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Political activity of the Russian youth: a mobilization potential of the sources of political information

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the forms of political activity of Russian youth through the prism of its sources on political information. The relevance of the study consists of a combination of a thorough review of the main research directions on the role of the youth participation in the socio-political process and the involvement of a specific empirical study conducted in the spring of 2019. This allows one to highlight different aspects of the situation under consideration. The empirical part of the study is based on the study "Youth Representations on the Opportunities of the Youth Leaders and Youth Organizations in Russia." This study was conducted in the four constituent entities of the Russian Federation (Altai Territory, Leningrad and Novosibirsk Regions, and St. Petersburg) in late April and early May 2019. A personal standardized interview was a research method. The sample size was 1,000 respondents (250 in each of the regions), who were the young people aged 14 to 30 years, permanently residing in the territories of the studied subjects of the federation. The article is of interest to those researchers working on the topic of the interaction between the real political process and such a significant group of the population as the youth, both professionally engaged in this topic and just interested.

Keywords: political activity, political behavior, political behavior of the youth, sources of political information

1. Introduction

The development of traditional forms of political behavior and political activity is due to the permanent development of the institution of the state as such, as well as due to the formation of the subjectivity of society, the rationalization of the political process, and the growing importance of legitimizing the political system through political participation. The traditional forms of political behavior include participation in voting, political campaigns, interaction with state authorities, local self-government, political organizations, personal contacts with politicians, participation in conventional and non-conventional actions, etc. At the same time, the traditional set of different forms of political behavior correlates with the sociocultural context and the characteristics of the political regime in a particular country and at a particular time. In this context, we can fix the transition from traditional forms of activity to new forms of "direct" participation [1], related *inter alia* to self-identification and political consciousness. That is why, as an object of study, the young people's representatives playing an increasingly important role in changing socio-political processes were selected. The study of sustainability, as well as the dynamics of the models of political behavior of the Russian youth, factors



influencing their formation, can provide additional opportunities for more effective prediction of the degree of political activity and analysis of political behavior patterns among the youth.

The theory of political activity of citizens belongs to the category of rather traditional topics in the Social Sciences in Russia. In the last sixty years, this characteristic of political behavior, fixing the variety of forms of political actions, their intensity and frequency, has been actively studied by domestic political scientists, political psychologists, and political sociologists. Periodically, empirical studies on this topic are carried out [2], [3], [4], dissertations are defended [5], [6], articles are published. They all reflect the effects of digitalization of politics in the political activity of various social groups and the population of the country as a whole [7], [8]. Currently, one of the priority areas in the study of political activity remains the problems associated with the young people's political behavior in conditions of total internetization [9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15].

2. Materials and Methods

The article presents some results of an empirical study of the political consciousness of the Russian youth, conducted by the scholars from the St. Petersburg State University and Altai State University in April-May 2019. The study was conducted in the following regions, selected according to the principle of maximum difference: Altai Territory, Novosibirsk Region, Leningrad Region, St. Petersburg. The method of collecting information is a personal semi-standardized interview. The sample size was 1,000 people aged 14 to 30 years; the sample is quoted with the control of unrelated signs of sex, age, education, type of settlement and region of residence (250 people in each regions, to ensure data comparability). The proportions of controlled characters in the subsamples strictly correspond to the data of the general population by region according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service.

Among the respondents, in general, according to the sample, men accounted for 47.6%, women – 52.4%. Those respondents aged 14–17 years accounted for 17.6% of all respondents, 18-21-years-old – 25.0%, 22-25 years-old – 26.6%, 26-30-years-old – 30.8%.

Holders of primary and incomplete secondary education accounted for 11.4%, secondary education (secondary school) accounted – 19.7%, primary vocational education (vocational school, lyceum) – 2.4%, secondary vocational (technical school, college) education – 25.5%, incomplete higher education (3 year university) –11.7%, higher education – 29.3%.

High school students made up 14.5% in the sample, college students (technical school, specialized school) – 11.2%, university students – 20.0%. Also, 17.0% of pupils study and work officially, 27.0% of them are employed and do not study, 7.4% work informally and do not study, 2.9% choose the option "other" (they are on maternity or postpartum leave).

7.1% of respondents rated their family's monthly income for each family member as no more than 10,000 rubles; 14.8% – in the range from 10,001 to 15,000 rubles; 20.0% – 15,001 to 25,000 rubles; 21.9% – 25,001 to 40,000 rubles; 16.7% – 40,000 rubles. 19.5% of all respondents were not able to accurately determine the amount of monthly income for each member of their family.

