

INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS ON THE RESULTS OF THE 14TH SAEIMA ELECTIONS (2022)

ETNISKO UN SOCIĀLO FAKTORU IETEKME UZ 14. SAEIMAS VĒLĒŠANU REZULTĀTIEM

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to research the most significant factors that influenced the Latvian parliament (14th Saeima) election results in 2022.

The results of the 14th Saeima elections showed that ethnically non-Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia still display a statistically significant negative vote against the political parties included in the previous government of Latvia, which does not promote social or ethnic stability and creates conditions for potential security risks to Latvia in the future.

Keywords: *Latvian parliament elections, non-Latvian citizens, Latvian citizens*

Introduction

The influence of various factors on the results of elections in EU member states has long been the subject of academic research, including modern academic research (Peltoniemi et al., 2023; Meesanthan, 2022; Utami et al., 2022; Zhirnova, 2022; Lysek et al., 2020). The influence of neighbouring territories on election results was studied by Fiorino et al. (2021), as well as Pontarollo & Ricciuti (2021), Lasoń & Torój (2019) and Grabowski (2019). Moreover, electoral factors that influenced the results of Latvian parliamentary elections have been reported in previous scientific publications by the author and co-authors (Paiders & Paiders, 2014; Paiders & Paiders, 2012; Paiders & Paiders, 2011).

Data and methods

The data on the results of the 14th Latvian parliament elections, the number of voters, activity, etc., were obtained from the information on election results approved and published by the Central Election Commission of Latvia, while data on the number of citizens of different ethnicities, and of ethnic Latvians and Russians; as well as on the distribution of national minorities, and on unemployment and other economic indicators, were obtained from the official statistics portal of Latvia, maintained by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

Taking into account that all the obtained data, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicators, correspond to a normal or lognormal distribution, the

comparison of spatial scalar fields was used as the determining method of data analysis. Namely, a linear correlation and regression analysis was carried out, examining which of the spatial scalar fields of the relative ethnic or social parameter was the most relevant to the scalar field of the spatial distribution of votes for parties or groups of parties, for example, in the vote for all the parties that participated in the election which were represented in the previous government, etc.

Results

In total, in the 14th Saeima elections, Latvian citizens expressed a strong lack of confidence in the parties represented in the previous government. Only 36% of all voters who participated voted for any of the coalition parties that were part of the previous government. Out of a total of 43 municipalities in Latvia, only in six (in the counties of Sigulda, Varakļāni, Valka, Smiltene, Mārupe and Valmiera) did the parties of the previous government receive combined majority support. A little less than half of all voters' support (45–50%) was obtained by the parties represented in the previous government in eight municipalities: Cēsis, Madona, Ogre, Ķekava, Alūksne, Saulkrasti, Aizkraukle and Limbaži counties. In all the other local government districts of Latvia, an absolute majority of voters did not support any of the coalition in any of the coalition parties included in the previous government. The voters of Daugavpils and other municipalities in Latgale showed especially low levels of support for the parties towards the parties of the previous government.

For comparison, in 2014, in 106 out of 119 municipalities, more than 50% of the voters who participated voted for the political forces making up the government.

In the 2018 Saeima elections, Latvian citizens' support for government parties was higher than in 2022. In 2018, the parties in the government were supported by a total of 38.7% of all voters.

In the results of the 2018 Saeima elections, we could see a distinct ethnic dimension. Taking together the results of the Latvian Russian Union and the Social Democratic Party Harmony, and performing a regression analysis on the percentage of votes obtained by these parties with the share of ethnically non-Latvians among Latvian citizens, the coefficient of determination was 94%, which meant that the share of ethnically non-Latvians among all citizens explained 94% of the joint results of the Russian Union and Harmony. As the proportion of non-Latvians among all citizens in each municipality increased by one percentage point, the total number of people who voted for the Latvian Russian Union and the Social Democratic Party Harmony increased by 0.96 percentage points. It could be concluded from this that in 2018 the main electorate of the Social Democratic Party Harmony and the Latvian Russian Union were the largest ethnic minorities in Latvia (Paiders, 2019).

On the one hand, it is very easy to compare the results of the Saeima elections with CSB data on the national composition of the population in different

municipalities. Looking at the total percentage of all ethnic Russians, Belarusians and Poles among the local population in each municipality and comparing it with the results of the 2022 14th Saeima elections, we can get the result that the number of votes cast (percentage of all those who voted) for the Latvian Russian Union, the Social Democratic Party Harmony and the Solidarity party as a whole, is almost identical (the coefficient of determination is 89%) with the percentage of ethnic Russians, Belarusians and Poles in each municipality. On the other hand, in municipalities and republican cities with a large proportion of Russians, Belarusians and Poles, there was a markedly negative correlation of the total population with the proportion of voters who voted for parties that were part of the previous governing coalition.

