

TYPES OF ABSENTEEISM: THE WAYS OF INCREASING THE CITIZENS' POLITICAL ACTIVITY

TARON SIMONYAN

Docent at the Yerevan State University,
Chair of Theory and History of State and Law
Ph.D. in Legal sciences
tsimonyan.arm@gmail.com

ANI SARGSYAN

Court of Cassation of the Republic of Armenia
Legal expert
YSU, Applicant
ani25sargsyan1097@gmail.com

DOI: 10.54503/2579-2903-2022.2-13

Abstract

This article is devoted to the research on the phenomenon of absenteeism and its influence on the electoral process.

The aim of the article is to present the types of absenteeism, the causes of occurrence of absenteeism, and the ways of overcoming absenteeism. It is necessary to mention the becoming of absenteeism into the subject of study by sociologists, politicians, and later lawyers.

According to Article 4 of the Constitutional law of RA "Electoral Code": "Elections shall be held on the basis of the principles of free and voluntary exercise of the right of suffrage. No one shall have the right to force an elector to vote for or against a candidate (a political party) or have the right to force an elector to participate or not to participate in elections."

The phenomenon of absenteeism has arisen from the above-mentioned principle and has become a means of boycotting elections. It is necessary to choose a certain way to overcome absenteeism which would not doubt the implementation of the principle of free and voluntary exercise of the right of suffrage, as well as other principles typical to a democratic state.

The results of the article are based on the experience of foreign countries, the degree of voters' participation during the elections held in a number of countries (presidential, parliamentary), and especially the degree of voters' participation in the elections in the Republic of Armenia, and how it has changed.

The results of the research allow us to conclude that there are three main ways to overcome voter absenteeism: to define the obligation of citizens to vote during elections, to exclude both the minimum electoral threshold and the requirement to consider the election valid, and to develop the legal culture of the electorate, to strengthen the citizens' confidence in the elections and in the realization of the importance of their participation in the process of the state government.

Keywords and phrases: absenteeism, political activity, electoral process, degree of voters' participation, legitimate authority.

**ԱՐՄԵՆՏԵԻԶՄԻ ՏԵՍԱԿՆԵՐԸ. ՔԱՂԱՔԱՑԻՆԵՐԻ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ
ԱԿՏԻՎՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԲԱՐՁՐԱՑՄԱՆ ԵՂԱՆԱԿՆԵՐԸ**

ՏԱՐՈՆ ՍԻՄՈՆՅԱՆ

ԵՊՀ պետության և իրավունքի տեսության ու պատմության ամբիոնի դոցենտ,
իրավաբանական գիտությունների թեկնածու
tsimonyan.arm@gmail.com

ԱՆԻ ՍԱՐԳՍՅԱՆ

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության վճռաբեկ դատարանի
իրավական փորձագետ,
ԵՊՀ հայցորդ
ani25sargsyan1097@gmail.com

Համառոտագիր

Սույն աշխատանքը նվիրված է արքենտեիզմի երևույթի և նրա՝
ընտրական գործընթացների վրա ունեցած ազդեցության ուսումնասիրությանը:

Աշխատանքի նպատակն է՝ ներկայացնել արքենտեիզմի տեսակները,
առաջացման պատճառները և հաղթահարման ուղիները: Անհրաժեշտ ենք
համարում ներկայացնել նաև համառոտ ակնարկ այն մասին, թե ինչպես է
արքենտեիզմը դարձել սոցիոլոգների և քաղաքագետների, իսկ հետագայում՝
նաև իրավագետների ուսումնասիրության առարկա:

«Ընտրական օրենսգիրք» ՀՀ սահմանադրական օրենքի 4-րդ հոդվածի
համաձայն՝ «Ընտրություններն անցկացվում են ընտրական իրավունքի
իրականացման՝ ազատության և կամավորության սկզբունքների հիման վրա:
Ոչ ոք իրավունք չունի պարտադրելու ընտրողին քվեարկելու որևէ թեկնածուի
(կուսակցության) օգտին կամ դեմ, ինչպես նաև հարկադրելու ընտրողին
մասնակցելու կամ չմասնակցելու ընտրություններին»:

Արքենտեիզմի երևույթն առաջացել է հենց վերոնշյալ սկզբունքից և
դարձել է ընտրությունները բոյկոտելու միջոց: Արքենտեիզմը հաղթահարելու
համար անհրաժեշտ է ընտրել այնպիսի ուղի, որը կասկածի տակ չի դնի
ընտրական իրավունքի իրականացման ազատության և կամավորության,
ինչպես նաև ժողովրդավարական պետությանը բնորոշ այլ սկզբունքների
իրագործումը:

Աշխատանքի արդյունքների հիմքում դրված է արտասահմանյան
երկրների փորձը, մի շարք երկրներում տեղի ունեցած ընտրությունների
(նախագահական, խորհրդարանական) ժամանակ բնակչության մասնակ-

ցության աստիճանը, և հատկապես ՀՀ-ում ընտրություններին բնակչության մասնակցության աստիճանը և վերջինիս կրած փոփոխությունները:

Աշխատանքի արդյունքները մեզ թույլ են տալիս եզրակացնել, որ գոյություն ունեն ընտրողների արսենտեիզմի հաղթահարման երեք հիմնական ուղղություններ՝ ընտրությունների ժամանակ քվեարկությանը մասնակցելու՝ քաղաքացիների պարտականության սահմանում, ընտրողների մասնակցության նվազագույն շեմի, ինչպես նաև ընտրությունները կայացած համարելու վերաբերյալ պահանջի բացառում և ընտրողների իրավական մշակույթի զարգացում, ընտրությունների նկատմամբ քաղաքացիների վստահության ամրապնդում և պետական կառավարման գործընթացում վերջիններիս մասնակցության կարևորության գիտակցում:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ. արսենտեիզմ, քաղաքական ակտիվություն, ընտրական գործընթացներ, ընտրողների մասնակցության աստիճան, լեգիտիմ իշխանություն:

ВИДЫ АБСЕНТЕИЗМА: СПОСОБЫ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ АКТИВНОСТИ ГРАЖДАН

ТАРОН СИМОНЯН

доцент кафедры теории и истории государства и права ЕГУ,
кандидат юридических наук
tsimonyan.arm@gmail.com

АНИ САРГСЯН

Кассационный суд Республики Армения
эксперт по правовым вопросам
соискатель ЕГУ
ani25sargsyan1097@gmail.com

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена исследованию феномена абсентеизма и его влияния на избирательные процессы.

Цель работы - представить виды абсентеизма, причины абсентеизма, способы преодоления абсентеизма. Необходимо сделать краткий обзор о том, как абсентеизм стал предметом изучения социологов, политологов, а затем и юристов.

Согласно 4-ой статье Конституционного закона РА "Избирательный кодекс", "выборы проводятся на основе принципов свободы и добровольности осуществления избирательного права. Никто не имеет права обязывать избирателя голосовать в пользу или против одного из кандидатов (одной из партий), а также принуждать избирателя к участию или неучастию в выборах".

Явление абсентеизма возникло из вышеупомянутого принципа и стало средством бойкота выборов. Для преодоления абсентеизма необходимо выбрать такой способ, который не ставит под сомнение реализованное принципа свободы и добровольности осуществления избирательного права, а также других принципов, типичных для демократического государства.

Результаты работы основаны на опыте зарубежных стран, степени участия избирателей во время выборов, проведенных в ряде стран (президентских, парламентских), и особенно на степени участия избирателей в выборах в Республики Армении, а также на том, какие изменения произошли.

Результаты исследования позволяют сделать вывод о наличии трех основных путей преодоления абсентеизма избирателей: определение обязанности граждан голосовать на выборах, исключение как минимального избирательного порога, так и требования считать выборы состоявшимися, а также разработка правовой культуры электората, укрепление доверия граждан к выборам и осознанию важности своего участия в процессе государственного управления.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: абсентеизм, политическая активность, избирательный процесс, степень участия избирателей, легитимная власть.

