

EU BORDER PROXIMITY EFFECT ON POLITICAL CHOICE IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF LATVIA

JANIS PAIDERS¹, JURIS PAIDERS²

Latvian University (Latvia)

ABSTRACT

The border effect of Russian and Belarusian border on Latgale electoral district has been analysed in this research. The proportion of Latvians in Latgale border area is a lot smaller in total than in the rest of the Latgale territory and the proportion of all the rest of the ethnic minorities in the border area is a lot higher while the number of votes for political parties with a mostly Latvian citizen electorate is proportionally higher. The obtained results indicate that the border effect on the election results for political parties is not statistically significant.

KEY WORDS: *border effect, electoral geography, spatial heterogeneity*

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Introduction

Border areas have a tendency to differ from the rest of the country and this is particularly true in case of EU external borders. This is a common situation for Eastern European countries and The Baltic States are united by the fact that they have a common land border with Russia and Latvia and Lithuania also have a border with Belarus. The difference between taxes and tariffs determine the flow of both legal and illegal trade flow across the EU border with Russia and Belarus. Outside border of EU could be considered a high risk zone for illegal immigrants.

Meanwhile EU border with Russia and Belarus could be considered a zone which is a subject to the foreign media influence because of the overlay of TV and radio distribution areas. Because of this situation there are many myths and assumptions about the effect which living near the Russian and Belarus border has. One of these assumptions is that political situation near these borders differs in case of parliamentary elections. This assumption could be verified by analysing parliamentary election results to see if results near the Russian and Belarusian border are significantly different and spatial analysis of election results with mathematical analysis methods allows to estimate this difference. To test this assumption is the main goal of this research.

This work is a part of electoral geography and the geographical factors which have an impact on election results are different between countries. In Case of Turkey parliamentary elections it is found that four major divisions are shaping the electoral geography: religion, ethnicity, regional economic prosperity, and previous state association (West, 2005). In Latvia, out of three possible levels on which electoral geography can be researched – local, regional, and national (Krampe, 2005) – election results have most often been examined at the national (electoral district) level. Electoral geography has been relatively little researched at the academic

¹ Janis Paiders – Masters student of the Latvian University Geography and Earth science department.
E-mail: paidersjanis@inbox.lv

² Juris Paiders – doctor of geography, associate professor in the Latvian University (Geography and Earth Science Department).
E-mail: jpaiders@inbox.lv

level in Latvia, with studies that deal with the spatial distribution of parliamentary election results giving it very little attention (How Democratic Is Latvia, 2005).

Studies of electoral geography have also examined the behavior of specific voter groups in relation to geographical factors, with groups being formed by ethnicity, race, income level, etc. (Groffman and Handley, 1989; McLaughlin, 2008). The influence of the ethnic composition on parliamentary election results in Latvia has already been discussed in previous publications of the authors (Paiders, 2012; Paiders and Paiders, 2011). Often, studies in the field of electoral geography focus specifically on examining the electorate of radical political forces, including research of its spatial dispersion (Alexseev, 2006; Stefanova, 2009; O'Loughlin et al., 1994). When evaluating the results of other countries, the differences in the political systems of these countries in comparison to Latvia must be taken into account.

1. Study Area

The analyzed territory is the Latgale constituency (Figure 1). In Latgale, it's Russian and Belarus border territories that are mutually compared with the rest of Latgale, trying to identify the main differences. The border area territories were defined as the biggest part of the territory located within 30 km from the outside border of Russia and Belarus.

