

Women's Participation in the Presidential Elections in Russia: Value Aspects of Mass Media Discourse

Aida N. Nurutdinova*

Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Kremlevskaya st., 18

Vera N. Argunova

Vyatka state University, Kirov, Moskovskaya st., 36

Arina A. Talan

Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Kremlevskaya st., 18

Abstract

The paper presents the results of the analysis of media coverage concerning the election campaigns for the presidential elections in Russia in 2012 and 2018. The emphasis is made on analyzing the representation of women candidates for top positions. The research is based on discourse analysis which revealed the holistic image of politicians, including explicit and hidden meanings. The analysis showed that the images of women politicians are devoid of a gender component. They are either commonplace, or include purely masculine features and actions. The paper explains that this representation of female characters in the electoral process corresponds to the essence of the modern sensual culture based on the domination of power, success and individualism significance, and moral atomism. The paper notes that a demand for moral values and moral authority of politicians has matured in the society. The results of the all-Russian sociological survey are given, according to which respondents expressed distrust and rejection of women candidates in the 2018 elections, because they did not possess the qualities necessary for the president. These trends can be described as a manifestation of the crisis of modern sensory culture and the forerunner of spiritual culture.

Keywords: Presidential elections in Russia; Female candidates; Mass media discourse; Sensual culture; Ideational culture.



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1. Introduction

The problem of women's participation in political life, and their representation in the highest echelons of state administration remains extremely urgent for Russia. Over the past decades, the number of women in the Federal Assembly, the government, the leading subjects of the Russian Federation has been steadily declining. A particularly pronounced disproportion is evident in the periods of presidential elections. And it's not just about the number of women involved, but about the "quality" of these women, whose image is being replicated by the media. The election of the head of state is an extremely important event not only for the political system, but also for the social structure of the country. Opportunities for all segments of the population to participate in elections, the rules for selecting participants, the progress of the agitation campaign, the vote and the results of the presidential elections characterize the "scope" of social equality / inequality, and the intensity of social mobility. The emerging trend of turning the elections into political shows, and the "carnivalization" of political life formed specific demands, first of all, for women-participants of presidential companies. This paper aims at analyzing the representation of women by television in the 2012 and 2018 presidential elections.

2. Methods

The empirical basis of the work is the results of the discourse analysis of television programs before the presidential elections in Russia in 2012 and 2018. The information and analytical programs which is published on the weekend consist of the two rating federal TV channels, including: "First Channel" (the "Sunday Times" program) and "Russia" (the "News of the Week" program) for the period from November 25, 2011 (appointment of the election date) to May 7, 2012 (inauguration of the new president). For comparative analysis, we also took the last presidential election in 2018. In the last election, the period studied was from December 15, 2017 to May 7, 2018.

A discourse always has its inner logic, integrity, creates new meanings, sets the framework for the perception of social reality (Dahlgren, 2013; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Keller, 2011; Lynch *et al.*, 2003; Wagenaar, 2014). The identification of discursive strategies and practices makes it possible to understand the nature of the symbolic reality being constructed, and its social orientation. Discourse contains a system of representations, i.e. evaluation interpretations. It is important to clarify the question of their subject in the analysis of representations, i.e. about who and for what purpose offers such a vision of the situation. When interpreting political events, the dominant mode of perception is set by ideology and the group in power (Lynch *et al.*, 2003). Thus, when disclosing the content of discourse, we see a picture of an event by the eyes of its creator, and we can understand the purposes for which this

picture was created. The discourse analysis is based on the ideas of the semiotic direction, which regards language as a system of signs having an explicit and hidden meaning (F. de Saussure, C. C. Pierce, R. Bart) (Hoffmann, 2004; Ryabova, 2008; Sanders, 2004). English sociologist J.B. Thompson notes that the symbolic phenomena contained in the discourse can contribute to the keeping / overthrow of the domination relationship in society (Brunsdon and Morley, 2005).

Discourse analysis is carried out using the ideas of gender methodology. The paper is based on the principles of sociocultural analysis of P. Sorokin, which is based on the understanding of society as an integral socio-cultural system that has logical-semantic integration (Davidenko, 2017; Sorokin, 2000; Verstraeten, 1996).

The paper uses the data of the all-Russian sociological survey conducted by ANO "Independent Research Center" (Russia, Samara). The survey was conducted on March 5-12, 2018. 1485 respondents were interviewed; the sample was representative. The survey was conducted at the place of residence of respondents using a routing sheet.

3. Results and Discussions

In the past two decades, the Russian policy has been covered by a conservative wave which increased the disproportion of women's representation in political life (Hoffmann, 2004). More precisely, the problem is not the political activity of women, but the absence of women among the political leaders in Russia. Politics has become predominantly a "men's business," and women provide the process of political decision-making.

