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ELECTIONS IN CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 BY THE MONITOR OF THE BLOGS IN SEPTEMBER 2021 IN RUSSIA AND ABOARD

Abstract: Covid-19 is part of the topic for blogging. The aim of the article is to identify of changes of organization and conduct of elections in connection with of the COVID-19 pandemic by the monitor of the blogs in September 2021 in Russia and aboard. To write this article, we used monitoring social media Brand24. In September 2021, 18.3% of all election blogs mention Covid-19. The conduct of elections during the COVID-19 period required addressing the wider use of electronic voting and voting by mail. Elections during the COVID-19 period are held with strict measures against COVID-19. Political parties and candidates have limited meetings with their voters, and voter campaigning has become an online format. The following issues appeared on the agenda: 1) on attracting voters to polling stations in the context of COVID-19; 2) voter participation in elections with COVID-19 symptoms; 3) reducing the ecological footprint of elections by developing policies to effectively prevent and reduce the generation of waste, including waste associated with COVID-19.

Key words: electoral process, COVID-19 pandemic, blogging

Introduction

It cannot be said that the situation with COVID-19 is close to completion, an active fight against COVID-19 continues. On September 14, 2021, the 76th UN General Assembly was opened. It is clear that a global catastrophe such as the Covid-19 pandemic can only be overcome through international cooperation

and solidarity It was noted that the international community is fighting simultaneously with the COVID-19 pandemic, trying to resolve numerous armed conflicts, poverty and the consequences of global warming (UN, 2021).

The aim of the article is to identify of changes of organization and conduct of elections in connection with of the COVID-19 pandemic by the monitor of the blogs in September 2021 in Russia and aboard .

To write this article, we used monitoring social media Brand24. In September 2021, the word "elections" was mentioned 4,780 times in blogs. Of these, 876 blogs mentioned "COVID-19". Covid-19 is an important blogging topic. In September 2021, 18.3% of all election blogs mention Covid-19.

Literature review

The work of foreign and Russian scientists is devoted to the organization and conduct of elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. Kulas P., Pawlak M. said that «the current pandemic causes uncertainty in the entire world, beginning from everyday life up to complicated economic mechanisms and political decision-making» (Kulas; Pawlak, 2021). M. A. Peck told that «in this worsening dystopia, it is clear that flattening COVID contagion curves compels flattening inequality pandemic curves concurrently» (Peck, 2021). E.V. Krasovskaya conducted a content analysis of the headlines of journalistic publications of the private Internet portal Onliner.by and the state television channel Stolichnoye Television in order to identify the frequency of reference to the topics of political protests and the fight against coronavirus infection (Krasovskaya, 2021). V.I. Fedorov conducted a SWOT analysis of the use of remote electronic voting based on empirical material from the All-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution and regional elections in September 2020. He believes that the difficulties associated with the implementation of measures to protect against coronavirus infection at polling stations have raised the issue of wider use of remote electronic voting.

(Fedorov, 2021). D.I. Popov studied deals with the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the procedure and outcome of the Poland's presidential elections in 2020. He told that «the polish political system withstood the challenges of the epidemic and remained virtually unchanged» (Popov, 2021).

The main part

On the possibility of holding elections in connection with COVID-19

An election is a massive event that increases the risk of contracting COVID-19. Doctors at Stellenbosch University warn that local elections could be a massive COVID-19 spread if people are not vaccinated (Chester, 2021).

In the Republic of South Africa, they believe that after they are carried out, you can face an unprecedented number of new cases of COVID-19 infection. On the part of electoral bodies, political parties, it is impossible to expose people's lives to this danger (Nancy, 2021).

K. F. Zimmermann published the article «Do elections accelerate the COVID-19 pandemic?». He exploited a natural experiment from the Czech Republic, which biannually renews mandates in one-third of Senate constituencies that rotate according to the 1995 election law and show that in the second and third weeks after the 2020 elections (held on October 9–10), new COVID-19 infections grew significantly faster in voting compared to non-voting constituencies. His results have implications for postal voting reforms or postponing of large-scale, in-person (electoral) events during viral outbreaks (Zimmermann, 2021).