Among the respondents, residents of regional centers and megacities made up 47.6%, residents of medium and small cities made up 26.6%, residents of urban-type settlements made up 9.4%, residents of rural settlements and villages made up 16.4%.

Data processing was carried out in the statistical package SPSS. Methods such as simple and combined data grouping, calculation of chi-square statistics with estimation of standardized residuals, multidimensional scaling, factor analysis were used.

3. Results

The results are presented in the following tables with subsequent interpretation. The Table 1 shows an increase in the popularity of such types of political activity as participation in elections (2.4% growth), in the work of political parties (+ 0.2%) and public organizations (+ 3.4%), material support for politicians and their projects (+ 0.1%), and discussion of politics in social networks, including reposts of political information (+ 6.4%). At the same time, we can record a decrease in the popularity of such types of political activity as appeals to authorities (a fall of 2.5%) and public organizations (-0.4),



participation in authorized strikes, rallies and demonstrations (-2.7%), as well as in unauthorized protests (-1.2%).

Table 1. Forms of political actions of the Russian youth in the last 2-3 years (%).

Type of political action in the last 2-3 years	2018	2019
Appeal to authorities	20.2	17.7
Appeal to public organizations	7.1	6.7
Participation in authorized strikes, rallies, and demonstrations	9.4	6.7
Participation in elections	35.9	38.3
Participation in the work of political parties	4.6	4.8
Participation in the work of public organizations	8.3	11.7
Participation in unauthorized protests	4.4	3.2
Material support for politicians and their projects	1.9	2.0
Discussion of politics in social networks, reposts of political information	15.7	22.1
Other	1.6	1.0

Table 2. Joint occurrence of the youth political participation forms (statistically significant standardized residuals).

	Appealing to public organizations	Participation in authorized strikes, rallies, demonstrations	Participation in elections	Participation in the work of political parties	Participation in the work of public organizations	Participation in unauthorized protests	Material support for politicians, their projects	Discussion of politics in social networks, reposts of political information
Appealing to authorities	+6.1	+2.4	+2.8	+4.3	+2.7			
Appealing to public organizations		+2.6	+1.6	+4.9	+8.6	_	+4.9	_
Participation in authorized strikes, rallies, and demonstrations			_	+6.0	+4.3	+8.1	+5.8	+3.9
Participation in elections				+3.2	+2.1	_	_	_
Participation in the work of political parties					+6.1	+2.8	+4.1	_
Participation in the work of public organizations						_	+3.7	+2.2
Participation in unauthorized protests							+4.2	+2.2
Material support for politicians and their projects								+1.7

Table 2 presents statistically significant standardized residuals that fix the presence of stable indicators of joint occurrence of various forms of political behavior of the youth. Usually, the voting young people, as well as applying to government bodies, participate in unauthorized protests, financially help politicians and support their projects, discuss political events in social networks and repost political information not quite systematically, but they do it rather spontaneously and situationally. The young people applying to social organizations behave almost the same with the only difference. They tend to financially support the projects of politicians and respond to various kinds of fundraising campaigns. For the youth representatives, participating in elections, sanctioned strikes, rallies and demonstrations



is situational. A similar situational behavior is characteristic of youth representatives working in public organizations regarding participation in unauthorized protests. For the young people working in political parties, this behavior is characteristic of political activity in social networks. It should be noted that there is no negative relationship between the forms of political behavior.

As a result of data grouping, a total of 4 groups were identified, according to the degree of political activity (Table 3). Political activity was not manifested in 34.6% of the youth, low political activity in 55.5%, average political activity in 7.8%, high political activity in 2.1%. Only one in ten can be rated as medium or high. A rather low indicator of the number of those who are actively involved in the political life of the Russian state is observed.

Number of forms of political behavior	Percentage of respondents participating in a different number of types of political actions in the last 2-3 years	Level of political activity	Percentage of respondents with different levels of political activity
0	34.6	Absent	34.6
1	35.5	Low	55.5
2	20.0		
3	5.4	Middle	7.8
4	2.4		
5	1.5	High	2.1
6	0.3	C	
7	0.1		
8	0.2		
9	0.0		
Total	100 0	Total	100 0

Table 3. Political activity of the Russian youth (% vertical).

