



Manipulative Electoral Technologies as an Instrument of Distortion in the Implementation of Regional Policy

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to determine the specific features of the use of manipulative electoral technologies as a distorted instrument for the implementation of state regional policy. The relevance of the study is due to the fact that the phenomenon of gerrymandering is inherent in both stable, highly developed democratic states, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and in developing ones. The selection of Malaysia and Ethiopia as case studies was determined by a combination of several factors, including their federal structure and the significant influence of ethnic minority factors within particular regions. The experience of Malaysia demonstrates that the combination of the first-past-the-post electoral system, ethnically structured electoral behavior, and the broad discretion of the Election Commission in the process of redistricting created favorable conditions for the development of both malapportionment and partisan as well as ethnic gerrymandering. Consecutive constitutional amendments effectively weakened restrictions concerning the equality of constituencies and provided the authorities with opportunities to influence the configuration of electoral maps in accordance with their own political interests. As a result, the electoral system, which formally was intended to ensure governmental stability and political competitiveness, for a long time contributed to preserving the dominance of the ruling coalition. At the same time, the example of the state of Johor demonstrates that the ethnic composition of the population and the territorial concentration of particular groups may become key instruments of electoral manipulation. No less illustrative is the example of the Harari Region in Ethiopia, where gerrymandering acquires a specific form by being combined with seat reservation mechanisms and special voting rights for ethnic minorities. On the one hand, such a model contributes to ensuring the political representation of the Harari people and creates mechanisms for protecting their right to self-determination. On the other hand, the excessive disproportionality between constituencies, the inequality of electoral power, and the actual dominance of particular ethno-political groups indicate a serious violation of the principle of equal suffrage. In this context, gerrymandering functions not only as an instrument of political representation, but also as a mechanism for consolidating ethnic politics and restricting political competition.




KEYWORDS

Electoral technologies, manipulative electoral technologies, gerrymandering, regional policy, majoritarian electoral system, electoral constituency/electoral district.



Маніпулятивні виборчі технології як інструмент викривлення для реалізації регіональної політики

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Метою даного дослідження є визначення специфіки використання маніпулятивних виборчих технологій як викривленого інструменту реалізації державної регіональної політики. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що явище джеррімендерингу притаманне як сталим високорозвиненим демократичним державам, як США та Великобританія, так і таким, що розвиваються. Вибір держав для дослідження – Малайзія та Ефіопія – був зумовлений поєднанням декількох факторів, таких як федеративний устрій, значний вплив фактору етнічної меншості у певному регіоні. Досвід Малайзії демонструє, що поєднання мажоритарної системи відносно більшості, етнічно структурованої електоральної поведінки та значної свободи Виборчої комісії у процесі перегляду меж округів створило сприятливі умови для розвитку як малапорціонування, так і партійного та етнічного джеррімендерингу. Послідовні конституційні зміни фактично послабили обмеження щодо рівності округів і надали владі можливість впливати на конфігурацію виборчої карти відповідно до власних політичних інтересів. У результаті виборча система, яка формально повинна була забезпечувати стабільність уряду та конкурентність політичного процесу, упродовж тривалого часу сприяла збереженню домінування коаліції, що править. Водночас приклад штату Джохор засвідчує, що етнічна структура населення та територіальна концентрація окремих груп можуть перетворюватися на ключовий інструмент електорального маніпулювання. Не менш показовим є приклад регіону Харарі в Ефіопії, де джеррімендеринг набуває специфічної форми, поєднуючись із резервуванням місць та спеціальними виборчими правами для етнічної меншини. З одного боку, така модель сприяє забезпеченню політичного представництва народу харарі та створює механізми захисту його права на самовизначення. З іншого боку, надмірна диспропорція між округами, нерівність виборчої сили та фактичне домінування окремих етнополітичних груп свідчать про серйозне порушення принципу рівності виборчого права. У цьому контексті джеррімендеринг виступає не лише інструментом політичного представництва, а й механізмом закріплення етнічної політики та обмеження політичної конкуренції.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

Виборчі технології, маніпулятивні виборчі технології, джеррімендеринг, регіональна політика, мажоритарна виборча система, виборчий округ.