D. Cameron (a spokesman for the Scottish Conservative Party spoke about the prospect of a separate Scotland joining the European Union said that “all our efforts should be focused on our recovery from Covid and rebuilding our

communities, least of all Scotland needs another independence referendum” (Percival, 2021).

The elections in Canada in September 2021 showed that voters can also refuse to participate in elections, and simply not go to the polls due to the fact that they may feel insecure (Kurtisdoering, 2021).

Parliamentary elections were held in South Korea in 2020. Strict measures have been taken against COVID-19, including disinfecting all 14,000 polling stations and requiring voters to wear masks, check temperatures, use hand sanitizer and plastic gloves, and maintain physical distance from others. Public health officials said that although nearly 30 million people voted, there was no local transmission of infection related to elections (Gtanthshalanews, 2021). The elections showed that in the context of COVID-19, the state can provide an effective response to the outbreak and receive the support of the population (Marmilova, 2021). The pandemic has shown the importance of holding elections.

In September 2021, Kosovo decided not to postpone the elections to a late date, but the public had two points of view about the elections due to the COVID-19 situation. Prime Minister A. Kurti, leader of the ruling Vetevendosje, and some of his allies from ethnic minority parties supported the recommendation of the Public Health Institute: banning public activities and citizens’ gatherings until the next epidemiologic evaluation. M. Krasniqi (the head of the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo) told that «my position is that the health of citizens should be a priority but also the health of democracy». L. Abdixhiku «opposed the postponement of the elections but promised that his party will only be active for only five days during the election campaign instead of the 30 days» (Isufi, 2021).

Photo 1. Kosovo to Go Ahead with Elections Despite COVID-19 Spike (Isufi, 2021)



Identification of changes in the electoral process in connection with COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unexpected changes in all areas of society. COVID-19 refers to the complex problems of our time, it is understood that it will be decided by politicians, and not by health experts, maybe elections can cure this disease. Despite the emergence of a vaccine and other efforts, the states continue to streamline all processes, including the electoral process in the context of COVID-19.

Early elections were held in Canada on September 20. The pandemic has led to fewer polling stations, fewer employees participating in elections. It also resulted in a record number of Canadians voting by mail with special ballots (1,267,014 ballots were mailed and 951,039 ballots returned, according to Elections Canada). Mailing newsletters should be the norm in every state (Canadian Politics, 2021).

In the United States, amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Harris County, the United States has been encouraged to create 24-hour polling stations and use drive-thru voting, and has also attempted to send applications to vote by mail to more than 2 million registered voters. Drive-thru voting is prohibited by law, and future mailing of applications for voting will be punished with criminal charges (Williamsburg News, 2021).

California became the eighth state in the nation with ledger law requiring every voter to post a ballot. Bill AB 37 potentially improves voter turnout, but also increases election costs as mail ballots are provided with prepaid postage. The idea of universal voting ballots by mail has been debated by government officials and voting rights activists for years, but it is unclear if these efforts would have been successful were it not for the COVID-19 pandemic (Svopasvs, 2021).

In South Africa, local elections were postponed to October 2021 due to the pandemic. The election commission noted that the elections were held under extreme conditions, and political parties had to look for more innovative ways of accessing voters. 2,600 voters have joined the discussion of the upcoming elections on the Spaces platform. Political parties, as well as other organizations, had to adapt during this unprecedented period. They are required to comply with Covid-19 protocols: social distancing and wearing masks. Traditional campaign methods such as community meetings on COVID-19 complaints, distribution of leaflets, and home meetings have been used on the ground to reach South Africans who do not have internet access (Lebuso, 2021).

Photo 2. Alert for the fourth wave of Covid-19 for South Africa (Nancy, 2021)



Due to the COVID-19 situation in South Africa, it was decided to test the new polling station voter registration (VMD) devices on a massive scale. These

devices are tablets, with the help of them, you can easily check the data of the voters' identity and allow them to enter the polling station.

