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Local elections in the Kazakh SSR as an instrument of political mobilization: a regional case of the Pavlodar Irtysh region (1920-1930s)

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Abstract. This paper examines the evolution of the electoral system in the territory of Kazakhstan in the 1920s – 1930s. Considering that the institution of elections under the Soviet system was formed on the basis of the specific principle of non-alternativeness (lack of choice) and was consistently entrenched both in the center and locally, attention should be paid to the conditions of its formation, the regulatory framework, and the specifics of its dissemination. The country's population was integrated into the new realities of political life when, according to the Constitution, citizens gained the right to participate in the life of the state; however, at the same time, a certain part of them was deprived of this right if their involvement with "exploitative elements" was revealed. Ideologization, proclaimed equality, and harsh repressive policies became characteristic components of the country's electoral system as well. Under these conditions, the state authorities carried out extensive organizational work to promote the new model of electoral campaigns; a large number of people were involved in agitation activities among candidates and electors, and corresponding literature was developed. At the same time, it is necessary to point out the colossal financial resources spent on organizing the entire election procedure. The aim of the research is related to the analysis of the history of preparing and conducting electoral campaigns in the Kazakh SSR in the 1920s – 1930s, identifying their features, problems, and contradictions, as well as assessing the role of elections in the process of forming the Soviet political system in the region. A distinctive feature of this work is also the regional aspect of studying the stated issues. To achieve the aim and the set tasks, archival materials from the fonds of the State Archive of the Pavlodar Region (Pavlodar City Executive Committee of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Deputies; Pavlodar Uyezd Committee of the Medical Sanitary Labor Union; Pavlodar District Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Deputies) were used, specifically within the framework of regulatory acts of authorities, reports of local executive committees, and electoral commissions. The source base of the research also included Soviet-era journals, analyzed from the perspective of their coverage of this topic. In the course of analyzing the historiography on the topic of the work, the main approaches, problems, and directions of its study were identified. Thus, the institution of elections to the Soviets became part of the process of "Sovietization" of society. These processes unfolded in parallel with a wide range of state-initiated campaigns of the period, such as the eradication of illiteracy, korenizatsiya (indigenization), anti-religious measures, and other initiatives aimed at reshaping the socio-political order and incorporating broad segments of the population, including residents of auls (villages), into newly constructed systems of social relations. Within this context, electoral practices acquired a ritualized character, serving as a symbolic mechanism through which citizens were formally integrated into political life.
Keywords: Kazakhstan; history; Soviet period; elections; regional case study; electoral campaigns

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Қазақ АКСР-індегі жергілікті сайлау саяси жұмылдыру құралы ретінде: Павлодар Ертіс облысының аймақтық жағдайы (1920-1930 жж.)

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада 1920-1930 жылдардағы Қазақ АССР-індегі жергілікті сайлаулар кеңестік мемлекет құрылысының алғашқы кезеңінің элементі және халықты саяси жұмылдыру құралы ретінде қарастырылады. Павлодардың Ертіс аймағынан алынған материалдарда, бүкілодақтық сайлау шешімдері мен директиваларының округтік және болыс деңгейлеріндегі әкімшілік тәжірибеде қалай жүзеге асырылғаны және оларды жүзеге асыруда қандай қиындықтар туындағаны көрсетілген. Зерттеу тақырыбы – 1920-1930 жылдардағы партиялық-мемлекеттік басшылық және әлеуметтік-экономикалық өзгерістер жағдайында ұлттық автономия жағдайындағы кеңестік сайлау науқандарының қалыптасуы мен өзгеруі. Зерттеу пәні жергілікті деңгейде сайлауды дайындау және өткізу рәсімдері мен тәжірибелерінен тұрады: сайлаушыларды есепке алу және тіркеу (көшпелі және жартылай көшпелі халықтың ерекшелігін қоса алғанда), округтерді қалыптастыру, учаскелер мен комиссияларды ұйымдастыру, кандидаттарды ұсыну және бекіту, үгіт-насихат жұмыстары, сондай-ақ сайлау құқығынан айыру институты арқылы қатысуды шектеу тетіктері. Жұмыстың мақсаты – 1920–1930 жылдардағы Қазақ АССР-індегі жергілікті сайлау науқандарына дайындық пен өткізу барысын қайта құру, олардың ерекшеліктерін, проблемалық салаларын және ішкі қайшылықтарын анықтау, сондай-ақ кеңестік саяси жүйенің қалыптасуындағы сайлаудың рөлін және аймақтағы саяси қатысу модельдерін бағалау. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі саяси жұмылдыру, саяси әлеуметтену және символдық билік ұғымдарына негізделген пәнаралық тарихи-әлеуметтанулық тәсілге негізделген. Тарихшылдық және жүйелік талдау принциптері, тарихи-генетикалық әдіс, партиялық-мемлекеттік құжаттар мен мерзімді басылымдардың мазмұндық талдауы, үгіт материалдарының дискурстық талдауы және реконструктивтік әдістер қолданылады. Бастапқы базаны кеңес органдарының нормативтік актілері мен нұсқаулықтары, сондай-ақ жергілікті атқару комитеттері мен сайлау комиссияларының есептерін қоса алғанда, Павлодар облысының мемлекеттік мұрағатының материалдары құрайды. Зерттеулер көрсеткендей, сайлаулар негізінен бақылауда болып, халықты легитимдеуге, оқытуға және жұмылдыруға қызмет етті: сайлауға қатысу әлеуметтік борыш және адалдықтың қоғам алдындағы растауы ретінде орнатылды. Сайлау тәжірибелері мен жергілікті халықты қалыптастыру және социалистік қайта құру науқандары саясаты арасындағы байланыс анықталды, ол кандидаттарды директивті түрде іріктеу мен «сайлау құқығынан айырылған тұлғалар» санатын кеңейтуде көрініс тапты. Сонымен бірге, жұмылдыру әсерінің шектеулері атап өтіледі: дауыс берудегі формальдылық, жиналыстардан жалтару жағдайлары, хабардарлықтың төмендігі және жергілікті билік

органдарының ықпалының жалғасуы, бұл халықты кеңестік саяси мәдениетке қосудың екіұштылығын баса көрсетеді. Алынған нәтижелер Қазақстандағы жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару органдарын құру тетіктерін және сайлау науқандарының халықты тәртіпке келтіру және әлеуметтендіру үшін қалай пайдаланылғанын түсінуді нақтылауға мүмкіндік береді. Сайлаулар осылайша қатысу формаларын және саяси адалдық критерийлерін өзгертетін әлеуметтік тәжірибе ретінде түсіндіріледі.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан; тарих; кеңестік кезең; сайлау; аймақтық іс; сайлау науқандары

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Местные выборы в Казахской АССР как инструмент политической мобилизации: региональный кейс Павлодарского Прииртышья (1920-1930-е гг.)