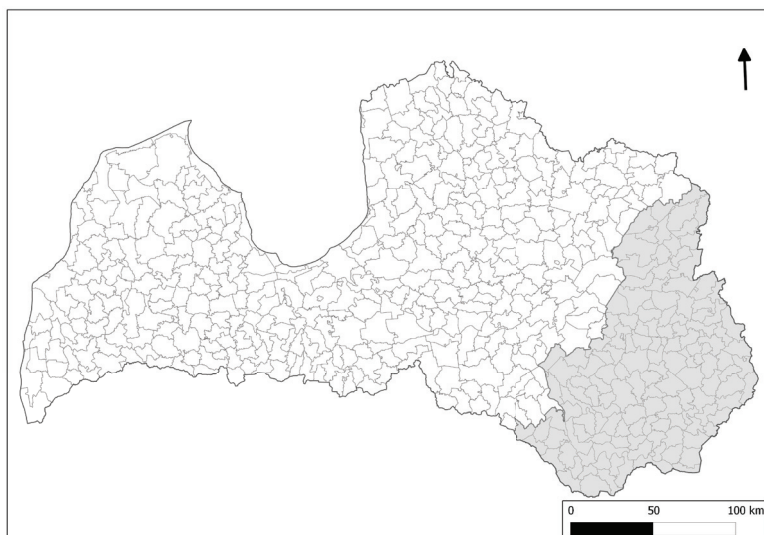


Figure 1. Latgale electoral district

Source: Central Election Commission, 2010

Latgale electoral district (Figure 1) is located in the East part of Latvia and it is the most ethnically diverse region in Latvia. Latgale constituency is more than 14 000 km² in size which is almost a quarter of the country area and it has about 16 % of the total number of inhabitants in Latvia. In the recent years Latgale had experienced a large population decrease mostly due to migration to other regions of Latvia or abroad. This population decrease can also be seen in the turnout of voters in parliamentary elections in the period from 2002 to 2010 which has gradually decreased, having dropped by about 20 % in 2010 compared to 2002. The number of rural parish voters in Latgale has decreased the most, falling by 27 % in the examined period.

2. Data and Methods

The study analyses the officially approved results of the elections of the 10th Saeima (parliament) of the Republic of Latvia (Central Election Commission, 2011). The results of all political parties participating in

the parliamentary elections were acquired and analyzed. For parties having overcome the 5 % threshold, the statistics of the pluses and strikes of each candidate in all electoral districts were also examined.

When examining the effect of the ethnic factor on the results of political parties, they were summarized and analyzed at a parish level. The Central Election Commission does not publish election results on a parish scale, so the results of parishes were derived from the results of individual polling stations, by adding together the results of stations in one parish or town. In cases where there was no polling station in a rural area or parish adjacent to the town the town's result was also attributed to these territories.

Data on the national composition was obtained from the available information of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) In addition, when examining the largest ethnic minorities in Latvia, it was necessary to determine the proportion of citizens within these groups, to what extent various national minorities have integrated in the political environment of Latvia (Dribins, 2007). Unfortunately, after the administrative-territorial reform, the PMLP no longer publishes information about rural parishes, just releases information on the distribution of nationalities by municipality therefore information about ethnic composition and citizenship were obtained using data from 2009 (Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009)

As the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) does not publish the ethnic composition of the territory according to citizenship status, in order to determine the ethnic composition of the citizens in the territory it was necessary to perform a calculation, after which a precise proportion of Latvians and non-Latvians amongst the citizens and an almost precise proportion of the biggest different ethnic minorities between the citizens (Russian, Belorussian, Polish) was obtained.

The discovery of the ethnical composition on the results of Saeima (the parliament of the Republic of Latvia) elections is based on two assumptions. Firstly, that the ethnic composition in the territory represents the ethnic composition of the voted electorates (on which there is no information). Secondly, the election activity between Latvians and different ethnical minorities is the same (the connection between election activity and the proportion of Latvians in the region is not statistically significant).

The work uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods. All initial data were tested for correspondence to normal distribution, using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Considering that, in accordance with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the zero hypotheses in relation to voting results in parishes and stations can be rejected; the t-test standard procedure was used for comparing averages. Analysis of the results of political parties, as well as of the results of individual candidates, in relation to the ethnic composition of the municipality or district was conducted by using linear regression analysis. A correlation coefficient was used as the indicator of the level of correlation. Following the standard used by Frolova (Frolova, 2005), the zero hypotheses – namely, that the resultant indication is not influenced by the factorial indication of the regression – was tested for regression models, checking whether zero was included in the credibility interval of the regression coefficient. If zero appeared in the credibility interval of the respective coefficients of the regression variables in the regression equation, the factor in question was excluded from the equation. All calculations have been done by the author in Microsoft Excel, with the exception of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, for which the program SPSS was used (Arhipova & Balina, 2003).