Introduction

Absenteeism (Latin - *absentis*, absent) is a form of deliberate boycott of elections by voters, refusal to participate in elections, passive protest of the population against the current system of government, political regime, indifference to the realization of human rights and responsibilities. In other words, absenteeism can be understood as a fact of indifference to political life, the notion of certain groups of people that "nothing depends on them in politics", "politics is not our business", etc.

In the beginning, absenteeism has been perceived as a positive phenomenon, a positive feature typical of democracies. However, further studies show that absenteeism is perceived as a negative phenomenon. The issue of illegitimacy of the government arises as a result of absenteeism.

The aim of this study is to present the main causes of absenteeism as a type of electoral behavior, its negative influence on the electoral process, and the formation of government bodies, the main ways of overcoming absenteeism.

Theoretical and methodological bases

Absenteeism is a natural-historical phenomenon, an integral part of the political system, built on the principles of democracy and freedom. It is considered a phenomenon of the political life of every democratic society and state governed by the rule of law. The prevalence of absenteeism, both in classical democracies and in countries that have recently stood in the way of democratic development, is related to the growth of non-functional processes in their political system, the consumption of the creative potential of historically established democratic institutions, the formation of "representative" type of political culture under the influence of the mass media. The scale and expressions of absenteeism are directly related to the historical circumstances of the establishment of democratic institutions, differences in the way of thinking of peoples, and the existence of various traditions and customs in a given society. Recently, sociologists, politicians, and lawyers have been researching processes related to the political sphere of public life. It is connected with a number of objective and subjective reasons, among which, first of all, the four main ones should be distinguished:

1. Social practice convincingly proves that the participation of the population in political processes and, first of all, in the formation of government bodies, is considered a condition for the successful functioning of a society built on the principles of democracy. No scholar, no politician dedicated to the principles of democracy, doubts the fact that the exclusion of certain social groups from active political life, the increase in the number of those who consciously distance themselves from politics, unavoidably prevents the formation of a civil society structure, negatively refers to the efficiency of the elective government bodies. It is obvious that the increase in the number of absentees is a sign of the imperfection of the current political system, an increase in distrust of the institutions of democracy, and an increase in social tension in society.

2. As already known, one of the typical features of the political life of the post-industrial society is the serious decrease in the citizens' political activity. The increase in

the number of absentees is practically recorded in all economically advanced countries, from England to Japan. According to the surveys conducted by some international organizations, in recent years the average voter indicator has decreased from 70% to 64%. It follows that absenteeism has become a constant companion to elections in modern times, which becomes more widespread every year.

3. The number of people who do not want to participate in the formation of community authorities and the election of heads of local self-government bodies is especially growing faster. Today, it is not uncommon for local legislatures to pass acts where elections are considered valid if attended by 20-25% of eligible voters. It is obvious that the decrease in the number of citizens participating in the elections raises the question of the legitimacy of the government, which is already perceived by many scientists as the main problem of the modern phase of development of the post-industrial society. There is no need to prove the fact that a politician who does not receive support from the majority of the population can't be perceived as a bearer of legitimate power, which in general leads to instability of the social organism, and causes many critical phenomena.

4. Some aspects of the problem of absenteeism have not completely been part of scientific sources. Particularly, a common approach to the essence of absenteeism has not been developed, there is no precise idea of the main reasons that make individuals decide to "not participate in politics at all", especially, in the elections. No opinion has been formed, particularly, on how absenteeism relates to the efficiency of functions of the form of government, state, family, education and other institutions [1].

According to some authors, the main reason of absenteeism is the unacceptability of the social structure, the institution of elections for some groups of voters, the absence of interest in politics, and the need to engage in political activities and not the complexity of the technical and organizational discipline.