The House of Representatives of the Philippines has adopted a resolution 2231 urging the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to extend the deadline for voter registration in the country and abroad to prevent voter disenfranchisement amid the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) (Sineneng, 2021). Voters who test positive for COVID-19 are not allowed to vote in national and local elections on May 9, 2022, as there is no alternative means of voting in the electoral law other than personal voting (The US Asian Post, 2021). The Department of Health (DOH) has strongly opposed a proposal from the Election Commission (Comelec) to create polling stations for voters who are positive about COVID-19. Deputy Health Minister M.R.Vergire advised Comelec to look for other digital options so that even COVID patients can vote in the 2022 elections (Abante News, 2021). The Philippines believes it is imperative, and urgently, to make the voter a central figure in the 2022 elections, which is why the #PHVote coalition was formed to promote opportunities for civil participation in the upcoming elections, work to increase voter registration and turnout, and fight misinformation related to elections (Philippin Elections, 2021).

Problems in the electoral process caused by the situation with COVID-19

Waiting times at polling stations on September 20 in Canada were longer than expected due to the presence of only 80% of electoral staff and strict COVID-19 measures (Lao; Boynton, 2021).

Many young people in Zimbabwe have been unable to access identity documents since last year following the outbreak of COVID-19, as a result of which they are unable to register for elections in 2023 (Women's institute for leadership, 2021).

In Morocco, the end of a short election campaign was marked by the absence of major political meetings due to COVID-19 (TheMaghrebTimes, 2021).

On the need for green electoral reforms ahead of elections in connection with COVID-19

EcoWaste, an environmental group in the Philippines, has advocated green electoral reforms ahead of the 2022 elections. The coalition has proposed a resolution with the following action points to reduce the ecological footprint of the 2022 elections: 1) zero waste as a policy to effectively prevent and reduce waste generation, including COVID-related waste such as used face masks and face shields; 2) the creation of an ad hoc committee that will lead the multi-stakeholder task of greening the elections and ensuring that relevant environmental rules and regulations are respected; 3) the requirement from all persons and groups participating in the elections to comply with the Law on Environmental Management of Solid Wastes, which, among other prohibited acts, prohibits littering, open dumping and open burning of waste; 4) make it mandatory for parties and candidates to use recyclable and reusable materials that do not contain hazardous chemicals for their election campaign, as well as for their mandatory post-election cleaning; 5) use their moral authority to encourage parties and candidates to articulate in their electoral platforms how they plan to promote public policy, as written in the Constitution, in order to “defend and promote the right of people to a balanced and healthy ecology in accordance with the rhythm and harmony of nature” ; 6) Include environmental awareness and accountability in a public information campaign for clean, orderly, peaceful, fair and fair elections; 7) adjust the campaign's motorcade, if not imposing a complete ban, to address persistent problems related to traffic congestion, noise, air pollution and climate change; 8) jointly with the Ministry of Health, develop rules to regulate the noise of the election campaign; 9) Strictly adhere to laws, rules

and regulations for proper placement of campaign materials and apply sanctions to those who violate them, 10) The EcoWaste Coalition will also reach out to political parties and political imitators to encourage them to think about the environment as they passionately seek votes voters (Pinoyrevelation, 2021).

The impact of the pandemic on the electoral process in Russia

During the elections of deputies to representative bodies of local self-government in September 2021 in Russia, the electronic voting system was used in Moscow and six other cities. The electoral authorities said the system helped to minimize the danger of the spread of COVID-19 (RFE / RL's Russian Service, 2021). In other constituent entities of the Russian Federation, regional Governments actively worked to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on election day, and citizens had to comply with safety rules (Communia, 2021). In Moscow, the Communist Party's requests to hold rallies were rejected with reference to the current rules for preventing the spread of Covid-19 (Russia and Former Soviet Union, 2021).

Photo 3. Elections in Russia (Communia, 2021)



Conclusion

In September 2021, 18.3% of all election blogs mention Covid-19. The pandemic has shown the importance of holding elections. and the need for a stronger, more secure state, better public health, and increased government

spending to cushion the dramatic economic impact of the pandemic. People do not vote only for a candidate or a party. They vote for a better system, better governance, and a better future. The conduct of elections during the COVID-19 period required addressing the wider use of electronic voting and voting by mail. Elections during the COVID-19 period are held with strict measures against COVID-19. Political parties and candidates have limited meetings with their voters, and voter campaigning has become an online format. The following issues appeared on the agenda: 1) on attracting voters to polling stations in the context of COVID-19; 2) voter participation in elections with COVID-19 symptoms; 3) reducing the ecological footprint of elections by developing policies to effectively prevent and reduce the generation of garbage, including COVID-related waste.

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