degree of participation of these groups in politics in the process of expanding the political capabilities of ethnic groups and increasing their numbers (Matt 2007).

Common place for most researchers of the American school is the establishment of the guiding role of leaders of ethnic groups, when the political ethnic elite acts as a catalyst for political activity. Representatives of an ethnic group take part in the electoral process when they are mobilized through the ethnic identity of the candidate, or through the political program of the candidate aimed at realizing the ethnic interests of the group (Leighley 2001).

Thus, the political participation of ethnic groups in the political process is the result of the growth of their own ethnic identity and the activity of political elites. It is political leaders and ethno-territorial political elites that mobilize ethnic groups realizing the possibility of redistributing various kinds of resources with other groups (titular or minority). Note that under certain circumstances, the ethnic elite can turn into an ethnocracy, which in many respects depends on state policy regarding ethnic groups.

In this regard, it is necessary to note the important role of the political regime and the state as a regulator of public relations in the realization of the interests of ethnic groups. In general, state policy in relation to ethnic groups is determined by various types of strategies: negative (imperative) and positive (favourable). All of them influence in a certain way the political activity of ethnic groups contributing to it or acting as an obstacle.

Researchers distinguish three types of the imperative strategy of the state in relation to ethnic

groups: discrimination, territorial and legal isolation, as well as genocide.

Discrimination is a restriction or deprivation of a part of citizens of their political and civil rights and freedoms on the basis of ethnic (racial, religious, linguistic) affiliation. This strategy inevitably leads to a restriction of the position of ethnic groups in many areas of public life, and its main goal is to achieve the privileged position of the "titular" group. The policy of creating a mono-ethnic society is characteristic, for example, of the Baltic states of the former USSR, which conduct discriminatory policies in relation to the Russian-speaking population. Such a situation may lead to the mental separation of the ethnic minority from the titular group, thereby laying the foundation for future ethnic conflicts in the state.

The territorial or legal isolation of ethnic groups is a tougher strategy of public policy, an example of which is the apartheid regime in South Africa from 1948 to the early 80s of the twentieth century. The fullness of civil rights was guaranteed only for the "white-skinned people", and it was envisaged to limit livelihoods for other groups of people: housing segregation; segregation in public places; regulation of the range of possible professions for each group; prohibition of mass contacts (especially marriages). For the black population, artificial quasi-state entities were created, namely Bantustans, with the goal of superseding this group from the political life of the "white-skinned" population, and in many ways from public life as a whole. Reservations for small indigenous people of the country, for example, Indians in the USA and Aboriginal people in Australia, are a similar form of territorial isolation.

Genocide is an extreme and radical form of state policy, defined as actions committed with the intention to physically destroy any national, ethnic, racial cultural-ethnic group, and recognized as an international crime.

We include the policy of tolerance and the policy of multiculturalism to the positive (favourable) strategies of the state in relation to ethnical groups.

According to some researchers, tolerance is a political virtue required from citizens of a liberal society. "Tolerance is expressed in the fact that participants in certain interactions retain their own vision of truth, along with the claims of others, while allowing themselves to be distracted from such a discrepancy.

At the level of political coexistence, this allows us to maintain a common basis for relations" (Zotov 2006).

The policy of multiculturalism, in turn, provides for actions aimed at preserving and developing ethnic, cultural, and religious differences in a single state. The recognition of such diversity expressed by the thesis "integration without assimilation" entails the right of the same ethnic groups to preserve and develop a variety of lifestyles, cultural trends, etc.

Thus, various factors determine the political participation of ethnic groups in politics. It is important to note that the exclusion of the political participation of ethnic communities in those states where such participation is necessary, leads to the destabilization of public relations, undermining the confidence of peoples in the government, thereby reducing legitimization of the last.

SUMMARY

Thanks to participation in the process of the development and accepting a decision, ethnic groups are able to realize their own political will and participate in political processes. The factor of such behaviour is, first of all, the existence of functioning institutions of democratic representation and state policy regarding ethnic or national minorities that allow ethnic groups to participate in politics. The political participation of ethnic groups is determined by the growth of ethnic identity, the desire to have the right of choice, and the numerical indicator of an ethnic group within a single settlement.

CONCLUSIONS

A special characteristic of the participation of ethnic groups in politics is that these groups, on the one hand, are both a subject of the political process and its object. According to the subjective approach, the participation of social groups in public life allows the development of interethnic relations in the state and strengthens trust between the peoples that inhabit the country. The involvement of ethnic groups in political processes allows them to exercise their political rights, represent interests, and thereby strengthen ties with state power. Finally, their political participation in the life of society and the state, expressed in civilized forms of achieving their political interests, helps to stabilize social relations, and avoids ethnic conflicts.

In accordance with the position that ethnic groups are objects of the political process, leaders of one or

other elite in modern society can contribute to the political mobilization of ethnic representatives, guided by the interests of the ethnic whole, as well as narrow group or even mercenary goals (lobbying for their own interests). Moreover, the very ability to mobilize an ethnic group for its political participation acts as the power resource of the ethnic elite to participate in the political game.

In general, the key determinant of enhancing political participation is the expansion of the political capabilities of ethnic minorities through the right to choose and the right to ethnic representation in the political arena. Ethnic groups intensify their political activity in the case of group awareness that the ethnic factor can influence the political decision-making process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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<https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.130>

Received on 23-10-2020

Accepted on 28-11-2020

Published on 31-12-2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.318>

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