Generally, there are two main types of absenteeism: passive absenteeism - the low political-legal culture of certain segments of the population, which causes indifference to political processes, avoidance, and estrangement; active absenteeism - refusal to participate in elections based on political motives, for example, disagreement with the referendum question, negative attitude towards all candidates in the presidential election, etc. Absenteeism is considered a type of electoral behavior. It is expressed not only in participation or non-participation in elections but in the avoidance of voting, "indifferent" (conformal) voting, protest voting, etc., too. Each of the above-mentioned forms of voter behavior indicates the acceptance or rejection of social and political norms and values. Electoral behavior is carried out in political processes, which reveal the dynamics of the development and changes of the political system institutions, the participation scale of different groups of the population in political activities.

Some researchers distinguish the following types of absenteeism:

1. Occasional, when due to the circumstances there was a phenomenon of absenteeism in the history of the elections of the given country;
2. Frequent (for certain types of elections);

3. Regular, when the phenomenon of absenteeism occurs in a given country during each election, and it seems normal, expected.

A group of researchers uses only two of these types.

1. Intermittent absenteeism (occasional and frequent);
2. Systematic, systematic absenteeism [2].

Methods

A number of factors have a big influence on voter activity, such as the type of election, the characteristics of the region, the characteristics of the electoral campaign, the level of education, the type of population, the type of political culture prevailing in the society, the type of electoral system, etc.

During the first round of the French presidential election in 2017, Emmanuel Macron won 24.1% of the vote (8.4 million voters) and Marine Le Pen - 21.3% (7.7 million voters). In the second round, almost 75% of voters took part in the voting, and Macron received 66.1% of the vote (20 million 750 thousand voters), and Le Pen - 34% (10 million 644 thousand voters): Interestingly, although almost 75% of the voters participated in the elections, about 11.47% of them participated in the elections (4 million voters) without voting for any candidate by openly throwing ballots in the trash. 3% of the votes were declared invalid [3].

76.2% of voters participated in the Bundestag elections in Germany in 2017, which is 4.7% more than during the previous elections in 2013 [4].

In Switzerland, the level of participation in elections and referendums is quite low. Thus, only 47.2% of voters took part in the referendum in 2017, and 48.5% in the elections in 2015 [5].

The following is the situation in the UK. 67.2% of eligible voters participated in the snap parliamentary elections held in December 2019, which, however, is less than the previous result - of 68.7% [6].

67.54% of the voters took part in the presidential elections in Russia in 2018, and Vladimir Putin received 76.69% of the votes, which was considered a record index. If we take into account the number of people included in the voter lists, V. Putin received, in total, 51.77% of the votes [7].

62.09% of voters participated during the second round of the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2019, where Vladimir Zelensky received 73.22% of the votes, and Petro Poroshenko - 24.45% [8].

In 2020 46.84% of voters participated in the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, which is obviously lower than the results of elections in 2015 - 56% [9].

As for the Republic of Armenia, more than 60% of voters participated in the parliamentary elections in 2017, while only 48.63% of voters participated in the snap parliamentary elections held in 2018. And 43.65% of voters participated in the Yerevan city council elections in 2018. During the snap parliamentary elections held in 2021 there was a slight increase of participation - 49.40%.

Results and discussion

Generally, there are three main ways to overcome voter absenteeism.

The first way is to define the obligation of citizens to vote during elections. This method contradicts the principle of free and voluntary exercise of the right of suffrage, which is one of the main democratic achievements of the modern world, the renunciation of which unwittingly doubts the democratic nature of the political regime in the country.

According to the supporters of the second way of overcoming absenteeism, it is necessary to exclude both the minimum electoral threshold and the requirement to consider the election valid. At the same time, it is emphasized that by solving the problem of absenteeism by such a technically easiest means, the government may find itself in a situation of de facto illegitimacy. If there is a minimum electoral threshold, the principle of democracy is distorted, the elective bodies cease to express the will of the majority of the people. The reduction of the minimum electoral threshold is perceived as an expression of concessions to non-professional candidates, parties, and an absence of support and respect by citizens for the election organizers' and the entire state government. The abolition of such a demand contributes not only to the destruction of the legal culture of the voters but to the other participants in the electoral process too.