1. Introduction

The electoral process requires a variety of approaches to win the competition. This leads to the use of technologies, including manipulative ones, which are also called gray or black, depending on whether they violate the law. In the modern sense, electoral technologies are primarily associated with the use of digital technologies through micro-targeting, methods of social media marketing in politics. At the same time, one of the oldest methods of electoral struggle, which is based on the use of administrative resources, is forgotten. We are talking about gerrymandering or making changes in the boundaries of constituencies. This is a very ancient, probably even one of the first manipulative electoral technologies in history, because it appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United States of America. The essence of the technology is to win, even if there are fewer votes in absolute terms, thanks to a combination of the principles of “winner takes all” and a majoritarian electoral system. However, it is worth distinguishing between situations similar to the US presidential elections in 2000 and 2016. In these two cases, the winners – Bush Jr. and Trump – received fewer votes than their competitors, but won by dividing the territory of states into states with the allocation of quotas, based on the number of votes in the House of Representatives. However, it was gerrymandering that manifested itself in something else – moving the boundaries of constituencies within states in order to divide the electorate in different constituencies and form an artificial minority in a competitor. Of course, to create such conditions, it is necessary to have administrative resources, or, more simply, to be in power.

Conducting regional policy is mandatory for any modern state that wants to meet the requirements of democracy or at least imitate this process. In addition to the signs of democracy, regional policy should contribute to the achievement of a set of social and economic tasks during the process of development of individual territories within the state. Considering gerrymandering in this context, it should be noted that any division of the territory into separate elements should have a potential benefit for citizens, which fits into the concept of human-centeredness. At the same time, gerrymandering is not strategic, or at least tactical, but operational, i.e., to achieve short-term results during elections, and the result obtained is beneficial primarily for the political forces in power. At the same time, it should be noted that if we consider examples not only of the classic example of gerrymandering, for example, the USA or Great Britain, but focus on developing countries, because in this category of countries, manipulative electoral technology has a permanent character of violation of the principle of fairness in the electoral process.

2. Literature Review

During the analysis of literary sources of domestic authors devoted to the study of manipulative electoral technologies, it was noted that a significant part of them did not consider the issue of gerrymandering. For example, O. Chubatenko, in his study, focuses on the definition of the concept of manipulation in the electoral process. The author emphasizes that manipulative electoral technologies are inherent in developed democratic countries and are characterized by their influence on the consciousness of the voter [5]. In the publication, N. Steshenko and K. Chostka draw attention to a specific case – the use of manipulative technologies in the organization of an election campaign on the example of local elections in the Kramatorsk territorial community in 2020. The authors reveal the use of technologies such as anti-advertising, black PR, manipulation of ratings and political slogans [21]. T. Madriga and A. Bryndalskyi investigated the role of manipulative electoral technologies for the national security system. Also, the authors’ study identified the actions of the state that should be aimed at maintaining a safe state, namely, protecting against cyber threats, monitoring media platforms for the presence of disinformation [12]. O. Hrytsenko considers the role of the mass media in the electoral process by exercising manipulative influence based on font design, emotional and expressive vocabulary [8]. Yu Kiyashko identifies the main manipulative technologies in the political slogans of the election billboards of both the presidential elections of Ukraine in 2019 and compares the domestic specifics with other states [11].

At the same time, gerrymandering is a much less common topic for research by domestic scientists. A. Avksentiev, in his study, considers various methods that are part of the general technology of gerrymandering, namely packing, racking, hijacking, and kidnapping. The author also defines certain

approaches to combating this manipulative electoral technology [2]. N. Stengach defines gerrymandering as one of the main problems of the American electoral system, which leads to political polarization [20]. Y. Nikolenko emphasized the role of gerrymandering in the process of territorial organization of elections. The author also asks the question of determining the methods of combating gerrymandering, emphasizing the transfer of powers to determine the boundaries of constituencies to organizations that are non-governmental and not interested in political competition [16].

At the same time, it should be noted that most domestic research on the topic of gerrymandering concentrates on the study of classic examples of the United States; at the same time, there is a need to popularize the experience of developing countries.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine the specifics of the use of manipulative electoral technologies as a distorted tool for the implementation of state regional policy. To achieve this, the following tasks were set: defining the general provisions of the concept of gerrymandering, considering the practical use of this manipulative electoral technology in two developing states – Malaysia and Ethiopia, identifying negative and positive aspects for the regional policy of these countries, and providing recommendations for the further development of electoral systems.