Fifteen people were nominated for the presidential elections in 2012, there were two women candidates - Lydia Bednaya (registration was denied at the first submission of documents) and Svetlana Peunova (denied registration due to lack of necessary 2 million signatures of voters). There is extremely small information about Lydia Bednaya even in the Internet. Therefore, it is possible to analyze only the image of the second candidate - S. Peunova, who passed the first registration in the CEC and obtained the status of a candidate.

Information about S. Peunova was published very meagerly. The Channel One referred her to as a "public figure from Samara," who submitted documents to the CEC, while she was shown on the general background sitting behind the members of the election commission. The second mention about her on this channel was connected with the submission of signatures to the CEC (she was able to collect 243,000 signatures instead of 2 million); here she was already represented as the leader of an unregistered party and shown close-up. In confirmation of the complexity of collecting 2 million signatures in the program, the words of the politician G. Kasparov were quoted, who assured that it was impossible to collect such quantity honestly. Journalists of the channel "Russia" stressed that there were only two candidates from the non-parliamentary opposition: G. Yavlinsky and M. Prokhorov, although in fact there were more of them, including a woman, S. Peunova.

The image of S. Peunova was inexpressive and faceless. It had neither gender nor ideological expression. This representation of the candidate was obviously caused by her oppositional political views. As S.G. Aivazova notes, at present only women who are loyal to the regime are allowed to participate in the political process. For those who have a different position, participation in politics results in a loss of identity (Davidenko, 2017; Okin, 2004).

In the elections of 2018, there was an external change in the situation. There were ten women of the thirty-six candidates, only one female candidate, Ksenia Sobchak, was allowed to take part in the elections. She was in a "campaign" consisting of 7 men. It would seem that the gender balance is at least a little, but has changed for the better. However, in our opinion, this is a deceptive impression. None of their parliamentary parties nominated a female candidate. Of the ten women candidates, two were self-nominated, the rest were nominated by non-parliamentary parties and collected 100 thousand signatures for participation in the elections. E. Gordon and I. Gagite themselves refused to participate in the elections, despite they collected signatures, the rest were refused for various reasons. K. Sobchak, TV presenter, was the only registered female candidate, she was nominated by the party "Civil Initiative" ("Grazhdanskaya Initsiativa").

Representation of the image of K. Sobchak on television confirms the thesis about androcentrism of the political sphere, where a male is regarded as a norm (Lynch *et al.*, 2003). The woman-candidate was represented as an active, young, active politician with masculine features. The main attention was focused on the formation of the public policy image with its own point of view. Kseniya Sobchak herself noted her non-feminine features, stressed that "the floor is not her ceiling". She appeared in public in strict suits at official events, then in a sporting style. In her speeches, Sobchak raised "non-women" topics: fighting corruption, the idea of free competition and economic development, judicial reform and protection of prisoners, protection of the rights of sexual minorities, support of ordinary residents of megalopolises facing different housing problems, protection of historical monuments, and so on. The replicas of K. Sobchak for the most part were not gendered: meetings with voters on the streets and in the premises, press conferences, participation in the rally, walking around the landfills; she poured water on her political rival, she expressed loud outrage and shown attempts to uphold the rights of citizens. The created image did not have femininity, many ideas translated and actions performed by her could correspond to the man-candidate with a certain ideological position.

Only a few episodes of the telediscourse emphasized the female component of her image. In one case, the TV presenter reported with irony that K. Sobchak congratulated the male candidates on Defender of the Fatherland Day, signing as Snow White, specifying that this fairy-tale character was "the most beautiful girl in the kingdom". In our opinion, the refinement had a certain semantic implication, since the appearance of K. Sobchak is being discussed in public space for many years. In the second episode one of the candidates has congratulated K. Sobchak with the women's holiday on March 8. In the programs analyzed by us, there were no "women's" stories related to the family, children, charity, etc.

This behavior of a woman politician suggests that she accepts the male rules of the game in politics, seeks to match them, losing her own female identity. Scientists who adhere to gender methodology explain this phenomenon by the fact that "gender" which is understood as social institutionalization on the basis of sex, is socially constructed (Brunsdon and Morley, 2005). Scientists explain the construction of gender relations from different methodological positions, but everyone agrees that gender presupposes power relations where masculine dominates over feminine. Political power is associated with masculine traits (strength, firmness, will, etc.), and feminine traits (softness, emotions, tenderness, obedience, etc.) are associated with a subordinate position. The scholars studied in detail the "women's history", the struggle of women for their right to participate in public life and showed that the presence of women in the political elite in recent centuries was the exception rather than the rule. All this makes us think about a deeper explanation of the subordinate position of women in the political sphere.

In our opinion, it is appropriate to refer to the ideas of P. Sorokin on the dynamics of sociocultural supersystems. He substantiated the cyclical development of a society that consistently passes through the stages of sensory and spiritual (ideational) cultures. There is an intermediate, transitional type of culture between them, namely, idealistic. In every culture there are always three types of social relations: familial, contractual and coercive. However, a certain type prevails depending on the nature of the culture. In a sensible sociocultural system, contractual and coercive relations predominate, and in the ideational - the familial one.