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Аннотация. В данной работе рассматриваются вопросы эволюции избирательной системы на территории Казахстана в 1920-1930-е годы. Учитывая то, что институт выборов в условиях советской системы формировался на основе специфического принципа безальтернативности и последовательно укоренялся как в центре, так и на местах, следует обратить внимание на условия его складывания, нормативно-правовую базу и особенности распространения. Население страны включалось в новые реалии политической действительности, когда, согласно Конституции, граждане получили право принимать участие в жизни государства, однако одновременно определенная их часть лишалась этого права, если обнаруживалась их причастность к «эксплуататорским элементам». Идеологизация, декларируемое равенство, жёсткая репрессивная политика становились характерными компонентами в том числе и выборной системы страны. В этих условиях государственной властью проводилась мощная организационная работа по пропаганде новой модели избирательных кампаний, к агитационной деятельности среди кандидатов и выборщиков привлекалось большое количество людей, разрабатывалась соответствующая литература. При этом следует указать и на колоссальные денежные средства, затраченные на организацию всей процедуры выборов. Цель исследования связана с анализом истории подготовки и проведения избирательных кампаний в Казахской АССР в 1920-1930-е годы, выявлением их особенностей, проблем и противоречий, а также оценкой роли выборов в процессе формирования советской политической системы в регионе. Особенностью данной работы является также региональный аспект изучения поставленных вопросов. Для раскрытия цели и решения поставленных задач были использованы архивные

материалы фондов Государственного архива Павлодарской области, в том числе документы Павлодарского городского исполнительного комитета рабочих, крестьянских и красноармейских депутатов, Павлодарского уездного комитета союза медицинских и санитарных работников, а также Павлодарского районного исполнительного комитета Советов рабочих, крестьянских и красноармейских депутатов. В исследовании проанализированы нормативные акты органов власти, отчёты местных исполнительных комитетов и избирательных комиссий. Источниковую базу исследования составили журналы советского времени, проанализированные с точки зрения освещения данной темы. В ходе анализа историографии по теме работы были выявлены основные подходы, проблемы и направления ее изучения. Таким образом, институт выборов в Советы стал частью процесса «советизации» общества. Он сопровождался многими организованными властью кампаниями того времени, в том числе ликвидацией неграмотности, коренизацией, антирелигиозной деятельностью и др., которые должны были коренным образом изменить общественно-политическую структуру и включить население, в том числе аулов в систему новых социальных отношений. Формировалась ритуализированность электоральных практик, когда символически граждане включались в политическую жизнь.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан; история; советский период; выборы; региональный кейс; избирательные кампании

Introduction

Electoral campaigns in the Soviet state during the 1920s-1930s represented a specific political phenomenon, fundamentally different from classical democratic models of elections. They were not a mechanism for political competition or the expression of alternative social interests but served as a tool for legitimizing the power of the Bolshevik Party, mobilizing the population, and instilling socialist ideology. Particular scholarly attention is warranted by the conduct of electoral campaigns in national autonomies, including the Kazakh SSR, where, as reflected in official Soviet evaluations, processes of state construction unfolded in a context marked by economic underdevelopment, widespread illiteracy, and the continued influence of traditional social structures.

This research aims to analyze the history of preparing and conducting electoral campaigns in the Kazakh SSR in the 1920s–1930s, identify their features, problems, and contradictions, and assess the role of elections in the process of forming the Soviet political system in the region.

Notably, the study examines the issues of preparing and conducting elections from a regional perspective. In this regard, shifting from a general theoretical and republic-wide consideration of electoral campaigns in the USSR and the Kazakh SSR to their analysis at the regional level is methodologically justified and scientifically necessary. Notwithstanding the presence of a standardized legal framework and centralized party-state control, electoral preparation and implementation in the 1920s-1930s exhibited considerable diversity, shaped by the socio-economic, demographic, and cultural particularities of individual regions.

The regional approach allows for the identification of the actual mechanisms by which the Soviet electoral system functioned, mechanisms that at the all-Union level are often leveled out by official rhetoric and uniform statistics. It is precisely at the level of oblasts, uyezds, and okrugs that the contradictions between the proclaimed principles of "Soviet power" and the practice of party administration of the electoral process were most clearly manifested.

The choice of the Pavlodar region as the object of concrete historical analysis is motivated by several factors. First, the Pavlodar district (*okrug/uyezd*) in the 1920s-1930s was a territory with a complex socio-economic structure, combining elements of sedentary agriculture, nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism, and developing industrial centers. This diversity of economic forms created specific conditions for implementing Soviet electoral policy and allowed for tracing its influence on various social groups.

Second, the region was characterized by ethnic and social heterogeneity of its population. Alongside the Kazakh population, Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, and other groups lived here, which gave particular significance to issues of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization), language policy, and representation in government bodies. Analyzing electoral campaigns in the Pavlodar region allows for an assessment of the extent to which the proclaimed principles of national equality and the involvement of the indigenous population in the system of Soviet governance were realized in practice.

Third, the Pavlodar region was a zone of active implementation of socio-economic transformations, primarily collectivization and the policy of "liquidation of the *bais* (wealthy stratum)". These processes directly impacted the preparation of elections, the formation of voter lists, and the scale of disenfranchisement. Studying regional materials allows for establishing the interconnection between socio-economic campaigns and electoral practices, as well as revealing the role of elections as a tool for political pressure and social control.