Respondents' answers indicate that only 3.2% of the youth do not use any political source of information, i.e. completely insensitive to political messages (Table 4). In 2019, as in 2018, social networks and instant messengers (70.7%), Internet resources, news feeds, videos, etc. from the World Wide Web (65.9%) remain the undisputed leaders as channels for obtaining political information. The second largest group of information sources covers from one third to half of youth and includes close friends and acquaintances (45.2%), relatives (33.6%) and federal television channels (39.6%). Every sixth to eighth youth representative receives political news from programs of regional television channels (17.0%) and radio programs (12.5%). Non-fiction (7.4%), regional and local newspapers (6.7%), central newspapers (4.5%), party propaganda materials (2.7%) act as outsider sources.

Table 4. Sources of political information for the Russian youth (%).

Types of sources	Percentage of the youth using this information source			
	2018	2019		
Social networks, instant messengers	68.3	70.7		
Information Internet resources, news feeds, videos, etc.	70.3	65.9		
Friends, acquaintances	41.4	45.2		
Central TV	42.0	39.6		
Relatives	27.0	33.6		
Regional / Local TV	17.2	17.0		
Radio	10.6	12.5		
Scientific literature	8.4	7.4		
Regional and local newspapers	4.9	6.7		
Central newspapers	4.4	4.5		
Party literature, campaign materials	3.1	2.7		
Other	1.6	1.6		



In comparison to the results of 2018, the distribution data show that the following sources of information have intensified: social networks and instant messengers (growth by 2.4%), physical environment (friends and acquaintances (+3.8%), as well as relatives (+6.6), radio (+1.9%), traditional print media (regional and local newspapers (+1.8%), as well as the central press (+0.1%). On the contrary, the young people began to use less such sources of information as the Internet resources (-4.4%), television (central, -2.4%; local, -0.2%), scientific literature (-1.0%), as well as party publications and campaign materials (-0.4%).

Production incentive configuration. The Euclidean distance model of individual differences (weighted).

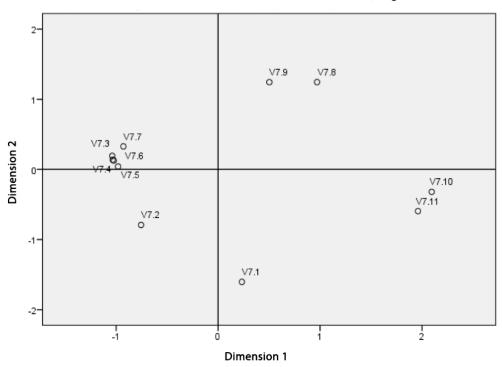


Figure. 1. Results of multidimensional scaling. Legend: V7.1 – central television; V7.2 – regional / local television; V7.3 – central newspapers; V7.4 – regional and local newspapers; V7.5 – a radio; V7.6 – party literature, campaign materials; V7.7 – a scientific literature; V7.8 – friends, acquaintances; V7.9 – relatives; V7.10 – social networks, instant messengers; V7.11 – information Internet resources, news feeds, videos, etc.

An analysis of multidimensional scaling (Figure 1) shows high rates of sharing sources such as: communication in a small circle of social communication with relatives and friends; traditional print media for political information and radio; online communication channels and social media. The groups of the youth turning to federal and regional television channels only partially overlap.

It can be seen from the data presented that those respondents who prefer central television as sources of information show a greater tendency to appeal to state authorities (standardized balance of +1.8). Consumers of regional and local television are more inclined to appeal to public organizations (+2.3), to participate in political parties (+3.4), public organizations (+4.1), as well as in unauthorized protests (+2.2). In the case of those who prefer the print press, both central and local, we are talking about a large number of different types of political activity. These are those appealing to government bodies (+1.8 and +2.9, respectively), participate in public organizations (+5.8 and +3.1) and in strikes, rallies, demonstrations, etc. (+2.3 and +2.1), in the work of political parties (+6, 0 and +4.9) and public organizations (+2.9 and +2.2), as well as ready to provide any material support for political actors and their projects (+2.2 and +4.0). In the case of respondents who are inclined to receive information from



the radio, we can find a tendency towards such types of political activity as appealing to public organizations (+2.3), participating in strikes and rallies (+1.9) and in the work of political parties (+2.9). Also, the connection between a large number of active political actions and a penchant for reading party literature and related campaign materials is visible. Here, we are talking about appeals to public organizations (+3.9) and participation in strikes, rallies, and demonstrations (+2.4), and, in fact, participation in political parties (+6.8) and public organizations (+4.4), as well as participation in unauthorized protests (+5.5) and material support for politicians and their projects (+2.0).