3. Results

Table 1. The differences in ethnic composition in Latgale in the year 2009

	Latgale total	The border area	The rest of Latgale
The number of citizens	344154	210295	133859
Latvians %	44.0%	35.3%	57.6%
Russians %	39.2%	41.6%	35.4%
Belarusians %	5.4%	7.7%	1.7%
Polish %	7.0%	10.0%	2.3%
Other %	4.5%	5.4%	3.0%

Source: Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009

In the Latgale constituency Latvians make up only 44.0 % of the total population, which is just a little bit more than the number of Russians in this territory. Without the Russians, Latgales constituency has a significant Belorussian and Polish community, the number of which in this region is a lot more significant in comparison with the rest of Latvia (Table 1).

The proportion of Latvians in the Latgale border area is a lot smaller in total than in the rest of the Latgale territory and the proportion of all the rest of the ethnic minorities in the border area is a lot higher. In the border area the number of Russians is even larger than Latvians, with the biggest proportion of the population with this nationality in the border area along the Russian area, especially in the Zilupe region. The biggest proportion of Belarussians and Polish is along the border area of Belarus, for example, in some particular parishes of the Krāslava region where the proportion of Belarussians exceed 50 %.

As the main factor in the Saeima elections in Latvia influencing the results of the elections is the ethnical composition in the territory, then when examining this factor it needs to be taken into account that part of the population of this territory are non-citizens, who don't have an opportunity to participate in elections (Table 1). A bigger proportion of non-citizens shows that the ethnic composition of the population which has participated in the election, significantly differs from the ethnic composition of the territory amongst all the citizens. The reason for this is the fact that country-wide amongst Latvians, only 0.2 % are non-citizens, whilst 41.6 % of Russians, 61.9 % Belarussians, 68.6 % Ukrainians 24.5 % Polish are non-citizens.

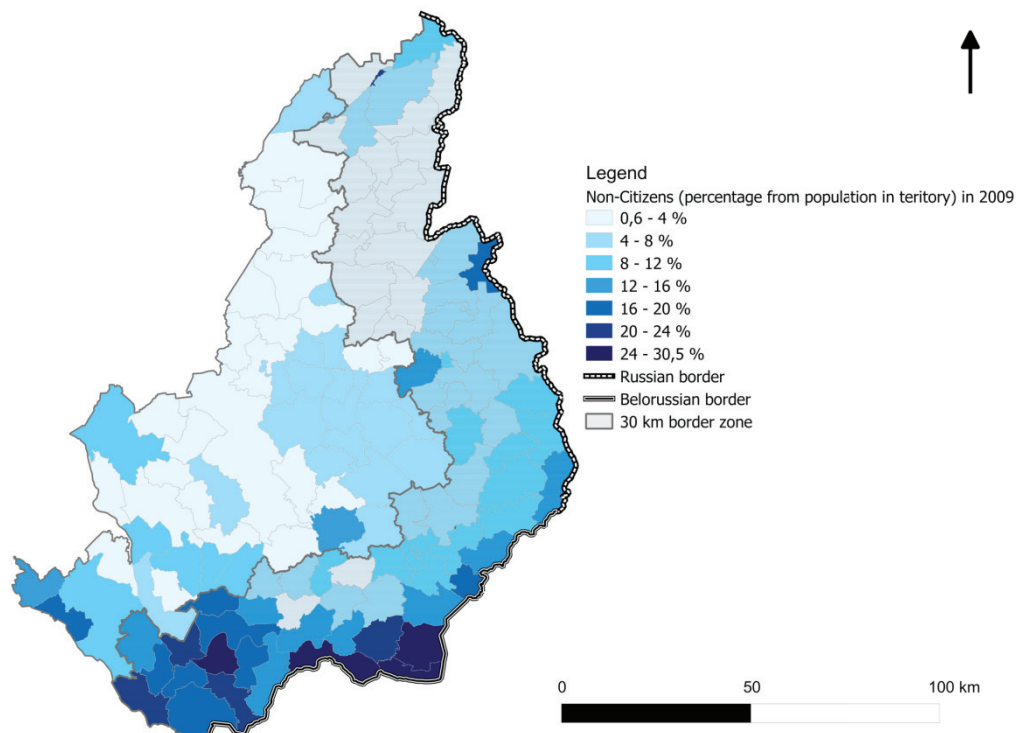


Figure 2. The proportion of non-citizens % from the number of population in year 2009

