When There Is No Choice: Electoral Preferences of Russians In Times of Ideological Uncertainty

The study analyses the electoral preferences of Russians who participated in the 2016 parliamentary and 2018 presidential elections. The empirical basis is derived from the data of nationwide monitoring carried out by Federal Centre of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences over 2014-2018. The sample comprised 4,000 persons (aged 18 and over) and was representative of the adult population in terms of gender, age, education and type of settlement. As the study shows elections in modern Russia may be described as “elections without choice”. This is why contemporary Russia resembles the Soviet Union. But the main difference is that the Soviet elections had Communist ideology as the basis, and those with dissenting opinions suffered official ostracism, persecution, and repression. Contemporary Russian elections are stripped of any ideological orientation. At present, the Russian policymakers consider an ideology as non-essential, while dissension is still considered dangerous. Consequently, today's ideological constructs become illusory and more disproportionate to the real tasks, values, and interests of a majority of citizens. Most voters are ill-informed about party and pre-election programmes that use conservative, social and democratic and liberal slogans. However, the study shows that, on the one hand, elections in contemporary Russia remain an essential political institution. This is proved by high voter turnout and the participation of opposition parties and leaders. Nevertheless, the effective democratic component is weak and largely formal.