Table 5. Preferred sources of information for the youth participating in various types of political activity in the last 2-3 years (statistically significant standardized residuals).

	Sources of political information										
Type of political activity	Central TV	Regional / Local TV	Central newspapers	Regional and local newspapers	Radio	Party literature, campaign materials	Scientific literature	Friends, acquaintances	Relatives	Social networks, instant messengers	Information Internet resources, news feeds, videos и т.д.
Appealing to authorities	+1.8	-	+1.8	+2.9	-	-	-	-	_	_	_
Appealing to public organizations	_	+2.3	+5.8	+3.1	+2,3	+3.9	+4.1	_	_	_	_
Participation in strikes, rallies, demonstrations	_	_	+2.3	+2.1	+1,9	+2.4	+1.8	_	_	_	_
Participation in elections	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
Participation in the work of political	_	+3.4	+6.0	+4.9	+2,9	+6.8	+2.4	+1.6	-	_	-
parties Participation in the work of public organizations	_	+4.1	+2.9	+2.2	_	+4.4	+4.2	+1.7	_	_	-
Participation in unauthorized protests	_	+2.2	_	_	_	+5.5	+1.7	_	_	_	_
Material support for politicians, their	_	-	+2.2	+4.0	-	+2.0	-	-	_	_	_
projects Discussion of politics in social networks, reposts of political information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	_	+2.1	+2.8

A similar picture is observed among those who prefer to receive information from scientific literature, and they can also record the following: a tendency to appeal to public organizations (+4,1), participation in strikes and rallies (+1.8), participation in the work of political parties (+2.4) and public organizations (+4.2), as well as in unauthorized protests (+1.7). Finally, a connection between the tendency to participate in the work of political parties and public organizations and the preference of friends and acquaintances as sources of information was found (+1.6 and +1.7), respectively). Only one,



but a very logical connection is observed in the case of those who prefer social networks and instant messengers, as well as information Internet resources. Here, obviously, there is a connection with the discussion of politics in social networks and reposts of political information (+2.1 and +2.8, respectively).

Table 6. The level of political activity of youth receiving information from various sources (% of the group with different levels of activity).

·					Sources o	f political	informa	tion			
Level of political activity	Central TV	Regional / Local TV	Central newspapers	Regional and local newspapers	Radio	Party literature, campaign materials	Scientific literature	Friends, acquaintances	Relatives	Social networks, instant messengers	Information Internet resources, news feeds, videos, etc.
Absent	37.9	14.2	3.5	5.8	12.4	1.7	5.2	45.1	36.1	64.7	59.5
Low	38.4	16.8	3.6	6.1	10.3	2.2	7.7	43.8	32.4	73.0	68.3
Madian	53.8	24.4	9.0	9.0	21.8	3.8	9.0	52.6	33.3	75.6	74.4
	+2.0	+1.6	+1.9		+2.3						
High	47.6	42.9 + 2.9	28.6 + 5.2	28.6 + 3.9	38,1 + 3,3	28.6 + 7.2	28.6 + 3.6	57.1	23.8	90.5	76.2

^{*} The second digit in the table is the statistically significant standardized balance.

Together with the data presented in Table 6, the overall picture is quite clear. The distributions themselves as a percentage of the group with different levels of activity are presented directly in the Table, but it is characteristic that we can note the average level of political activity in case of preference for central and local television (+2.0 and +1.6, respectively), as well as central newspapers (+1.9) and radio (+2.3). A high level of political activity correlates with a penchant for local television (+2.9), central and local newspapers (+5.2 and +3.9, respectively), radio (+3.3), and party and scientific literature (+7.2 and +3.6, respectively).

Thus, it is possible to note the undoubtedly existing relationship between certain sources of political information and the level of political activity. In addition to the obvious relationship between the high level of political activity and the consumption of information from the sources of a political party, in the first place, we are talking about television and the traditional print press. At the same time, such a pronounced relationship between those respondents who prefer virtual sources of information and their level of political activity is not observed.