Furthermore, the Pavlodar region possessed a well-developed network of local government and party structures, enabling a detailed analysis of the interaction between the Soviet, the party committee, and electoral commissions. The regional level allows for tracing the decision-making process both "from the bottom up" and "from the top down," revealing the degree of autonomy of local bodies and the actual nature of party leadership. Attention was paid to identifying "class-alien elements," who were excluded from the electoral process.

Methods and Materials

This study is conducted within the framework of an interdisciplinary historical-sociological approach, combining the tools of political history and historical sociology. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the work is based on the concepts of political mobilization, political socialization, and symbolic power, as developed within modern social theory.

The general scientific methodological principles employed include the principle of historicism, which involves examining the institution of elections in the Kazakh SSR in the dynamics of its formation and transformation within the context of the socio-economic and political processes of the 1920s–1930s. The systemic approach, which allowed for the analysis of local elections as an element of the holistic mechanism of Soviet political power. The principle of social constructivism, within which electoral practices are interpreted as constructed forms of political reality.

The study employs the historical-genetic method to identify the logic of formation and factors in the evolution of electoral practices.

The historical sociological part of the research is based on the use of:

- Content analysis of party and state documents, instructions, meeting minutes, and periodical materials;
- Discourse analysis of agitation texts and public speeches, revealing the dominant narratives of mobilization;

- A reconstructive method aimed at restoring the practices of population participation through archival evidence, reports, and statistical data.

The empirical basis of the study consists of regulatory acts of the Soviet authorities of the Kazakh SSR and the RSFSR published in periodicals; materials from the regional archive – the State Archive of the Pavlodar Region; reports from local executive committees and election commissions. Among the documents used are materials from fonds 5, 17, and 75.

Results

After the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks rejected the principles of parliamentary democracy characteristic of bourgeois states and advanced the concept of Soviet power as a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR already enshrined a fundamentally different model of electoral law, based not on civil equality but on a class approach.

Voting rights were granted only to the "working people," while individuals classified as belonging to the "exploiting classes" were disenfranchised. Thus, from the very beginning, elections were restrictive in nature and served as an instrument of class policy. Under the conditions of the Civil War and subsequent economic recovery, electoral campaigns primarily performed mobilizing and educational functions.

The Kazakh SSR was established in 1920 as the Kirghiz (Kazakh) Autonomous Republic within the RSFSR. The official renaming of the republic in 1925 formed part of the broader policy of national delimitation and korenizatsiya (indigenization). Within this framework, the electoral institutions of the autonomy were established in accordance with all-Union and republican legal norms, drawing in particular on the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR and the 1926 Constitution of the Kazakh SSR.

In the context of the establishment of Soviet power in Kazakhstan, the electoral campaigns of 1920-1926 became an important instrument for implementing the policy of korenizatsiya, aimed at involving the indigenous population in the system of governance and forming national cadres for the administrative apparatus. As demonstrated by the research of I.V. Anisimova in "The Establishment of Soviet Power and the Policy of Korenizatsiya in Kazakhstan in 1920–1926", the process of indigenization had a dual character: on one hand, it contributed to expanding the representation of the Kazakh population in Soviet and elected bodies; on the other hand, it remained strictly controlled by the Party and was subordinated to the tasks of political mobilization and ideological integration. In this context, elections served not only as a legal mechanism for forming government bodies but also as a means of institutionally entrenching the Soviet model of governance, which combined national cadre policy with centralized control over the political process (Anisimova 2017: 21-27).

An important factor shaping the electoral system of the autonomy was the population registration processes unfolding in Kazakhstan in 1920-1923, which, as A.M. Balykova shows, were incomplete and largely transitional in nature. The instability of the administrative-territorial division, high population mobility, the consequences of the Civil War and famine, as well as the specificities of the nomadic and semi-nomadic way of life, significantly complicated accurate demographic accounting. This directly impacted the republic's electoral potential, such as voter registration, the formation of lists, and the determination of representation quotas, which were carried out under conditions of a limited and often fragmented statistical base. This situation enhanced the manageability of the electoral process and expanded opportunities for

administrative intervention during the early stage of establishing the Soviet electoral system in the Kazakh SSR (Balykova 2015: 70-72).

The organization of elections in the Kazakh Republic was governed by a special instruction issued by the Kazakh Central Executive Committee (KazTsIK). This document was formulated not only with reference to earlier regulatory acts and guidelines of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) but also with explicit consideration of the particular conditions under which voting took place among Kazakhstan's nomadic population. The initial version of the instruction was approved on 9 October 1925 and emphasized the requirement for comprehensive voter registration, extending to nomadic groups. At the same time, the use of formal summons to notify voters in nomadic and semi-nomadic localities was not made mandatory. In rural settings, electoral meetings at the precinct level were entrusted to the chairpersons of village election commissions, who acted as authorized representatives of the volost electoral authorities (Ablazhei, Zhanbossinova 2025: 430).

Considered within a wider institutional and legal framework, these provisions correspond to the conclusions formulated by M. Salamatova, who argues that election commissions in the RSFSR between 1918 and 1936 functioned not as independent bodies of electoral administration but as structurally integrated components of the Soviet state system, operating under rigid normative regulation and direct party supervision. In the context of the Kazakh Republic, this approach implied that the adaptation of KazTsIK electoral instructions to local conditions, including the nomadic way of life, did not alter the fundamental model of electoral governance. Election commissions remained instruments for transmitting centrally defined directives, prioritizing objectives of political mobilization and supervision over electoral behavior rather than ensuring procedural autonomy or neutrality at the local level (Salamatova 2014: 58-76).

A key element of the RCP(b) strategy, known as the "Face to the Countryside," was the policy aimed at the "revitalization" of local Soviets. The expansion of their functional authority was intended to enhance the effectiveness of local governance. Volost (district) Soviets were granted independent budgets and received broader competencies in the spheres of public health, education, cultural and enlightenment activities, and communal services. In addition, they were charged with facilitating agricultural development, implementing agrarian measures, and promoting cooperative organization.