However, such comparisons are not quite correct. The majority of Latvian Belarusians and Ukrainians do not have Latvian citizenship and did not participate in the elections. On the other hand, 99.9% of all ethnic Latvians living in Latvia have Latvian citizenship. CSB data show that on 1 January 2022, only 392 ethnic Latvians living in Latvia did not have citizenship of the Republic of Latvia. According to the CSB public data, on January 1 2022, almost 95% of all Roma living in Latvia had Latvian citizenship. Among Latvian Poles and Latvian Jews, a very high proportion were Latvian citizens (more than three quarters), as was also the case among many numerically small ethnic groups. On 1 January 2022, only 37% of Latvian Ukrainians and 45% of Latvian Belarusians had Latvian citizenship. A completely different picture can be observed when looking at Latvian citizenship status among the Latvian Russian minority. On 1 January 2022, 66.5% of all ethnic Russians living in Latvia had Latvian citizenship. In addition, the proportion of citizens of the Republic of Latvia who are Russians tends to increase. In 2018, 64% of all local Russians had Latvian citizenship, but within four years this figure had increased by 2.5 percentage points. The relatively small proportion of Latvian citizens among Latvian Ukrainians and Belarusians, compared to the large proportion of Russians who are citizens of the Republic of Latvia, is connected with the fact that a high proportion of the descendants of Latvian Old Believers (Russians), who have lived on the territory of Latvia since the 17th century, were citizens of the Republic of Latvia in 1940. The descendants of these people had the right to receive citizenship of the Republic of Latvia without any obstacles. On the other hand, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and other peoples who entered Latvia after 1940 had to go through a naturalisation procedure (examination in the national language etc.) in order to obtain citizenship of the Republic of Latvia.

Therefore, the majority of Latvian Belarusians and Ukrainians, although they are permanent residents of Latvia, could not participate in the elections. Since almost all ethnic Latvians have Latvian citizenship, by subtracting the number of ethnic Latvians from the number of citizens of the Republic of Latvia registered in each district, the number of ethnically non-Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia in each administrative unit of Latvia can be obtained.

In January 2022, 73.7% of all Latvian citizens living in the city of Daugavpils were not ethnic Latvians. In Augšdaugava municipality (the former Daugavpils district) the proportion of ethnically non-Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia was 50.3%, in Rēzekne it was 49%, and in Krāslava district it was 40.8%. In the capital of Latvia, Riga, more than 40% of all declared Latvian citizens were not ethnic Latvians. By contrast, in the counties of Kuldīga, Varakļāni, Smiltene and Talsi, 95% of all citizens of the Republic of Latvia declared they were Latvians.

As the results of the statistical analysis show, in counties with a larger proportion of Latvian citizens and of Russian ethnicity, there was less support for all parties represented in the previous government coalition as a whole. On the other hand, the coefficient of determination between the share of Latvians (as a percentage) in the municipalities and among Latvian citizens who voted for the government coalition in 2022 was one of the lowest in the last decade. The coefficient of determination (as a percentage) between ethnic Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia in the municipalities and support for the previous government was 66%. Ethnically Non-Latvian voters were generally very negative towards all parties represented in the previous government coalition (determination coefficient was 63.5%).

According to the statistical analysis, the greatest support of citizens of the Republic of Latvia who are Russians was shown to the Social Democratic Party “Harmony” (determination coefficient – 63.36%), followed by the political party Stability! (53.59%). There was also statistically significant support of Russians who were Latvian citizens for the party Latvia First (determination coefficient – 34.03%).

When conducting a statistical analysis of the proportion of ethnically non-Latvians (as a percentage) in municipalities and national cities with the proportion of Latvian citizens (as a percentage) who in 2022 as a whole voted for the parties Sovereign Power, the Social Democratic Party Harmony, Stability! and the Latvian Russian Union, it can be concluded that when the proportion of ethnically non-Latvian citizens in municipalities (or republican cities) increases by one percent, support for these four parties as a whole increases by 0.92 percentage points. In addition, this relationship explains 94% (determination coefficient, Figure 1) of all the results of the 14th Saeima elections. Regarding the votes of ethnically non-Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia, it has to be concluded that the parties Sovereign Power, the Social Democratic Party Harmony, Stability! and the Latvian Russian Union are generally supported by national minorities with Latvian citizenship whose families speak Russian, regardless of the ethnicity recorded in the passport.

On the other hand, the time when all government parties had a very close relationship with the ethnic Latvian share of citizens of the Republic of Latvia in the municipalities did not repeat itself in 2022. By conducting a statistical analysis between the share of ethnic Latvians (as a percentage) in municipalities and the capital

city with the share of Latvian citizens (as a percentage) who voted for the parties of the previous government coalition in 2022 as a whole, it can be concluded that if the share of Latvian citizens in municipalities (or capital city) increases by one percent, support for the parties of the previous government as a whole increases by .58 percentage points. Moreover, such a relationship explained only 63% of all election results in the vote for the four parties of the former government.