4. Methods and Materials

During the study, a set of various general scientific and specialized methods was used. For example, for a better understanding of the prerequisites for the formation of the modern type of electoral systems in Malaysia and Ethiopia, the historical method was used. The structural and functional approach made it possible to determine the role of regions with a different ethnic structure, which, in turn, led to the fact that such territories began to receive a special status. The use of the comparative method made it possible to determine both common, such as, for example, an emphasis on the ethnic component, and distinctive features (level of political competition, form of government) of the use of gerrymandering. An important role in the study was played by the institutional method, which made it possible to consider the specifics of the systems of public administration of regional development in Malaysia and Ethiopia. In addition, the study applied decision-making theory in the context of considering the effectiveness of the electoral systems of Malaysia and Ethiopia.

5. Results and Discussion

For a better disclosure of such a phenomenon of manipulative electoral technology as gerrymandering, let us consider its manifestation in different states that are not related to each other, in order to avoid a conscious or subconscious study of the same type of countries. In majoritarian electoral systems, revision or change of the boundaries of constituencies is a regular procedure, which in different countries with territorial organization of elections is usually called delimitation or redistricting. In general, Redistricting means changing the geographical boundaries of constituencies in response to changes in population distribution [4].

The purpose of such a process is to take into account demographic changes, ensure the effectiveness of election administration, adapt to administrative-territorial boundaries and other factors that affect the proportionality of representation and, accordingly, the implementation of the principle of equality of suffrage. In one form or another, changing the boundaries of constituencies can affect the election results. When actors with conflicting political interests intervene in the redistricting process, this often leads to phenomena commonly defined as small portioning or gerrymandering, which provide advantages to certain groups, political parties or candidates over their opponents [3].

In the simplest sense, gerrymandering can be defined as the process of deliberately distorting the boundaries of constituencies in favor of a certain party or a specific group. This curvature can take many forms. The most common are party, bipartisan, and ethnic/racial gerrymandering.

Party gerrymandering occurs when the boundaries of constituencies are formed in favor of the ruling party, which controls the delimitation process. On the other hand, bipartisan gerrymandering takes place in situations where the formally independent process of reviewing district boundaries is actually aimed at preserving the distribution of political influence between the main parties that already

exists. In this case, the results of redistricting do not create an obvious advantage for one political force, and the main goal is to maintain the status quo, on which the parties involved in the process of reviewing districts reach an informal agreement [12].

Instead, racial or ethnic gerrymandering means “redrawing the boundaries of constituencies to favor one racial or ethnic group of voters over another.” Ethnic gerrymandering can be implemented in various forms, but the most common among them are “packing” and “cracking.”

“Cracking” occurs when the concentrated electoral potential of a certain group is artificially divided among several constituencies. This is done to reduce the political influence of this group in districts dominated by other voters.

Instead, “packing” means uniting supporters of a certain group within the same district in such a way that they form an excessive majority of votes there. As a result, a significant part of these votes is actually “lost,” since it does not affect the results of elections in other constituencies where this group could gain representation.

Let’s start the analysis with the experience of Malaysia. It was inherent in this state that power, in fact, for about fifty years (from 1957 to 2018) belonged to one political force - the United Malay National Organization party. After the Sino-Malay ethnic riots of 1969, the country began to be classified as an electoral-authoritarian regime. In Malaysia, a majoritarian system of relative majority in single-member constituencies is used to conduct elections to federal and regional legislatures. In the period from 1974 to 2018, five cycles of revision of the boundaries of constituencies were carried out in the country, which were accompanied by changes in the proportions of voters and territories and the expansion of the composition of legislative bodies [10].

Malaysia’s electoral system is based on a combination of the principles of parliamentary democracy and a federal constitutional monarchy. The type of electoral system is a majoritarian system of relative majority with single-member constituencies. Among the different types of electoral systems, this system is considered to be particularly vulnerable to gerrymandering [16].

The decision to introduce a majoritarian system of relative votes in single-member constituencies in Malaysia originates from the activities of a 46-member committee created in 1954 to prepare for the first federal elections of some members of the Federal Legislative Council in 1955. The committee supported a system of relative voting in single-member districts, although proportional representation, alternative voting, and a system of limited voting were also considered. Alternative models were found to be too complex and difficult for voters to understand [9].

At the same time, the committee was aware that the system of relative votes in single-member constituencies tends to disproportionately strengthen the representation of the party that receives the largest number of votes. However, this was considered acceptable, since such a system could contribute to the formation of a stable government.