Source: Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009

The total number of non-citizens in Latgale creates 13.8 % of Latgale population, but their proportion in Latgale has a very big territorial variation which fluctuates from 0.69 % in the Krisjaņi parish to as much as 31.0 % in the Indra parish in the border area of Belarus (Figure 2). The spatial variation of non-citizens is mainly tightly connected with the variations of the ethnical composition. For example, the very high proportion of non-citizens in the border area of Belarus can be explained by the fact that amongst the Belarussians

who create a bigger ethnical minority in these parishes, the proportion of non-citizens is higher than in the border area of Russia, where the biggest ethnic minority is Russians.

It needs to be taken into account that the proportion of non-citizens has a very high and statistically significant variation between the border territories and the rest of Latgale. 18.2 % of the border territory population is non-citizens, which is almost 3 times more than in the rest of Latgale, where in 2009 only 6.9 % of the population are non-citizens. The reason for the significant differences is firstly the fact that the proportion of Latvians in the border parishes is a lot smaller in comparison with the rest of Latgale. One should also take into account the fact that the proportion of non-citizens in % from the number of non-Latvians in Latgale is spatially uneven.

Table 2. The differences of the ethnic composition in Latgale amongst the citizens in the year 2009

	Latgale total	Border area	The rest of Latgale
The number of citizens	296683	172069	124614
The % of Latvians amongst the citizens	51.0%	43.1%	61.9%
The % of Russians amongst the citizens	34.8%	36.7%	32.1%
The % of Belarusians amongst the citizens	3.0%	4.5%	1.00%
The % of Polish amongst the citizens	7.4%	11.0%	2.4%
The % of others amongst the citizens	3.8%	4.6%	2.7%

Source: Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009

The proportion of different nationalities between the citizens (Table 2) significantly differs in comparison with the distribution of the same nationalities amongst all of the population (Table 1). This is mainly because the role of Latvians amongst the citizens is a lot more significant due to the high number of non-citizens in the rest of the ethnical minorities. Therefore, 51.0 % of all the citizens of Latgale are Latvians, becoming the main part of the electorate in the constituency overall.

It can be observed that the proportion of Russians has decreased amongst the citizens in comparison with the population in total, but the biggest decrease is connected with the decrease in the proportion of Belarusians, as only 48.5 % of the Belarusians in Latgale have Latvian citizenship. Here it needs to be mentioned, that in the remaining territory of Latvia only 35.0 % of Belarusians are Latvian citizens, but other ethnical minorities also have a significantly higher proportion of citizens in Latgale. The Polish proportion amongst the citizens in Latgale has even increased in connection with the fact that 91 % of the Polish in Latgale are citizens.

Looking at proportion of Latvian's from citizens (%) in Latgale parishes, as the variable indication, and the proportion of votes (%) for Harmony Centre, as the resultant indication. In Latgale electoral district, 133 observations were made. The determinative coefficient was 0.646. In turn, the regression coefficient was -0.64. The upper and lower limits of the regression coefficient were -0.56 and -0.72 respectively, which indicates that the zero hypothesis can be rejected, as the regression coefficient differs from zero with a very high probability. If the proportion of Latvian citizens increased by one percent, then the proportion of voters for Harmony Centre would decrease by 0.64 percentage points.