The explanatory ability of the calculated model of factor analysis of the sources of political information for young people with a high level of political activity is 70.71%. Three factors were highlighted (Table 7), which were grouped based on the following channels: (a) traditional media and communication with relatives; (b) communication with friends offline and online through social networks and instant messengers, as well as information gathered in the political and propaganda literature; (c) printed scientific literature and information sources from the Internet. Although the analysis shows that this youth group with high indicators of involvement in political activity uses all the sources of political information available, the traditional media and communication with relatives have the greatest impact. Political mobilization of young people is easier under the influence of network communication with friends and political advertising materials, than it is under the influence of scientific analytical materials printed in a traditional way or obtained from the virtual space.



Table 7. Factor analysis of the sources of political information for the young people with high rates of political activity.

The matrix of components after rotation^{a,b}

	Component					
Sources of political information	1	2	3			
Central TV	0.886	0.131	-0.138			
Central newspapers	0.860					
Regional and local newspapers	0.853		0.134			
Regional / Local TV	0.813	0.227				
Radio	0.692		0.253			
Relatives	0.688	0.429	0.285			
Friends, acquaintances	0.120	0.837	0.234			
Party literature, campaign materials	0.263	0.734	0.109			
Social networks, instant messengers	-0.168	0.689	-0.365			
Information Internet resources, news feeds, videos, etc.			0.880			
Scientific literature	0.288	0.326	0.685			

Factor extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. (a) The rotation converged in 4 iterations. (b) In the analysis phase, only observations are used for which the real political activity of the strata is defined as high.

The study showed that, at present, contrary to popular beliefs in social circles, social networks, instant messengers, and generally Internet channels have less mobilization ability to form a stable model of active political behavior. They "work" well to mobilize young people for one-time "high-profile" actions, but in the long run they are inferior to more traditional sources of information.

4. Discussion

Obviously, there are different points of view on the causes and forms of political activity. Currently, domestic and foreign researchers are increasingly worried about global leadership issues [16], [17], a fundamental comparison of the models of youth political leadership that is emerging in various types of civilizations [18], [19], [20] and states with different political regimes [21], as well as in the face of severe world economic crises [22], [23]. The voices of researchers about the need for a critical understanding of the foundations of the theory of leadership [24] and the modification of typologies of political leadership [25] in the new reality of online communication and the intensification of political processes sound more and more actively [26], [27], [28]. More than that, the growth of social demand for an effective management system [29] and power institutions for political innovation sounds more and more actively. Various scholars talk about an objective request to study the youth motivation for participation in public and political projects in leadership positions [30], as well as the principles of organizing the work of leaders with members of their movements and organizations [31], [32], [33], [34]. Independent objects of analysis are the leadership phenomena for the young people studying in high school [35], as well as differences in leadership models of various representatives from certain gender groups [36]. The issue of technologies for "growing" new political leaders among civic activists and people with high rates of political participation also remains highly relevant [37], [38]. The data presented in the article correspond to the understanding of the close relationship between the forms of political participation, sources of information and political leadership as a condition for the significant impact of participation on real political processes.

5. Conclusion

Summing up, we can note that the youth consciousness in the framework of manifesting their political behavior is quite structured. Those who prefer various specific forms of political behavior tend to focus on different types of sources of political information. At the present stage, a certain image of political behavior is formed in the minds of the youth. It is based on various foundations, both ethical (appealing to the justice of political decisions) and pragmatic (related to the desire for security and the need to adopt



the existing "rules of the game"). We can conclude on a fairly significant range of opinions and manifesting practices, since the young people quite often cannot understand how the key problems of political processes relate to their own problems, as well as how public political practices can affect their own daily lives. At the same time, the study shows a significant role of traditional media (television and print media) in the predominance of high political activity. This can be explained by the initially high level of passionarity of those youth representatives who prefer to use traditional sources of information. Also, we can talk about several models of political activity: (a) "proactive," associated with participation in the work of public organizations using social networks and an active, sometimes an unconventional form of protecting their interests; (b) "cooperative," which implies a willingness to participate in unconventional forms of protecting interests and using active conventional forms, as well as the need for self-realization in a team of like-minded people; as well as (c) "loyalistic," manifesting a willingness to appeal to state and public institutions, a passive conventional form of protection of interests and pronounced factors of corporateness and materiality. And here, a fairly clear connection between the carriers of a particular model and preferred sources of information is also found. Those gravitate to traditional sources of information, they use the "proactive" and "cooperative" models, while in the more virtual world are found just the carriers of the "loyalistic" behavior model, which looks somewhat counterintuitive.

Obviously, the state authorities' understanding of the dominant models of political behavior among individual groups of youth representatives should have very practical meaning and be taken into account when making certain managerial decisions.

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