On the one hand, the mechanisms of “communal representation” such as reserved seats, separate ethnic electoral registers, or the introduction of a proportional electoral system were rejected. On the other hand, the party-motivated delimitation of constituencies significantly increased the number of constituencies with a Malay majority, as a result of which the system of relative votes in single-member constituencies significantly distorted “the relative strength of different communities and political parties in parliament.” The researcher also noted the dilemma of alternative models: ethnic minorities could maintain “their own group identity and solidarity by acting as a cohesive community,” but at the same time, this would “increase their separation from the wider society and contribute to their further isolation and political powerlessness.”

The problem of party-motivated delimitation of constituencies dates back to the first years of Malaysia’s independence. One of the key issues of modern discussions remains the rules for determining the boundaries of constituencies. A committee appointed by the Federal Legislative Council to consider the issue in the run-up to the 1955 election reaffirmed the traditional principle that each constituency should have approximately the same number of voters. At the same time, a certain “advantage for rural districts” was allowed, given the difficulty of access and other difficulties specific to rural areas.

The 1957 federal constitution reduced the tolerance to 15% of the average county size, taking into account two factors: the distribution of different ethnic communities and differences in population density and transport accessibility. However, the coalition government made constitutional changes in 1962, again increasing the permissible “weight” of rural districts to 50% compared to urban ones. In 1973, even this restriction was completely abolished by a new constitutional amendment, although the

wording about the “approximate equality” of districts remained in the Thirteenth Annex to the Federal Constitution.

Further amendments to the Constitution in 1984 further weakened the regulation of the delimitation process. In particular, one of the articles provided that the Election Commission may not comply with the provisions of the Thirteenth Annex if it considers such derogations necessary. The totality of these successive amendments actually gave the Election Commission almost unlimited freedom in determining the boundaries of constituencies [7].

The period 2015–2018 was characterized by increased public attention to the proposals to revise the boundaries of constituencies promulgated by the Election Commission, as well as the intensification of public mobilization and the submission of numerous objections to the identified violations, primarily apparent gerrymandering. Initially, this process covered the state of Sarawak during 2015, and the new plan for redistricting was officially approved in December of that year, just before the 2016 state legislative elections. In 2016, the revision of the electoral maps of West Malaysia and the state of Sabah began. Despite the active resistance of civil society and opposition politicians who challenged the identified violations, the government nevertheless put the new election maps to the vote and achieved their approval by the parliament at the end of March 2018, just before the 14th general elections on May 9, 2018 [9].

The main motive that prompted supporters of electoral reform in Malaysia to advocate for a change in the electoral system was the problems of small-portioning and gerrymandering. It is these phenomena that have been repeatedly condemned and become the object of struggle by the movement for electoral reform. The unresolved irregularities pointed out by civil society representatives, as well as the legal obstacles to challenging the last stage of the revision of the boundaries of constituencies in the run-up to the 2016 legislative elections of the state of Sarawak and the 14th general elections, were in fact the “last straw” that finally strengthened the demands for a change in the current electoral system [15].

In the context of Malaysia, the problem of small-portioning has two main dimensions: interstate and intrastate. Since the number of parliamentary seats assigned to each state was fixed by Article 46 of the Federal Constitution after the 1973 constitutional amendment, the interstate allocation of seats became more of a political issue than a technical process based on the population of each state. This led to distortions in the equitable distribution of parliamentary seats among the states, resulting in the territories of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur becoming particularly underrepresented.

At the state level, the Board of Elections is responsible for determining the boundaries of districts according to demographic changes in order to minimize intrastate over- and under-representation. However, the commission does not have the final right to make decisions on new electoral maps, as it can only submit recommendations to the Prime Minister and Parliament, who approve them by a simple majority of votes. The right to finally determine the boundaries of constituencies was removed from the Election Commission after the constitutional amendment of 1962 [15].

Malaysia is characterized by a historically formed ethnic character of electoral behavior. Political parties in Malaysia are largely organized along ethnic lines: the Malays, which includes Malay Muslims and various indigenous peoples, have traditionally supported the ruling coalition led by the United Malay National Organization, while the Chinese community has largely voted for the Democratic Action Party.

The ethnic nature of voting in Malaysia is further enhanced by the presence of constitutional provisions that guarantee the special status of Malays and the so-called “sons of the earth,” i.e. the indigenous population. It was the United Malay National Organization that positioned itself as the main defender of these groups, which contributed to the consolidation of ethno-political polarization and stable models of ethnic voting.