The relationship obtained allows the conclusion to be made that the main electorate of the Harmony Centre in Latgale, similarly as in the territory of Latvia in total, is precisely the non-Latvian citizens of Latvia. Nevertheless, the fact that the ethnic factor in Latgale is the main one determining the electorate of this party, its role in Latgale is significantly smaller than in the territory of Latvia in total, where this factor explains around 85 % of the whole dispersion (Paiders and Paiders, 2011). It means that it is possible, that the influence of different regional parliamentary candidates on the distribution of election results in the Latgale constituency is more important in comparison with other constituencies.

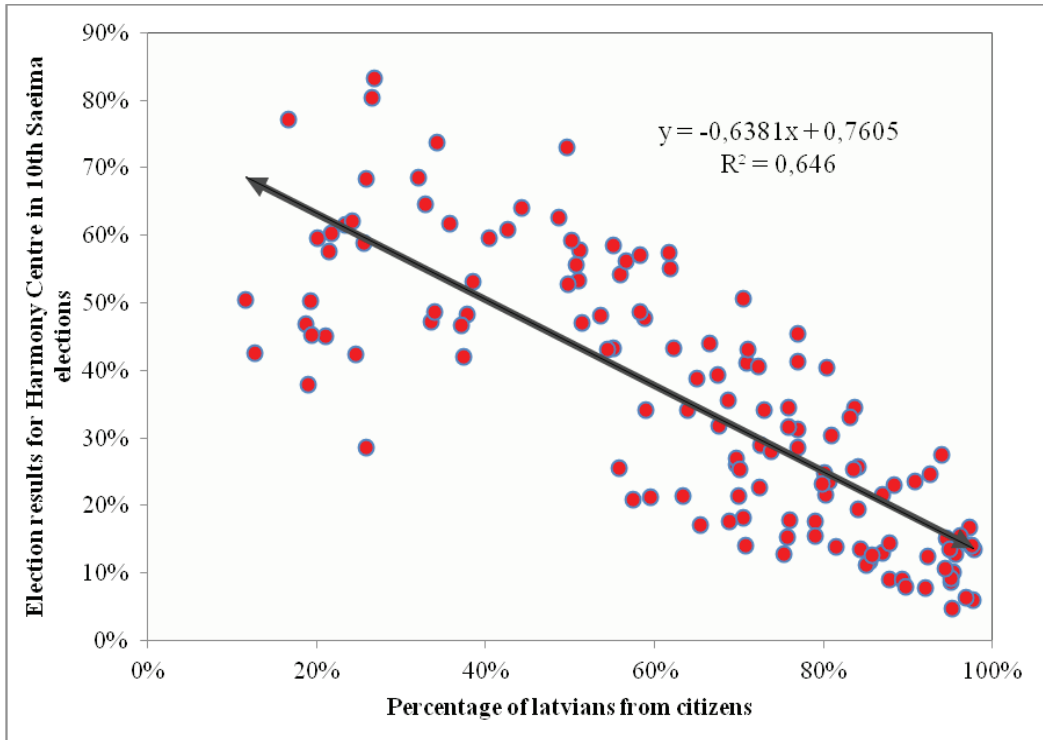


Figure 3. The dependence of the Harmony Centre from the proportion of Latvians in the Latgale constituency during the 10th Saeima election

Source: Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009; Central Election Commission, 2010