Village Soviets, in turn, acquired the right to draft revenue and expenditure estimates, which were subsequently incorporated into volost budgets. Their responsibilities encompassed the development of primary education infrastructure, the organization of reading huts, and the establishment of medical and sanitary facilities. In order to widen peasant participation in Soviet activities, the numerical composition of village councils was expanded. This increase made it possible to create specialized commissions (sections) within village Soviets responsible for particular areas of activity, such as land management, cultural and educational work, and public utilities. By 1925, most village and volost Soviets had established between two and five such commissions, whose work was to involve representatives of public organizations and the rural intelligentsia (Il'inykh 2024: 36-48).

At the same time, as noted by A.A. Kemelbekov, the expansion of the competencies of village and volost Soviets in the 1920s was directly interconnected with Soviet electoral practices, as elections were viewed not only to form governing bodies but also as a mechanism for legitimizing the local governance system. The formally declared involvement of broad layers of the peasantry and rural intelligentsia in the work of the Soviets was combined with strict regulation of the electoral process and party control, which limited the autonomy of local self-

government. Accordingly, even as their organizational responsibilities and functional scope expanded, the Soviets continued to operate within a highly centralized system of authority, while electoral procedures served predominantly mobilizational and administrative purposes, facilitating the ongoing reproduction of the Soviet administrative and political order at the local level (Kemelbekov 2019: 12-17).

A characteristic feature of electoral law in the republic was the widespread application of the practice of disenfranchisement. The category of the "disenfranchised" included representatives of the traditional Kazakh elite – bais, sultans, clergy, as well as traders, kulaks, and individuals accused of "anti-Soviet activity." In the conditions of Kazakhstan, this policy was particularly extensive, as the traditional social structure of society did not align with the Soviet class model.

In the well-known specialized party-ideological journal of the 1920s-30s, Propagandist, aimed at providing methodological support to agitators of the RCP(b)/VKP(b), disseminating the party line, and increasing the effectiveness of propaganda work, the country's leadership line was officially defined: "According to the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR and the 1924 Constitution of the USSR, the electoral system in our country provided for restrictions on exploiter elements; elections were not entirely equal, were multi-stage (for elections to middle and higher bodies of power), and open. Certain restrictions on democracy were necessary at the time. The fierce resistance of the exploiting classes made the temporary deprivation of their voting rights necessary. Some advantages for workers in the norms of representation during elections were introduced when the peasants were still entirely small proprietors, and the influence of the kulaks in the countryside was still strong" (What is an electoral district? 1937: 22).

From the very first years of Soviet state formation, the determination of groups excluded from electoral participation occupied a central place in the political agenda of the ruling leadership and was regarded as an essential instrument for the acquisition and consolidation of power. Bolshevik rhetoric, as well as the earliest normative acts of the Soviet regime, reveal a consistent intention to protect the Soviets from the influence of so-called "socially alien" elements. Already in December 1917, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs circulated a special appeal entitled "To All Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants', and Farm Laborers' Deputies", which explicitly advised against electing kulaks, traders, and other exploiters to the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. In this context, seven categories of citizens were formally deprived of electoral rights: (a) individuals employing hired labor for profit; (b) persons subsisting on unearned income, including interest on capital, enterprise profits, or property revenues; (c) private traders and commercial intermediaries; (d) monks and clergy of religious denominations; (e) former employees and agents of the police, gendarmerie, and security services, as well as members of the former ruling dynasty; (f) individuals officially declared mentally ill or placed under guardianship; and (g) persons convicted of mercenary or dishonorable crimes for periods established by law or judicial verdict (Salamatova 2018: 124).

Archival data from the Kazakh Central Executive Committee (KazTsIK) indicate that during the 1924-1925 electoral cycle, disenfranchised individuals accounted for 2.4% of the republic's population eligible for voting, with the figure rising to 4.3% in urban centers and amounting to 2.3% in rural areas. In auls and villages, Kazakhs constituted 54% of those excluded from voting rights, whereas in cities their share was significantly lower at 19%. The urban disenfranchised population was dominated by traders and intermediaries, who comprised 62% of the total. In rural localities, approximately 25% of those deprived of voting rights were members of the clergy, nearly 36% were classified as persons living on unearned income, and close to 15% had no criminal convictions. Overall, during the 1924-1925 campaign, Kazakhs represented 61% of

all disenfranchised individuals, while Russians and members of other ethnic groups accounted for the remaining 39% (Ablazhei, Zhanbossinova 2025: 433).

The extensive use of disenfranchisement, which became a characteristic feature of electoral campaigns in the 1920s, particularly in the formation of representative bodies at the highest levels of authority, including elections to the supreme Soviet institutions, emerged as a key mechanism of political filtration. By excluding substantial segments of the population from electoral participation, the authorities not only reduced the social base of the electorate but also redefined elections themselves as an administratively managed process aimed at selecting "class-reliable" representatives. By the mid-1920s, this practice had firmly institutionalized elections as a controlled procedure subordinated to the objectives of party consolidation and the reinforcement of the centralized power structure.

Archival materials indicate that the practice of disenfranchisement was accompanied by appeals from citizens with individual petitions for a review of their legal status. For instance, documents from the Pavlodar District Election Commission for 1934 record a fact of a written petition being submitted for the restoration of voting rights, in which the applicant appealed to a change in their social position and loyalty to the Soviet government. This source allows us to view election commissions not only as bodies of administrative record-keeping and control but also as institutions through which procedures for the conditional reintegration of the "disenfranchised" into the political space were carried out.

Appendix 1 contains one of the numerous materials addressed to an election commission¹.

As shown by the research of M.M. Kozybaeva and A.T. Kaipbaeva, the institution of the "disenfranchised" had not only an electoral but also a broader socio-legal dimension: disenfranchisement solidified a status of political marginalization, complicated social adaptation, and intensified the repressive nature of Soviet policy in the urban environment. In this context, local elections in the Kazakh SSR acted not so much as a form of political participation but as a mechanism for the institutional exclusion of "socially alien" groups, which was particularly evident at the regional level (Kozybaeva, Kaipbaeva 2024).