Such models of ethnic voting create a clear basis for the analysis of gerrymandering through the study of the ethnic composition of the population within specific geographical districts. The authors use these trends in ethnically driven electoral behavior to analyze gerrymandering strategies.

Within Malaysia, special attention can be focused on the state of Johor, a densely populated region located next to Singapore. With a population of about 2.7 million, Johor is Malaysia’s third-largest state and is segregated for gerrymandering consideration due to its ethnic diversity [17].

Following the 2018 elections, which took place immediately after the 2016–2018 district boundaries were revised, the ethnic composition of West Malaysia was: 60.9% Malays, 28.9% Chinese, 8.3% Indians, and 1.9% from other groups (as of March 2022). For comparison, the electorate of the

state of Johor consisted of 54.7% Malays, 37.6% Chinese, 6.0% Indians, and 1.8% of other groups. Thus, the ethnic structure of Johor generally resembles the national one, although the share of the Chinese population here is slightly higher, and the Malay and Indian population is lower [18].

Most importantly, Johor is considered the historical homeland and one of the main support regions of the United Malay National Organization. However, since 2008, the party has begun to lose electoral support, especially among ethnic Chinese and Indians, as a result of which many ethnically mixed districts have become vulnerable to increased opposition. This created a powerful incentive for the use of gerrymandering and small-portioning in order to curb this trend [15].

The Federal Parliament and the 13 state legislatures of Malaysia independently determine their number in accordance with Article 46 of the Federal Constitution or the relevant provisions of state constitutions and laws. Since state constituencies are nested in federal districts, a single process of reviewing and changing the boundaries of constituencies is used for both levels of legislature, which traditionally associates the expansion of the composition of parliaments at the federal and regional levels [22].

A change in the size of the legislature requires approval by a two-thirds majority in the Federal Parliament and in individual state legislatures, but a simple majority of votes is sufficient for the Johor State Parliament. After the Barisan National coalition, led by the United Malays National Organization, lost two-thirds of the seats in parliament, it could no longer increase the number of federal constituencies. Because of this, the Johor state government also did not increase the number of districts at the state level [23].

The most effective way to overcome gerrymandering for Malaysia can be considered to be reforming the constitutional and legal framework. Perhaps, the solution to this situation could be to change the electoral system to a proportional one, or at least to a more complex variety of a majoritarian one.

The next country that we will analyze in this study will be Ethiopia, which is a rather specific representative of African content. The electoral model of the Harare region is one of the most peculiar features of the regional constitution. It combines various electoral design mechanisms that are commonly used to protect minority rights. These include seat reservations, gerrymandering, and special voting rights granted to members of an ethnic minority. Some elements of similar mechanisms can be found in other states or autonomous entities, albeit in a different form. At the same time, it is the Harari region that stands out among many others for its specifics.

The most peculiar aspect of the electoral model of the Harari region is the gerrymandering of the state's constituencies. The Harari National League consists of 14 members, while the House of People's Representatives has 22 members, bringing the total number of deputies to the bicameral council of the state to 36 [1].

From the point of view of constitutional regulation, gerrymandering manifests itself precisely in the formation of constituencies from which members of the House of Representatives are elected. Members of the House of People's Representatives are elected in two multi-member constituencies, delegating 4 and 18 deputies respectively. The key landmark of the electoral map is the Yogol wall, a historical fortification in the inner part of the city.

The first constituency, within which four members of the House of People's Representatives are elected, covers the Amir Noor district, where the Harari population predominantly lives. Instead, the second district includes seven woreds located outside of Amir Noor, where the non-Harari population predominates. These include Dire-Teyara, Herrer, Sophie, Aboker, Shenkor, Ginela, and Hakim. Voters from these districts vote for the election of 18 members of the House of People's Representatives [10].

The shape of the election map clearly shows signs of gerrymandering. The area of Amir Noor is only 48 hectares, while the total area of the state of the Harari region reaches 33,400 hectares (approximately 334 km²). Therefore, it can be concluded that the boundaries of the constituencies were deliberately formed in such a way as to concentrate the electoral potential of the Harari people within Amir Noor, while the votes of the non-Harari population are accumulated in one large district.