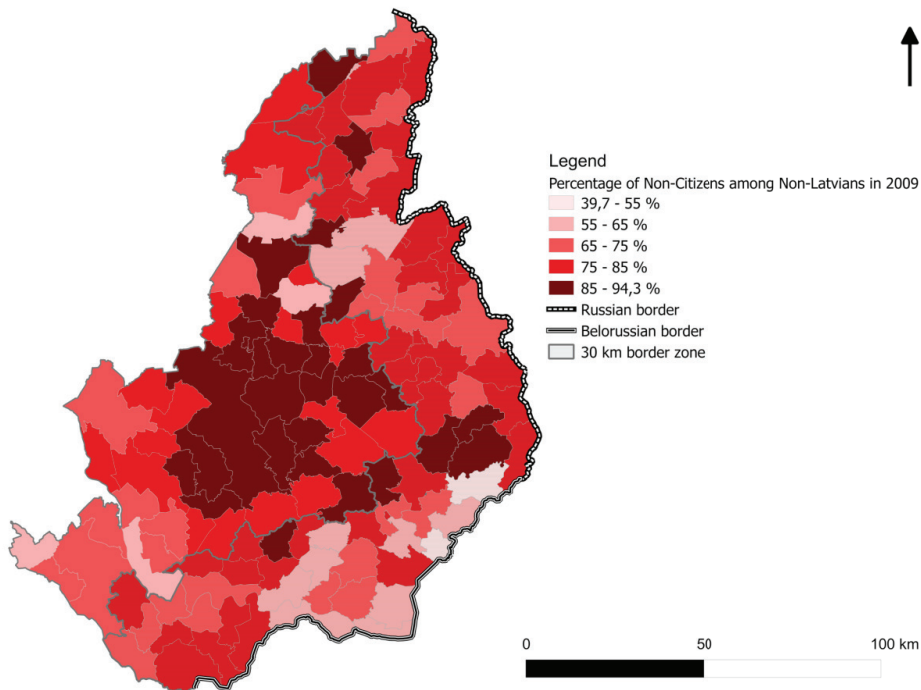


Figure 4. The proportion of non-citizens % from the number of non-Latvians in year 2009

Source: Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009

In total 75.4 % of non-Latvians in Latgale are citizens (Figure 4), which means that the proportion of citizens in Latgale between non-Latvians is slightly higher in comparison with the rest of Latvia, in which only 50.9 % of all of the non-Latvians are citizens. The reason for these differences is the fact, that in Latgale, there has been a historically higher proportion of non-Latvians and a lot bigger part of the population are descendants of the pre-war non-Latvians in the territory of Latgale (to say it more precisely and clearly, with references).

The proportion of non-Latvians in the territory in the scale of Latgale has a significant variation. For example, in the Sokolu parish, Rēzekne region 94.3 % of all the non-Latvians are citizens, nevertheless in this parish 73.2 % of the citizens are Russians. 39.8 % of the Kepova parish non-Latvians are citizens, and this parish in the border area is the only one in Latgale, where this indicator is smaller than the average proportion of non-Latvian citizens in the rest of Latvia.

The differences in this indicator are also statistically significant when comparing the border territories with the rest of Latgale. If 71.9 % of non-Latvians in the border territories have citizenship of Latvia, then in the rest of Latgale 83.7 % of non-Latvians are citizens, mainly due to the very high proportion of non-Latvian citizens in the Rēzekne, Riebiņi and Preiļi counties.

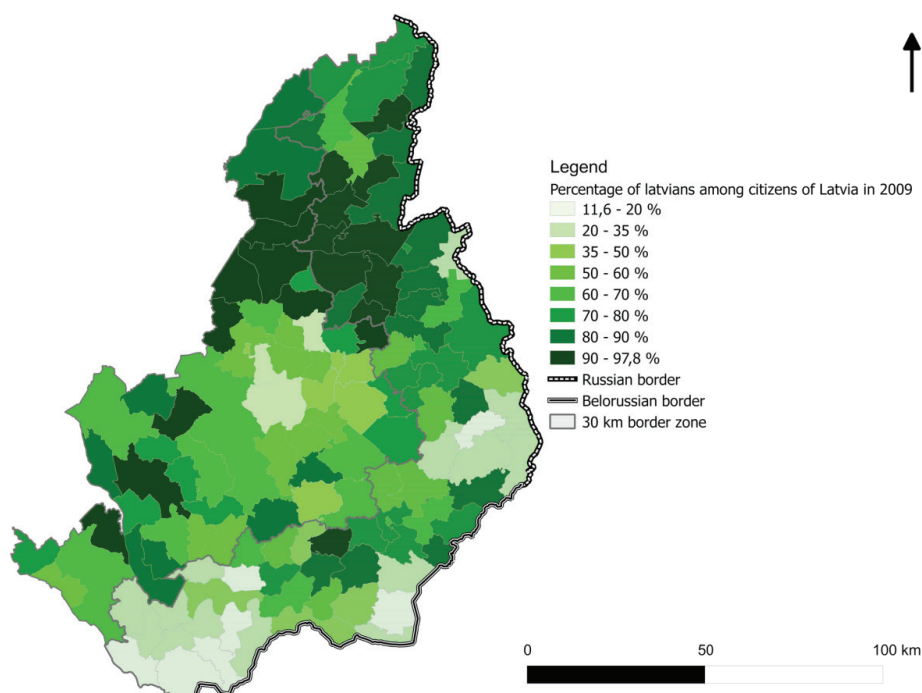


Figure 5. The proportion of Latvians % from the total number of citizens in the year 2009