Familial relations are long, intense, and solidary. P. Sorokin gives them such a name to emphasize their spiritual nature and resulting social cohesion. Familial relations can exist not only in a family and small groups, but also in the state, and among members of many other groups (Sanders, 2004).

Contractual relations are less intense; their duration is limited by the time frame of a contract; they clearly prescribe those or other actions and have the nature of a transaction. This makes them sensually selfish; members of a contractual group always remain largely alien to each other (Sanders, 2004).

Forced relations are antagonistic in nature. One of the parties in them imposes a different manner of behavior, duties and functions contrary to the desires and inclinations of the other party, forcing them to perform through physical or psychological coercion. The participants in forced relations are not simply alienated, but assess each other negatively; there is no mutual understanding between them (Sanders, 2004).

In fact, the above-described pure types of social relations often have mixed forms. Nevertheless, it is important for us to note Sorokin that forms of government and domination depend on dominant social relations (Sanders, 2004).

The modern stage of development of society refers to the last stage of the existence of sensual culture. In this connection, a gender construct based on the power of men and masculine qualities becomes understandable. The gender interpretation of the relationship between men and women in society goes along the way of eliminating the "sexual issue" by erasing the differences in their social roles, unifying social behavior, appearance and other things, that is, ignoring the natural "consequences" of the sexual identity of people. However, the desired equality of men and women does not occur, including the political sphere. External declarations of equality result in deeper social inequality, leading to a loss of female identity.

P. Sorokin emphasizes many times that the values of spiritual culture will inevitably be established in society. Change in consciousness will produce the best minds of society which will turn them into great religious and moral leaders. In politics, the transition to a new socio-cultural cycle will manifest itself in popular movements for the creation of an honest and morally responsible government of the people, by the will of the people and for the sake of the people (Sanders, 2004).

The ideas expressed by P. Sorokin show that it is impossible to solve the problem of expanding the participation of women in the political management of the state without changing the value orientations. While people value each other, including politicians, according to the criteria of "life success", wealth, without regard for moral qualities, the situation will not change.

Modern mass media discourse vividly reflects the value preferences of sensual culture: the dominance of power, masculinity, financial success, ethical relativism and nihilism, moral atomism. They create deliberately false images, are hypocritical confusing mass consciousness.

Meanwhile, there is another request in the public consciousness. In the opinion of a number of Russian experts a return to moral values is needed in politics that will help people to give an objective assessment to current political leaders and to resolve the social contradictions that have arisen (Chernyshov, 2017; Davidenko, 2017; Okin, 2004). A.G. Chernyshov believes that a new leader capable of becoming a moral authority and forming the ethical basis of socio-political practice will appear in society (Chernyshov, 2017; Verstraeten, 1996).

According to the opinion poll conducted by ANO "Independent Research Center" before the presidential elections of 2018, the population of the country has its own position in relation to women participating in presidential companies. 75% of respondents believe that women should participate in the elective company.

However, the Russians did not see decent candidates among the women involved. 30% of respondents agree with the opinion that it is easier to gain authority against the background of the current president. 18% of respondents felt that they are being imposed on voters so that people become disillusioned with politics. 11% of the responses were "They are meant to show that women do not have a place in politics." 6% believe that they are designed to arouse the interest of the male part of the population towards elections. Their response options (15%) indicated a lack of confidence in these candidates.

The Russians voted for popular candidates in the 2018 presidential election. A third of the population (31%) believe that the public figure S.M. Lada-Rus' (Peunova) nominated in previous elections, should also participate in the upcoming presidential elections. 17,5% of the respondents believed that it was rather necessary. Some

respondents who offered their own answer are not familiar with the politician or consider involvement meaningless, since she will still be put aside. 18% of respondents believed that S.M. Lada-Rus' would have been supported by the people in the next presidential elections. Another 19% believed that they would rather get support than they did not get. A quarter of respondents answered that she would not have received support, one third of respondents (33%) found it difficult to answer (Davidenko, 2017; Grinin *et al.*, 2016; Shitova and Shitov, 2016).

4. Conclusions

The results of the analysis show that the television discourse of the presidential elections in Russia expresses the dominant values of the modern era, the understanding of politics as a serious, manly thing to do in which the women role is minimal, and the inclusion of women in a political race assumes their subordinate position and / or accordance with masculine rules of the game. Presented images of women politicians are devoid of individuality and pronounced feminine qualities, their images either impersonal, or are presented in a common form, inherent in both men and women. In our opinion, these representations are manifestations of modern sensory culture (in the terminology of P. Sorokin). A sign of the crisis of sensual culture is the rejection by society of women politicians nominated in the last presidential election, their qualities, their behavior, their statements, their attitude to them, as unworthy and not worthy of respect. At the same time, there is a public demand for moral values and moral authority of politicians, which implies a transition to a spiritual culture.

Acknowledgements

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

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