This conclusion correlates with materials from a socio-historical analysis of disenfranchisement in the 1920s–1930s, based on regional archival sources from Western Kazakhstan, which shows that the practice of classifying individuals as "disenfranchised" was expansive and often arbitrary, affecting not only "former" and affluent strata but also socially vulnerable groups of the urban population. This turned electoral restrictions into a persistent tool of social control at the local level (Sapasheva 2024).

Under these conditions, the question of the composition and functioning of local Soviets acquired particular importance for the party-state leadership. The escalating socio-economic changes associated with the conclusion of the NEP and the intensification of the course towards socialist reconstruction demanded not only maintaining but further strengthening control over local government bodies. This largely explains the emergence in 1927 of special directives addressed to all state bodies and party bloc administrations (GO and UPB) regarding the conduct of Soviet re-elections. These directives were aimed at renewing the composition of local authorities, strengthening party influence within them, and bringing the Soviets into line with the new political and social tasks facing the Soviet state on the eve of the fundamental shift of the late 1920s.

The transition from the policy of mass disenfranchisement to the campaign for Soviet re-elections in 1927 was not a rupture but represented a logical continuation of the course towards centralization and ideological unification of the Soviet political system. Re-elections were

viewed not as a democratic procedure for renewing power but as an instrument for adjusting the composition of the Soviets in accordance with the party's current directives and the tasks of the country's socio-economic transformation.

The instructions for conducting Soviet re-elections, sent in 1927 to all state bodies and party bloc institutions, were not declarative but clearly regulatory in nature. They detailed both organizational measures for preparing the re-election campaign and its political and ideological tasks. Such documents allow us to trace how the party-state leadership sought to transform re-elections from a formal procedure for renewing the composition of the Soviets into an instrument for targeted influence on the social structure of local power.

Of value in this context are archival materials that record specific directives addressed to local authorities and party organizations. They reflect not only the official interpretation of the re-elections' goals but also the practical mechanisms for their implementation on the ground. A characteristic example is a document stored in the State Archive of the Pavlodar Region, which concisely formulates the key tasks of the 1927 re-election campaign. Analyzing its content allows us to specify the general course of the party leadership and identify the priorities that determined the preparation and conduct of Soviet re-elections during the period under review:

At the beginning of 1927, Soviet re-elections were conducted across our gubernia [Semipalatinsk]. The main tasks of this campaign are:

1) Strengthening the alliance between the working class and the peasantry, as the main political factor ensuring socialist construction.

2) Creating an alliance between farm laborers, the poor, and middle peasants in the village and aul, as a means of excluding the bai-kulak element from socio-political Soviet activity.

3) Resolutely implementing the slogan 'Sovietization of the aul,' which means organizing genuine Soviet power in the aul by involving representatives of the poor and middle-peasant population of the auls in the leadership work of the aul Soviets...

6) A resolute rebuff to the NEP elements of the city, fundamentally paralyzing their attempts to infiltrate the City Soviets, while firmly implementing the principles of Soviet democracy...

The GSPC [gubernia trade union council] considers it necessary to emphasize the main tasks regarding the nomination of candidates. We believe the most appropriate and politically practical position is for trade union organizations, without presenting special lists, to nominate candidates jointly with VKP(b) cells, for we owe all existing achievements to the ideological leader of the working class, the VKP(b). On this issue, another point should be noted: when nominating candidates, it is necessary to consider the requirement to elect representatives of all groups/membership into the Soviets, such as Kazakhs, women, youth, specialists, etc. The GSPC considers it necessary to instruct trade union organizations that this work should not be viewed as auxiliary but must be at the center of the unions' attention during this campaign, especially in the village and aul, where the work of the Soviets significantly influences union work as well" (Gosudarstvennyj arkhiv Pavlodarskoj oblasti²).

During the collectivization and repressions of the 1930s, electoral campaigns increasingly transformed into a ritual of political loyalty. Elections were used as a tool for identifying "unreliable" elements and strengthening control over society.

The 1936 Constitution of the USSR established the Soviets of Working People's Deputies as the fundamental political institutions of the state. For the first time, the Constitution included a dedicated chapter on the Electoral System, formalizing the participation of citizens in elections to these Soviets. Key democratic principles were codified in law, including universal, direct, and equal suffrage conducted by secret ballot. Voting rights were conferred exclusively to citizens

of the USSR. Article 135 stipulated that elections were universal: all citizens of the USSR aged eighteen and above, regardless of nationality, race, religion, education, residence, social origin, property status, or past activities, were entitled both to vote and to stand for election, with exceptions made for persons legally declared insane or those whose convictions included the loss of electoral rights. Eligibility for election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was set at twenty-three years of age, without distinctions based on sex, nationality, or other social factors. Article 139 confirmed that elections to all Soviets of Working People's Deputies from local rural and urban Soviets up to the Supreme Soviet were to be conducted through direct participation of the citizenry (Borisov 2009: 195).

The adoption of the 1936 Constitution of the USSR formally enshrined the principles of universal, equal, and secret suffrage. However, in practice, these innovations did not lead to the democratization of the political system. Under conditions of a single-party state and mass repressions, elections retained a decorative character and served as a means of demonstrating the unity of the people and the party.

In the Kazakh ASSR, which was transformed into a union republic in 1936, elections became part of the all-Union political ritual, finally losing even the limited elements of autonomy.

The preparation for elections in the Kazakh SSR was a complex, multi-stage process under the strict control of party organs. Formally, electoral commissions and Soviets were responsible for organizing the elections, but actual leadership was exercised by the organs of the RCP(b) and later the VKP(b). Key elements of the preparation included compiling voter lists; verifying the social origin and political reliability of the population; forming electoral districts; and selecting and approving candidates.

As highlighted in the journal *Propagandist*, the organization of electoral precincts underwent a significant transformation. Previously, precincts were established according to production units such as factories, plants, state farms, and institutions. Following reforms, precincts were reorganized on a territorial basis. This shift was not only a response to the practical difficulties of dividing electoral districts along production lines but also reflected profound societal changes associated with the consolidation of socialism, the elimination of exploiting classes, and the socialist transformation of peasant agriculture. The political and moral unification of Soviet citizens, coupled with the USSR's emergence as a strong socialist state, enabled the removal of certain restrictions and inequalities previously embedded in electoral law.