Source: Office of Citizen and Migration affairs, 2009; Central Election Commission, 2010

Among the citizens Latvians create 51.0 % of the number of citizens in total, which is a lot smaller in comparison with the rest of the territory of Latvia (Figure 5). The tiny amount of Latvians has political consequences, therefore it means that for those political parties whose biggest part of electorate is Latvians, success in Latgale is largely limited.

Nevertheless, despite the low total proportion of Latvians amongst the citizens, this indicator has very high spatial heterogeneity in Latgale, starting with the territories, which on the scale of Latvia have one of the highest proportions of Latvians among the citizens in the north of Latgale (Rugāji, Balvi region and the northern part of Rēzekne region), where the proportion in several parishes exceeds 97 % amongst the citizens. In Latgale there are also the kind of territories where on the scale of Latvia has the lowest proportion

of Latvians amongst the citizens, in the territories which are located in the border area of Belarus and for example in the Skrudaliena parish in the Daugavpils region where the proportion of Latvians is smaller than 12 % amongst the citizens of Latvia.

In the border area territories in Latgale the proportion of Latvians is only 43.1 % of all the citizens in these territories, whilst in the rest of the territory of Latgale it almost exceeds 62 %. This difference in means between border and non-border areas was detected as statistically significant.

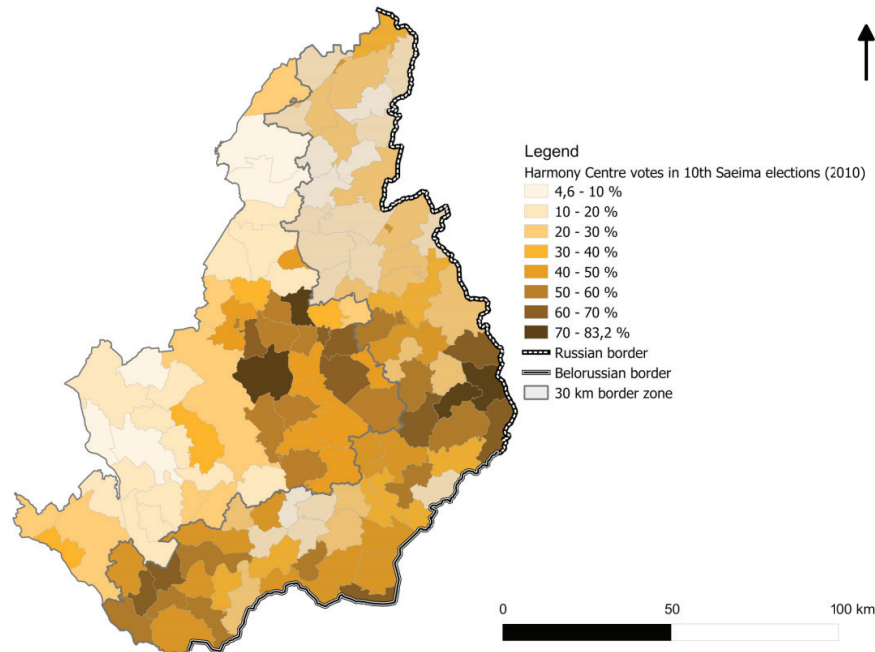


Figure 6. The number of votes for the Harmony Centre in % from the total amount of the electorate during the 10th Saeima election.