Unlike the Harari National League, ethnicity is not a criterion for exercising the right to run for elections to the House of People's Representatives. Any resident of Harari Region State, regardless of ethnic origin, can stand as a candidate. As already mentioned, even if a candidate lives far from the constituency in which he wants to run, he can still nominate his candidacy if he proves that he was born in this constituency. Thus, there is a possibility that representatives of both houses may even come from outside the region.

Similar to the Harari National League, the state constitution gives the House of People's Representatives a number of political powers that this chamber exercises independently. These include the formation of economic and social development policies, the introduction of agricultural taxes and the revision of the regional budget. To balance the division of power between the two chambers, the House of Representatives of the People's Republic is also empowered to nominate the Speaker of the Joint Assembly of the Harari State Council.

The Joint Assembly, in turn, exercises legislative powers in the areas of local self-government, peace and security, land use and income taxation. In addition, it is the joint assembly that is empowered to appoint the President of the State, the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the State Council, the Chairman and Deputy Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, Judges, the Auditor General, the Commissioner of Police, as well as other officials of the State upon the submission of the relevant authorities.

Thus, the electoral model of the Harari region combines several specific mechanisms at once — reservation of seats, gerrymandering and special voting rights — in the process of forming a bicameral state council. The council is made up of two assemblies that represent, on the one hand, the Harari people and on the other, the entire population of the state. While the members of the Household Needs Assessment Unit are elected exclusively by representatives of the Harari people, both inside and outside the region, the members of the House of Representatives are elected by all residents of the state, regardless of ethnicity.

At the same time, the general residency requirement necessary for the exercise of the right to vote does not actually apply to representatives of the Harari people, despite the lack of a clear constitutional basis for such a mechanism. Similarly, the restrictions imposed on non-Harari voters to participate in the elections of the Household Needs Assessment Unit also do not have a direct constitutional consolidation. At the same time, the decision of the Council of Representatives of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, adopted based on the recommendations of the group of expert consultants of the Transitional Parliament, became the main legal instrument that ensured the preservation of the practice of special voting rights in Harari and the restriction of the number of voters in elections to the Household Needs Assessment Unit [24].

Gerrymandering of constituencies has not only negative consequences, but also certain advantages. In the case of the Harari region, it has contributed to the formation of ethnic minority-dominated districts, which effectively guaranteed the representation of the Harari people in the House of People's Representatives, although such representation is not guaranteed.

Four seats in the House of People's Representatives, combined with legally guaranteed representation in the National Assembly of the Harari People, which consists exclusively of Harari representatives, provide this people with control over half of the seats in the state council. Such political representation not only allows the Harari to exercise their constitutional right to self-determination, but also creates an opportunity to influence the adoption of laws, the formation of policies and the process of their implementation within the state.

At the same time, gerrymandering in the form in which it is used in the Harari region raises serious concerns. First of all, this concerns the principle of proportionality and equality of the population between constituencies. The distribution of electoral power between the two constituencies from which the members of the House of Representatives are elected is extremely disproportionate, since the inequality in population between the constituencies is obvious.

Thus, four members of the state council are elected from two constituencies in which less than 9% of the state's population lives, while the other half of the representatives come from one large constituency, where about 90% of the population of the Harari region lives.

Such gerrymandering violates the principle of equality of suffrage, which is based on the concept of "one person, one vote". This principle implies that each vote should have the same weight. It requires equal voter participation and proportional representation of the population. Equality of suffrage is considered violated when the difference in population between constituencies becomes excessively disproportionate.

In the Harari region, the delimitation of constituencies results in disproportionate representation of both Harari and non-Harari populations. This can be clearly seen through the ratio of votes received by representatives in both districts during the last elections. Thus, the candidate who received the largest number of votes in one of the constituencies where four members of the House of Representatives are elected received 10,043 votes, while the leading candidate in the second district of

the House of People's Representatives, where 18 representatives are elected, received 77,954 votes [25].

Based on the number of votes received by the winner in the first district, it can be assumed that the population of this district hardly exceeds 20 thousand people. Instead, a similar estimate for the second district gives an approximate figure of 150 to 200 thousand inhabitants. This means that one representative from the first district represents about five thousand residents on average, while a representative from the second district represents more than eleven thousand people.

The main problem with this situation is that a significant part of the state's population is actually left without proper political representation. Together, the Harari and Oromo peoples make up about 65% of the population of the Harari region. Although opposition parties formally participate in the elections, their chances of success remain almost zero. Unexpected changes among candidates or voting results are extremely rare.