Whereas earlier elections involved precincts that facilitated direct voting only for city and village Soviets, the new system established elections through larger electoral districts subdivided into precincts to improve accessibility for voters. Electoral precincts became central to the administration of elections: voter lists were maintained, ballots received and counted, and political agitation and candidate promotion carried out. Chapter IV of the Regulation on Elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, comprising nine articles, was devoted to the organization of precincts, demonstrating the attention of the Bolshevik state to practical electoral administration and its commitment to the principles of socialist democracy (KHow is the polling station organized 1937: 22–23).

Legal limits were established to ensure precincts remained manageable. No precinct could exceed 2,500 residents or 1,500 registered voters, while rural settlements with populations between 500 and 2,000 were required to have their own precincts. The Central Executive Committee (CEC) further refined these provisions for sparsely populated areas: settlements with 300 or more residents situated at least 10 kilometers from the district center could form separate precincts, while northern, eastern, and mountainous regions allowed precincts for

populations as low as 100 individuals. Even military units and border outposts were included, with a minimum of 50 voters sufficient to constitute a precinct. In addition, deputies of the Soviet of Nationalities were elected in single-member districts, which did not necessarily correspond territorially to districts used for elections to the Soviet of the Union. A hierarchical system of electoral commissions was established, led by the Central Electoral Commission for the Supreme Soviet elections. The legislation aimed to ensure that polling stations were located as close as possible to voters' residences. Voting was strictly personal and conducted only in designated premises; preliminary voting or mobile ballot boxes were prohibited, and all registered citizens were required to vote in person (Berljavskij, Bondarev 2025: 15).

Local records illustrate the implementation of these regulations. According to the Protocol of the Pavlodar City Soviet of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Deputies on 4 August 1937, members discussed and reviewed the city's preparedness for the upcoming elections to the Supreme Soviet, indicating the active engagement of local Soviets in the organizational process. Members of the Soviet lamented the City Soviet's unpreparedness for the elections due to the lack of proper attention to various categories of the population potentially planned for participation in the elections. "Now it is necessary to organize the study of the election regulations through study circles among the unorganized population of the city. The City Soviet is insufficiently engaged in cultural and mass work; it does not mobilize the masses to study the Stalin Constitution... special explanatory work on the regulations needs to be conducted with housewives and domestic workers, and agitation among religious believers needs to be strengthened. It is necessary to create an Agitators' Department under the City Soviet, to deploy an agitation network through ZhAKTs [housing-rental cooperative associations] and across the entire population"³.

In the 1920s–1930s, ZhAKTs were the grassroots unit of the Soviet urban management system, uniting residents. "The instruction to 'deploy an agitation network through ZhAKTs,' found in archival documents of the 1930s, reflects the practice of using housing-rental cooperative associations as basic cells for agitation and propaganda work among the urban population."

Following its deliberations, the plenum of the Pavlodar City Soviet concluded that: "... the plenum fully and completely approves the election regulations for the Supreme Soviet developed and approved by the 4th session of the CEC of the USSR. The Stalin Constitution, which has enshrined the positive successes in the victory of socialist construction, signifies a political turning point in the life of our country. The election regulations for the Supreme Soviet, reflecting the principles and objectives of the 1936 Stalin Constitution, codified in law the achievements of the USSR in implementing socialist democracy. These regulations required a thorough reorganization of the work of Soviets at all levels, demanding comprehensive engagement from the entire plenum to align local governance with the Constitution's goals. The Presidium of the City Soviet, primarily engaged in economic work (allocation of apartments, etc.), paid insufficient attention to cultural and mass work, did not mobilize the sections and deputy groups for the daily explanation of the Stalin Constitution, the election regulations for the Supreme Soviet, and other laws and decrees of the Party and government among the masses." It resolved: "In accordance with the resolution of the District Executive Committee plenum, to conduct reports by City Soviet deputies to their electors from August 15 to August 25 of this year. To oblige the working apparatus of the City Soviet to draw up a calendar plan and develop concrete measures for studying the election regulations for the Supreme Soviet of the USSR by August 7, organizing special study circles through ZhAKTs and for the unorganized population, for which purpose to select the best members of the plenum, section heads, approve

them as agitators and circle leaders, assigning them to specific districts of the city... The task of the Soviet is to rally even more closely around the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and the leader of the peoples, Comrade Stalin, based on mobilizing the attention of the city's working people to the struggle for the complete eradication of wreckers, saboteurs, spies of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite band, and for the complete liquidation of the consequences of wrecking"⁴.

The procedure for nominating candidates to the Soviets was strictly regulated and controlled by party structures. Candidates were approved at party conferences and meetings and were then formally nominated by labor collectives or public organizations.

In the Kazakh ASSR, significant attention was paid to the policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization) - attracting representatives of the indigenous Kazakh population to governance. However, in practice, many "national cadres" were under strict control by party organs and did not possess real political autonomy. Thus, the nomination of candidates was not democratic, but directive in nature, and elections essentially turned into a procedure for ratifying predetermined figures.

Agitation was a crucial element of electoral campaigns. Under conditions of low literacy and the predominance of oral forms of communication in the Kazakh ASSR, specific propaganda methods were widely used. These included mobile agitation groups, "red yurts," oral lectures, theatrical performances, and mass gatherings in auls. "The experience of Moscow and Leningrad convincingly proves the enormous influence and authority of worker-agitators and propagandists among the population of neighborhoods and houses gravitating towards enterprises. At present, it would be impossible to ensure the leading role of workers in the elections without the transition from production-based electoral precincts to territorial ones" (*KHow is the polling station organized 1937: 22-23*).

Electoral agitation during this period focused less on explaining individual candidates' programs than on cultivating loyalty to Soviet power and reinforcing the perception of its "popular" legitimacy. Participation in elections was framed as a political obligation, while abstention was interpreted as a sign of opposition to the regime.