From the results of statistical analysis, it can be concluded that the higher the average gross monthly salary in the municipality, the higher the support for the parties Progressives and New Unity. This factor alone can explain approximately 42% of all the results obtained by the Progressives party in the 14th Saeima elections.

A traditionally important factor that provides support for opposition parties and reduces support for governing parties is the unemployment rate. A similar trend could be observed in the 14th Saeima elections. Evaluating the votes in the 14th Saeima elections, it can be concluded that a high level of unemployment in the municipality had a statistically significant contribution to voter support for the political parties The Force of People's Power, Stability! and the Social Democratic Party Harmony. For these three parties, high unemployment explained about a quarter of all election results. On the other hand, municipalities with a very high level of unemployment had a statistically significant and negative attitude towards the Progressives and New Unity parties. The factor of unemployment explained more than 40% of the vote distribution of these two parties in the 14th Saeima elections.

The 14th Saeima elections were marked by new trends. The policy implemented by the government parties in 2022 made those voters whose homes were not connected to central heating, and who mainly used firewood for heating and rarely electric heating, very negative towards the government parties. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in the second quarter of 2022 there was a significant increase in demand for long-term storage energy resources (firewood, wood briquettes and wood pellets) in Latvia, which manifested itself as an approximately twofold increase in prices for firewood, as well as natural gas and heat. According to data from the Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia, in January 2022, on average, 1 MWh of thermal energy cost consumers 66.66 euros, but in January 2023, 113.04 euros. Initially, households with wood heating were excluded altogether from the state-supported heating price increase compensation mechanism. According to the data of the Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia, in the big cities of Latvia there are the fewest houses without connection to central heating systems. On the other hand, in the municipalities of Alūksne, Smiltene, Rēzekne, Krāslava and Varakļāni, the majority of all households were not connected to central heating in 2021 and mainly used firewood to heat their homes.

The analysis of mathematical statistics shows that this part of the voters had a very high motivation to vote for the opposition parties. In the vote for the parties Servant of Latvian People and the Union of Greens and Farmers, there was a

statistically significant relationship between the voting results in the vote for these parties and such factors as housing without connection to central heating.

Factors such as the number of employees in manufacturing and mining, energy, construction and water supply (as a percentage) compared to the number of employees in 2021 had no statistically significant impact on the election results.

On the other hand, the proportion of people employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (as a percentage) compared to the number of people employed in 2021 had a statistically significant effect on the results of the 14th Saeima elections in the vote for the parties Servant of Latvian People and the Union of Greens and Farmers, which explained about 30% of all election results

Discussion

It should be concluded that Latvia has pronounced Russian-speaking minority parties, which try to unite the interests of all Russian-speaking people without particularly caring whether a Russian-speaking citizen of the Republic of Latvia has the entry “Russian”, “Belarusian”, “Ukrainian” or any other in the nationality field of their passport. Therefore, when looking at the proportion of Latvian citizens who are Russians among all Latvian citizens older than 15 years who vote for the so-called “Russian parties” the trends are not as pronounced as when evaluating the votes of all non-Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia. At least half of all Latvian citizens of Russian origin come from the descendants of Latvian Old Believers. The Old Believers have lived on the territory of Latvia since the 17th century and they were all citizens of Latvia during the first republic. All these Latvian Russians (and their descendants) had the right to Latvian citizenship after the restoration of independence. This Russian element of Latvia has fully integrated into Latvian society and in many cases, in their own opinion, is significantly different from those migrants of Russian ethnicity who entered the territory of Latvia after its occupation by the USSR in 1944 and 1945 and who obtained Latvian citizenship through naturalisation. That is why the votes of Russians in the big cities of Latvia and the Russians of Latgale are very different.

Unfortunately, when conducting a statistical analysis with the available statistics, it was not possible to elaborate on several very important several very important factors that very reliably influenced the outcome of the 14th Saeima elections.

It is likely that the politics of the ruling parties during the Covid pandemic and Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the consequences of this war in rising prices of energy, resources, fuel, food and other goods had a huge influence on the results of the 14th Saeima elections. Unfortunately, it is not easy to identify the full impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on the results of Latvian elections, because the relevant statistics are not available and most likely will never be available.

Conclusion

The results of the 14th Saeima elections showed that ethnically non-Latvian citizens of the Republic of Latvia still vote based on ethnic consideration.

On the other hand, citizens of Latvia who are ethnic Latvians are starting to be guided by parties' positions on economic and social issues when voting for political parties.

Among ethnically non-Latvian citizens of Latvia, we can observe a statistically significant negative vote against the political parties included in the previous government of Latvia, which does not promote social or ethnic stability and creates conditions for potential security risks for Latvia in the future.