The exception was the national elections of 2005, one of the most competitive in the history of Ethiopia, which gave an unprecedented result. At that time, the two opposition parties were able to win four seats in the House of People's Representatives, while the National Assembly of the Harari People and the Oromo Democratic Party received 18 and 14 seats, respectively.

The last elections, in turn, were completely controlled by the Prosperity Party, which also won almost 98% of the seats in the national parliament. Thus, the previous composition of the state council did not always adequately reflect the real ethnic structure of the population of the Harare region. Rather, they represented the political dominance of the ethnic Harari and Oromo as the two main populations of the region.

In view of the above, it is obvious that gerrymandering in the Harari region comes with several serious problems. Although this electoral model provides political representation of the Harari people, the extremely visible disparity in population between constituencies indicates an unfair distribution of electoral power among them.

In addition, gerrymandering contradicts the principle of equality of suffrage enshrined in both the regional and federal constitutions of Ethiopia, since the difference in population between districts is excessively disproportionate [6]. Although assessing the compactness of constituencies usually requires the use of special scientific techniques, the election results for the last five election cycles indicate that the compactness of one constituency and the excessive territorial scale of another actually contribute to the formation of a predetermined election result, which in most cases provides representation specifically for the Harari and Oromo populations.

Moreover, the intra-party arrangement effectively distributing state council seats between the two parties representing the Harari and Oromo ethnic groups leaves a large part of the region's population without adequate political representation. Such a model is able not only to consolidate the ethnic nature of politics, but also to strengthen the tendencies towards political exclusion of other groups of the population.

It can be concluded that the electoral model of the Harari region needs to be substantially reformed if it is to ensure adequate representation of both the Hararian and non-Hararian populations. Constituencies need redistricting. Regular revision and updating of electoral maps allow for a more proportional, if not completely equal, distribution of electoral power between Hararian and non-Hararian populations in different districts. Such a distribution is a key condition for the implementation of the principle of equality of votes.

6. Conclusions

Gerrymandering remains one of the most controversial and, at the same time, the most effective tools for influencing election results within majoritarian electoral systems. Despite the formal justification of the need for redistricting by demographic changes, administrative factors, or the need to ensure effective representation, in practice, the revision of the boundaries of constituencies is often used as a mechanism of political control and retention of power. This is especially pronounced in cases where the delimitation process is under the influence of political actors interested in forming a favorable configuration of constituencies.

The experience of Malaysia demonstrates that the combination of a majoritarian system of relative majority, ethnically structured electoral behavior and significant freedom of the Electoral Commission in the process of reviewing the boundaries of constituencies has created favorable

conditions for the development of both small-portioning and party and ethnic gerrymandering. Successive constitutional changes have actually eased restrictions on the equality of constituencies and provided the authorities with the opportunity to influence the configuration of the electoral map in accordance with their own political interests. As a result, the electoral system, which was formally supposed to ensure the stability of the government and the competitiveness of the political process, for a long time contributed to the preservation of the dominance of the ruling coalition. At the same time, the example of the state of Johor shows that the ethnic structure of the population and the territorial concentration of individual groups can turn into a key tool of electoral manipulation.

Equally illustrative is the example of the Harari region of Ethiopia, where gerrymandering takes a specific form, combined with seat reservations and special voting rights for an ethnic minority. On the one hand, this model contributes to ensuring the political representation of the Harari people and creates mechanisms to protect their right to self-determination. On the other hand, excessive disproportion between constituencies, inequality of electoral power and de facto dominance of certain ethno-political groups indicate a serious violation of the principle of equality of suffrage. In this context, gerrymandering acts not only as an instrument of political representation but also as a mechanism for consolidating ethnic politics and limiting political competition.

Thus, both of the considered examples confirm that gerrymandering is not an exclusively technical problem of constituency formation. In fact, it directly affects the level of political competition, the nature of representation, the stability of the political system and the degree of implementation of democratic principles.

In this regard, ensuring the transparency of the redistricting process, introducing clear criteria for the formation of constituencies, strengthening the independence of election commissions and regularly reviewing election maps in accordance with demographic changes are important conditions for minimizing the manipulative impact of gerrymandering. Otherwise, constituencies may not turn into an instrument of fair representation of citizens, but into a means of political construction of the desired election result.

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