Agitators communicated to the electorate the narratives sanctioned by the party and Soviet authorities, presenting elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as both a demonstration of socialist democracy and a continuation of the struggle against "enemies of the people." Citizens were expected to engage actively in the electoral process, signaling their unity with the Communist Party and the candidates it endorsed. Official messaging emphasized that all eligible men and women aged eighteen and above were to vote, supporting pro-Soviet candidates and resisting any attempts by "hostile elements" to gain influence within the Supreme Soviet (*Berljavskij, Bondarev 2025: 16*).

At the same time, one of the key problems of electoral campaigns in the Soviet state was their formal nature. The absence of alternative candidates, administrative pressure, and predetermined results stripped the elections of real political content. Furthermore, mass disenfranchisement undermined the principle of representation and heightened social tensions.

Conclusion

After the formation of the Kazakh SSR in 1920, the Soviet authorities faced the necessity of integrating a predominantly rural, nomadic, and semi-nomadic population into new political structures. The low literacy rate, the dominance of traditional forms of social organization (clan and aul-based ties), and the weakness of the state apparatus shaped the distinctive character of electoral campaigns.

Local elections to the Soviets became part of a broader strategy of "Sovietization" of society. They were conducted against the backdrop of campaigns to eliminate illiteracy, anti-religious propaganda, and the social restructuring of the aul environment. In this way, elections were transformed into a form of political ritual, symbolically affirming the population's affiliation with the new system.

From a sociological standpoint, local elections in the Kazakh SSR can be seen as a form of managed mass mobilization, where the primary goal was not the competitive representation of interests but rather the involvement of as many citizens as possible in practices of Soviet loyalty.

Electoral commissions, as well as party and Komsomol cells, actively directed public participation, turning elections into an organized campaign. Voting was accompanied by meetings, rallies, and agitation, transforming elections into an element of mass political education. The restriction of voting rights for "class-alien elements" created a model of participation based not on universal citizenship but on political loyalty.

Historical-sociological analysis reveals that during the existence of the Kazakh ASSR, a profound transformation in models of public participation took place. In the pre-revolutionary period, forms of political activity in the region were primarily tied to traditional self-governing institutions, informal authorities, and clan structures. Soviet elections gradually displaced these practices, offering new forms of legitimacy through participation in meetings, voting, and the delegation of representatives.

By the mid-1920s to early 1930s, participation in elections increasingly took on a ritualized character. High voter turnout was ensured not so much by individual political motivation as by social control, administrative pressure, and the symbolic significance of the procedure. Participation became a mandatory social act, demonstrating one's belonging to "Soviet society."

Despite the formally massive participation, elements of hidden distrust and passive resistance persisted - such as avoidance of meetings, formalistic voting, and the preservation of alternative forms of authority in the aul environment. This reflects the ambiguous perception of elections as a tool for political integration.

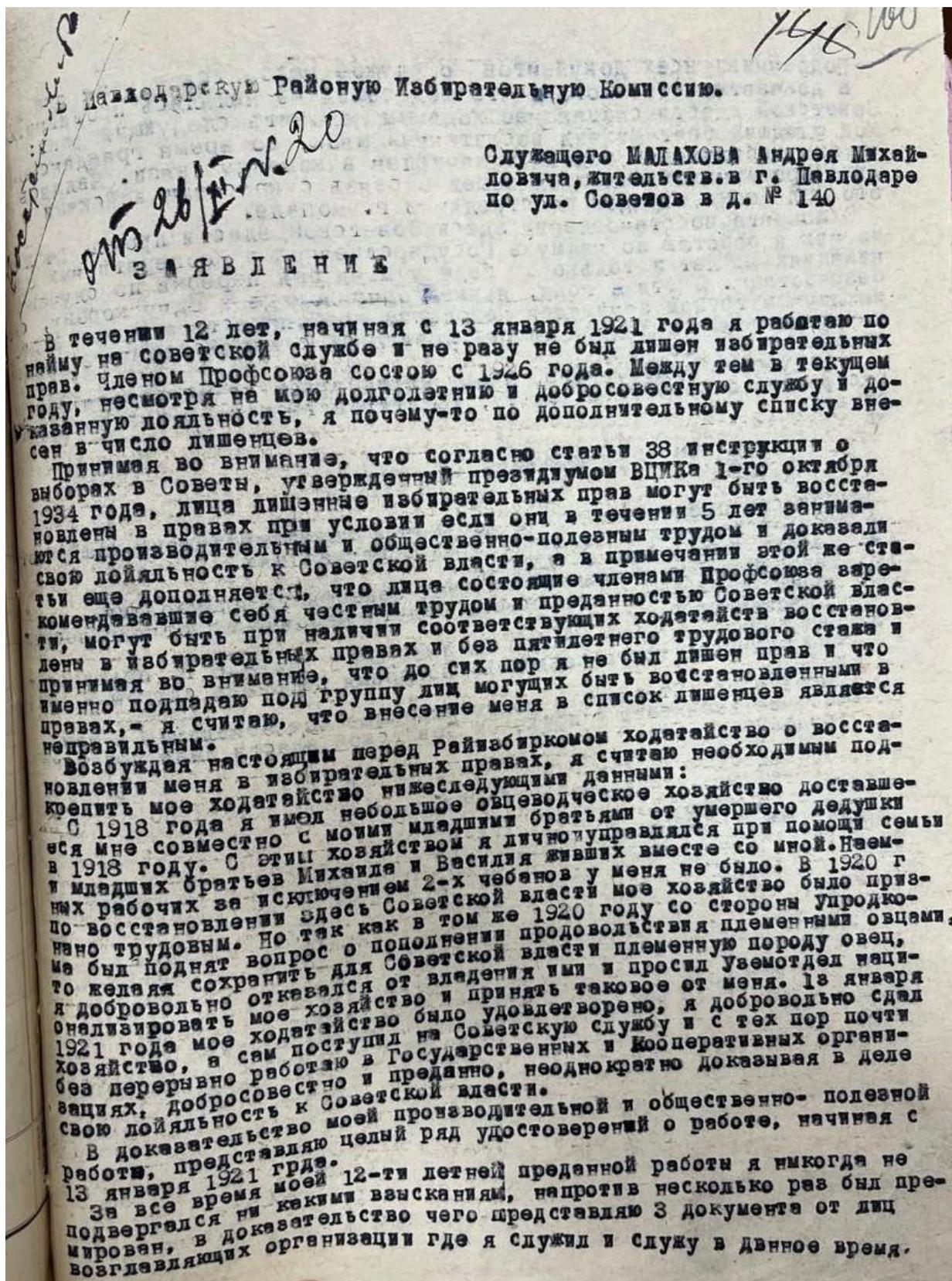
From the perspective of historical sociology, local elections in the Kazakh SSR can be interpreted as a technology for shaping a manageable political subject. Elections fulfilled the functions of socializing the population within the new symbolic framework of the state; disciplining through collective forms of participation; and legitimizing power through the demonstration of mass support. In this sense, it was less about democratization and more about the institutionalization of a mobilization model of politics, characteristic of the early Soviet regime.