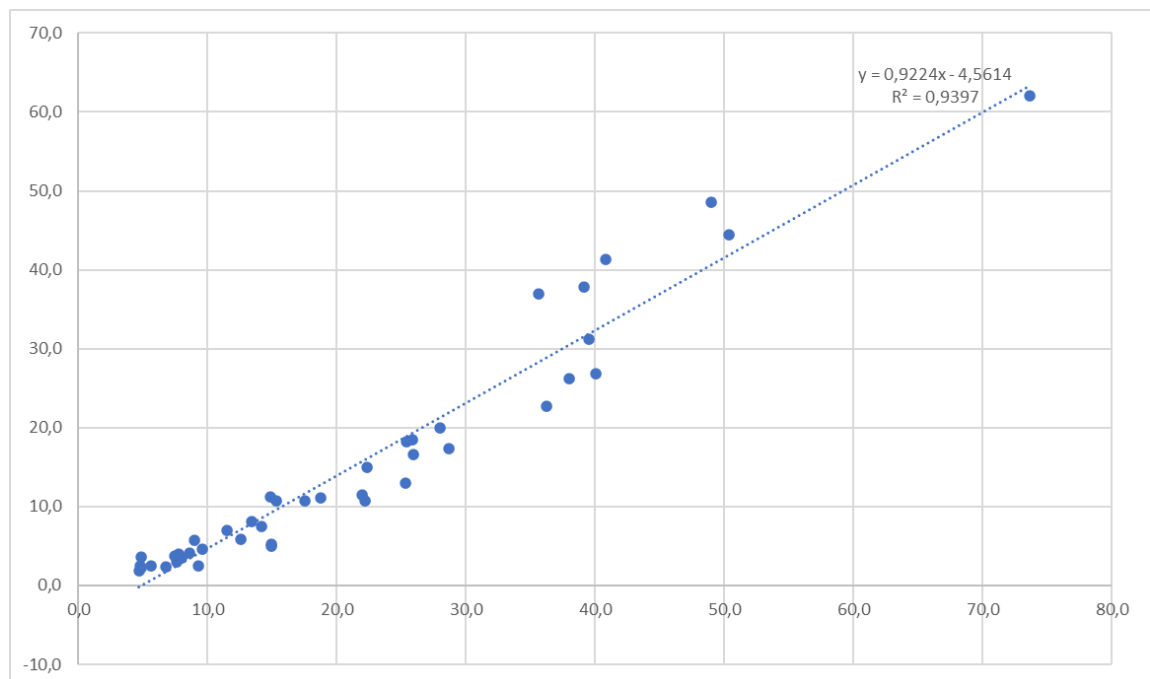


Figure 1. **Proportion of Latvian citizens (as a percentage) who in 2022 as a whole voted for the parties Sovereign Power, the Social Democratic Party Harmony, Stability! and the Latvian Russian Union** (author's figure based on data from Central Election Commission of Latvia)

It can be concluded that when the proportion of ethnically non-Latvian citizens in municipalities (or republican cities) increases by one percent, support for these four parties as a whole increase by 0.92 percentage points (horizontal scale). In addition, this relationship explains 94% of all the results of the 14th Saeima elections.

Kopsavilkums

Pētījuma mērķis bija noskaidrot būtiskākos faktoros, kas ietekmēja 2022. gada 14. Saeimas vēlēšanu rezultātus Latvijā. Rezultāti atklāja, ka etniski nelatviešu izcelsmes pilsoņi izrādīja ievērojamu negatīvu balsošanas tendenci pret politiskajām partijām, kas bija saistītas

ar iepriekšējo valdību. Tas raisa bažas par sociāliem un etniskiem konfliktiem, kas Latvijai nākotnē varētu radīt drošības riskus.

Pētījumā tika izmantota statistiskā analīze, lai izpētītu etnisko un sociālo parametru saistību ar politisko partiju balsojuma tendencēm. Rezultāti atklāja statistiski nozīmīgu negatīvu balsošanu no etniski nelatviešu izcelsmes pilsoņiem pret visām partijām, kas bija iekļautas iepriekšējā valdības koalīcijā (korelācijas koeficients 63.5%).

Pētījums uzsvēra ārējo faktoru ietekmi, piemēram, valdības rīcību Covid pandēmijas laikā un Krievijas agresiju pret Ukrainu, kas ietekmēja vēlēšanu rezultātus. Tomēr datu ierobežojumi liedza pilnīgu šo faktoru analīzi.

Secinājumā šis pētījums konstatē etnisko un sociālo faktoru nozīmīgumu Latvijas vēlēšanās un akcentē nepieciešamību turpināt izpētīt un attīstīt politiku, lai risinātu potenciālās problēmas un nodrošinātu valsts sociālo un politisko stabilitāti.

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