Source: Central Election Commission, 2010

The Harmony Centre in the Latgale constituency received the highest result 46.2 % of votes (Figure 6) during the 10th Saeima elections, the reason for which was the fact that the biggest part of the electorate of this party is made of non-Latvians, the number of which amongst the citizens in Latgale is a lot higher than in the rest of Latvia. The highest results of the Harmony Centre were in the Zilupe region, reaching an 83.2 % high result. A very high result was also reached in part of the Rēzekne region parishes. The lowest results of the Harmony Centre have been in the Vārkava and Balvi regions, reaching 4.8 % of votes in the Vārkava region.

This party also reached a significantly higher result in elections – 50.5 % of votes in the border area territory, which is more than in the rest of Latgale, where 40.5 % of the electorate voted for them. This difference between means of two groups (Border areas and the rest of Latgale) cannot be looked at as statistically significant.

It was noticed, that the border area and the differences in the rest of Latgale in the results of the Harmony Centre during the 10th Saeima elections was significantly smaller than in the proportion of Latvians amongst citizens in these same territories. This not only doesn't allow confirmation of the assumption, that in the border areas of Russia and Belarus would be bigger support for those political forces the biggest electorate of which is Russian, Belarusian Latvian citizens, but even shows that with the same ethnic composition, the result of the Harmony Centre in the border area territories are even smaller.

These results allow the conclusion to be made, that the second of the most important factors (after the ethnic factor), which influence the geographical distribution of election results is connected with the distribution of the success of particular candidates in different constituency territories. As an example the Rēzekne

region and Rēzekne can be mentioned, where all together 45.2 % of citizens are Latvian citizens who are non-Latvian, even though the number of votes for the Harmony Centre in these territories is 55.7 %, which means that at least 10 % of voters in Rēzekne and the Rēzekne region haven't been bound to the influence of the ethnic factor in their choice. The reason for this is very possibly connected with the fact that in this territory strong regional candidates of this party were candidates (Janis Tutins, Ivans Ribakovs), whereas in the border area territory this party doesn't have strong regional candidates, which means that the electorate of this party stays strongly connected with the ethnic composition amongst the citizens.

Conclusions

1. Border area in Latgale differs significantly from rest of the region in terms of composition of citizenship or ethnicity. Percentage of non-Latvians near the Russian and Belarusian border is higher while the citizen percentage of Latvia is lower than the rest of Latgale. The largest ethnic minority in the border area is Russian, while the Belarusian border area has the biggest proportion of Belarusians and Polish.
2. Even though the ethnic factor in Latgale is the main factor determining the electorate of largest political parties, its role in Latgale is significantly smaller than in the territory of Latvia in total. The assumption that some of the dispersion can be explained with the proximity to the Russian or Belarusian border cannot be verified and it appears that the second most important factor that explains the dispersion of election results is the distribution of strong regional candidates for main political parties.
3. The fact that proximity to the Russian or Belarusian border has no significant effect on election results even on political parties whose electoral base is mostly Russian (and Belarusian) means that ideas that propose that citizens in these territories are living a different political environment which influences their vote are probably not based in scientific analysis.
4. The methods used in this article allow not only to analyse the results of parliamentary elections and ethnic composition but also to use this method to other available parameters about parishes. By doing that full scope of difference between border area and rest of the country can be understood.

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ES SIENOS ARTUMO POVEIKIS POLITINIAM PASIRINKIMUI LATVIJOS PARLAMENTO RINKIMUOSE

JANIS PAIDERS, JURIS PAIDERS
Latvijos universitetas (Latvija)

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamas sienos su Rusija ir Baltarusija poveikis Latgalos rinkiminėje apygardoje. Latvių dalis Latgalos pasienio zonoje yra daug mažesnė nei likusioje Latgalos teritorijoje, etninių mažumų dalis pasienio zonoje yra daug didesnė, tuo tarpu balsų skaičius, tenkantis politinėms partijoms, kurių elektoratas didžiausias, yra proporcingai didesnis. Gauti rezultatai rodo, kad sienos įtaka rinkimų rezultatams nėra statistiškai reikšminga.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *sienos poveikis, rinkimų geografija, erdvės heterogeniškumas.*

JEL KLASIFIKACIJA: R000.