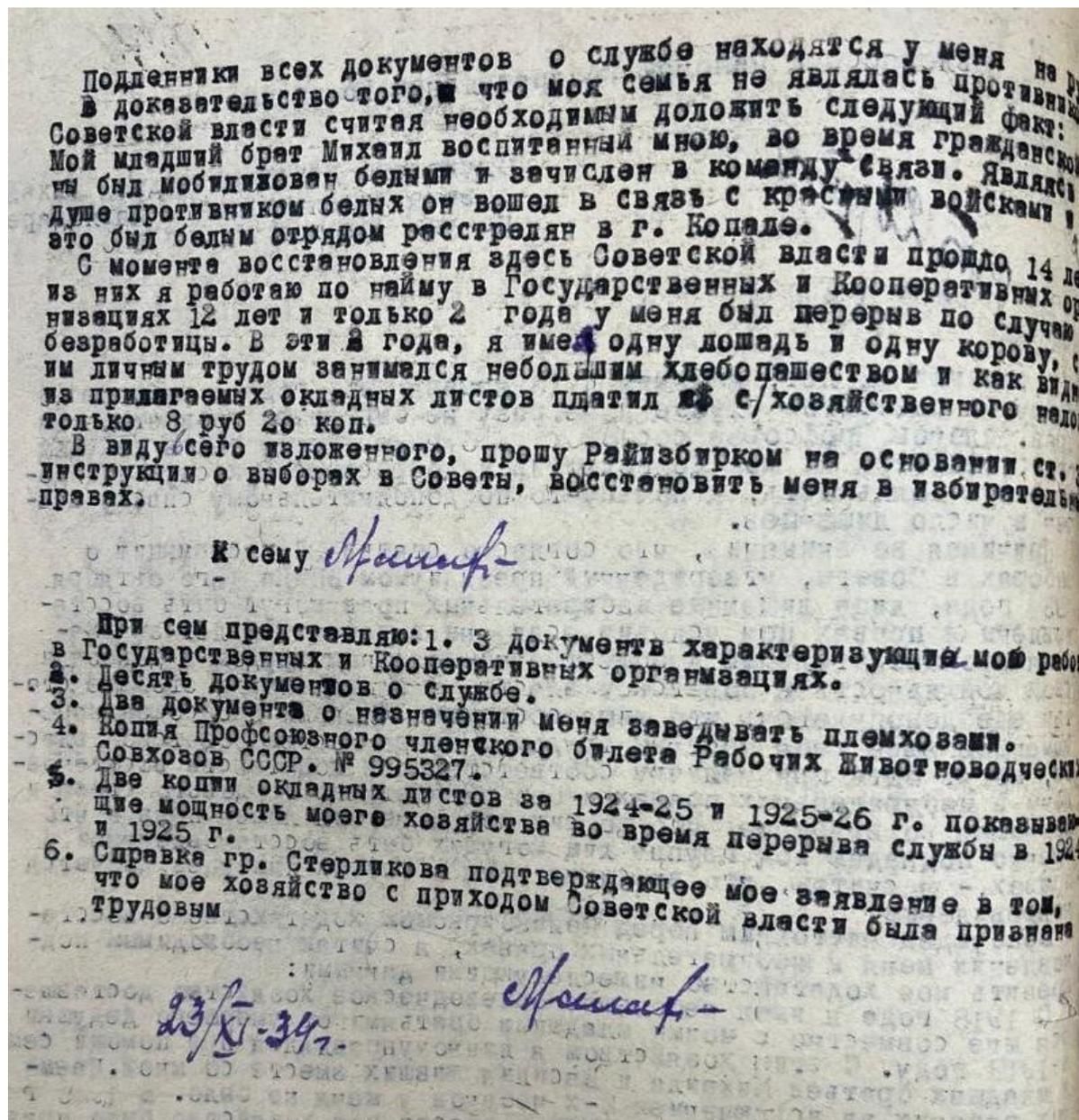
Local elections in the Kazakh SSR served as an important tool for political mobilization and the transformation of social behavior among the population. They contributed to the formation of new models of citizenship based on collective loyalty, ritualized participation, and ideological integration. Historical and sociological analysis indicates that, in this context, elections functioned less as a mechanism of political representation and more as a tool for integrating the population into the framework of Soviet political culture, where participation signaled the affirmation of one's loyalty to the state and its ideological objectives.

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Appendix 1. Application for the Pavlodar District Electoral Commission





Notes

1. Application to the Pavlodar district Election Commission from employee A.M. Malakhov dated 11/23/1034. Gosudarstvennyj arkhiv Pavlodarskoj oblasti (further GAPO). F. 5, in. 1, fil. 13, p. 100.
2. On the tasks of re-election to the Councils. GAPO. F. 75, in. 1, fil. 29, p. 28-31.
3. Protocol of the meeting of the Plenum of the Pavlodar City Council of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army Deputies of August 4, 1937. GAPO. F. 17, in. 1, fil. 124, p. 95.
4. Resolution to the Protocol of the Meeting of the Plenum of the Pavlodar City Council of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Deputies dated August 4, 1937. GAPO. F. 17, in. 1, fil. 124, p. 98.

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A. Turlybekova processed archival document data, discussed hypotheses regarding the research questions, and compiled relevant information. N. Baigabylov wrote the historical context and the concluding part of the article. E. Sailaubai conducted a critical analysis of the available data on the research topic.

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