The technical means of overcoming absenteeism cause legal nihilism of the citizens having sufficient knowledge of the law. The absence of legal opportunity to express their complaints in elections (voting against all, failing to vote by not voting) can lead to illegal protests by citizens. If the voter avoids participating in the elections because of insufficient development of the legal culture, then the abolition of the minimum electoral threshold will not promote the development of the culture under any circumstances.

The third way to overcome absenteeism is to develop the legal culture of the electorate, strengthen the citizens' confidence in the elections, and in realizing the importance of their participation in the process of the state government. This way is the most difficult one, but it is the most perspective one, both in terms of developing a legal culture and ensuring the legitimacy of authorities.

It should be noted that, from the third way's point of view, there are developed programs which envisage the development of legal culture among people starting from the school years [10], which is why it is proposed to involve young people in parties and electoral processes.

Conclusion

Thus, absenteeism is the political behavior of citizens, refusal to participate in politics for a number of reasons: depoliticization of citizens, their indifference to politics ("political apathy"), protection of privacy, the frustration of people in politics, loss of trust in candidates, political institutions, low level of political competence of voters, lack of confidence in making the right choice, doubts about having a serious influence on politics, the low significance of election results for citizens, etc.

We distinguish several types of absenteeism. There are occasional, frequent, and regular types of absenteeism. According to the level of participation in politics, there are active and passive types of absenteeism.

Overcoming absenteeism perspective, there are three ways, the third of which is the most difficult one, perspective and expedient at the same time is to develop the legal culture of voters, to strengthen citizens' confidence in elections and realization of their importance in the state government. For that purpose, it is necessary to develop the legal culture among the people (starting from school years), to encourage the activities of political non-governmental organizations, to involve young people in political and electoral processes, through which young people will have a clear idea of the importance of their participation in elections.

References

1. Rosenko, M.N. Absenteeism as a factor of influence on the legitimacy of public authorities // Problems and prospects of socio-economic reform of the modern state and society: materials of the XVIII International Scientific and Practical Conference, Moscow, Institute for Strategic Studies: Pero, 2015, 200–215 pp. (in Russian):
2. Ghiuta, Ovidiu-Aurel, The motivations of electoral absenteeism. - Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava. – 2014, P. 5 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283321759_The_motivations_of_electoral_absenteeism:
3. All French presidential election results: 66% of Emmanuel Macron (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.rfi.fr/ru/frantsiya/20170508-vse-rezultaty-vyborov-prezidenta-frantsii-66-emmanyulya-makrona>, 08.05.2017:
4. Germany announced the final results of the elections to the Bundestag (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://p.dw.com/p/2lhvj>, 12.10.2017:
5. Power in Switzerland belongs to a few. (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.swissinfo.ch/rus/главнаястраница/лаборатория-демократии_власть-в-швейцарии-принадлежит-немногим-/43824422, 23.01.2018:
6. Kapitonova, N.K., The results of the parliamentary elections in Great Britain (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/experts/itogi-parlamentskikh-vyborov-v-velikobritanii/>, 13.12.2019:
7. Presidential Election in Russia (2018), (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Президентские_выборы_в_России_\(2018\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Президентские_выборы_в_России_(2018)):
8. The results of the second round of elections in Ukraine. Interactive map (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-48006285>, 21.04.2019:
9. Azerbaijan: unexpected elections, usual results (in Russian) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.eurasianet.org/азербайджан-неожиданные-выборы-обычные-результаты>, 11.02.2020:
10. Bouza, Luis, Addressing youth absenteeism in European elections. - League of Young Voters in Europe, European Youth Forum. - 2014, P. 52. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/addressing-youth-absenteeism-in-european-elections.pdf>.