



EFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION SUPPORT MEASURES FOR THE LEVEL OF INTEREST IN ELECTIONS AMONG RUSSIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Background: As part of the organization and conduct of elections in Russia, extensive work on voter information and campaigning is being done by all actors involved in information support for elections, both at the federal and local levels. The integrated work of all participants in information support of elections addresses various aspects related to the knowledge, attitudes, motives, intentions, values, and actions of voters. These aspects include the following set of measures: informing voters about elections, increasing the electoral culture of citizens, work on maintaining and increasing interest in elections, intention to participate in elections, involvement in issues related to the discussion of election campaigns of candidates and parties, interaction with the content on electoral topics, direct participation in elections. **Goal:** The objective of the study is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of activities in the field of information support of elections, particularly efforts to increase interest in elections among voters. **Methods:** The study uses the method of comparative analysis of the level of interest of the youth electorate of two age groups, 18-24 years old and 25-34 years old, to elections, both before the information support of elections and after the information and propaganda campaign. **Results:** Both age groups show a rather low level of interest in elections. Data analysis reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of election information coverage and gives an opportunity to outline the vector of voter outreach.

Keywords: Information support of elections; Youth electorate; Level of interest in elections.



EFICÁCIA DAS MEDIDAS DE APOIO À INFORMAÇÃO PARA O NÍVEL DE INTERESSE NAS ELEIÇÕES ENTRE A JUVENTUDE RUSSA

RESUMO

Antecedentes: Como parte da organização e condução de eleições na Rússia, está a ser feito um extenso trabalho de informação e campanha eleitoral por todos os actores envolvidos no apoio informativo às eleições, tanto a nível federal como local. O trabalho integrado de todos os participantes no apoio informativo às eleições aborda vários aspectos relacionados com o conhecimento, atitudes, motivos, intenções, valores, e acções dos eleitores. Estes aspectos incluem o seguinte conjunto de medidas: informar os eleitores sobre as eleições, aumentar a cultura eleitoral dos cidadãos, trabalhar para manter e aumentar o interesse nas eleições, intenção de participar nas eleições, envolvimento em questões relacionadas com a discussão das campanhas eleitorais dos candidatos e partidos, interacção com o conteúdo sobre tópicos eleitorais, participação directa nas eleições. **Objectivo:** O objectivo do estudo é avaliar a eficácia e eficiência das actividades no campo da informação de apoio às eleições, particularmente os esforços para aumentar o interesse nas eleições entre os eleitores. **Métodos:** O estudo utiliza o método de análise comparativa do nível de interesse do eleitorado jovem de dois grupos etários, 18-24 anos e 25-34 anos, nas eleições, tanto antes do apoio informativo às eleições como após a campanha de informação e propaganda. **Resultados:** Ambos os grupos etários mostram um nível de interesse bastante baixo nas eleições. A análise dos dados revela tanto os pontos fortes como fracos da cobertura da informação eleitoral e dá uma oportunidade de delinear o vector de divulgação dos eleitores.

Palavras-chave: Apoio informativo às eleições; Eleitorado jovem; Nível de interesse nas eleições.

1 INTRODUCTION

The electoral process and the institution of elections are an integral and important part of every democratic state (Dahl, 2000; Lijphart, 1977). All components of the electoral process are subject to close scrutiny. Such aspects as electoral behavior and the electoral activity of voters are no exception (Leighley, 2012). There are a few factors that influence electoral activity. One such factor is the degree of voter interest in elections.

Interest in elections is shaped by a wide range of factors. One of the key aspects that play a decisive role in the level of interest in elections is information support of elections. The events occurring in the electoral process and their informational coverage determine how interesting the elections will be for voters. From the point of information support of elections, young people are one of the most important segments of the electorate, since they present the potential that ensures social stability, the economic activity of the state, and democratization of the country's political

development. Yet at the same time, youth is one of the most difficult segments of the electorate in terms of retaining and drawing attention to elections due to the specific characteristics inherent in young people. This determines the importance of monitoring the results of information support for elections, analyzing the effectiveness of the measures taken, and, if necessary, adjusting the strategy and tactics of work to inform young people, including the matters of increasing their interest in elections.

2 METHODS

The methodological basis of the study consists of secondary data from VTsIOM sociological surveys conducted to determine the interest of voters in elections.

Comparative analysis, synthesis, and generalization are used as the basic research methods. The chronological framework of the study covers the period from 2017 to 2021.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 2018 Russian presidential election, the total level of interest in the election among the youth aged 18-24 in March (63% of the respondents reported being rather disinterested in the election) was lower than in July, nine months before the election (76% reported being rather interested) (VTsIOM-SPUTNIK, 2017a, 2018). The results provided in Figure 1 show that there is no unambiguous upward or downward trend in the level of interest in elections among young people between the ages of 18 and 24. Each recorded peak conveys that interest in the election increased or decreased at some point, suggesting that this age group is marked by an unstable interest in elections. For instance, in October 2017, only 51% of respondents noted being disinterested in the upcoming elections, while in November of the same year, the share of respondents interested in the elections reached 77% (VTsIOM-SPUTNIK, 2017b, 2017c). A month later, in December 2017, the number of respondents who said they were interested in the elections dropped again to 58% (VTsIOM-SPUTNIK, 2017d). Data analysis thus points to the conclusion that work to maintain and increase interest in elections among the youth cohort aged 18-24 must be continuously maintained by means of information support and, if necessary, changes in the means of communication to raise the efficiency of interaction with young people and prevent the reduction of the audience interested in elections.



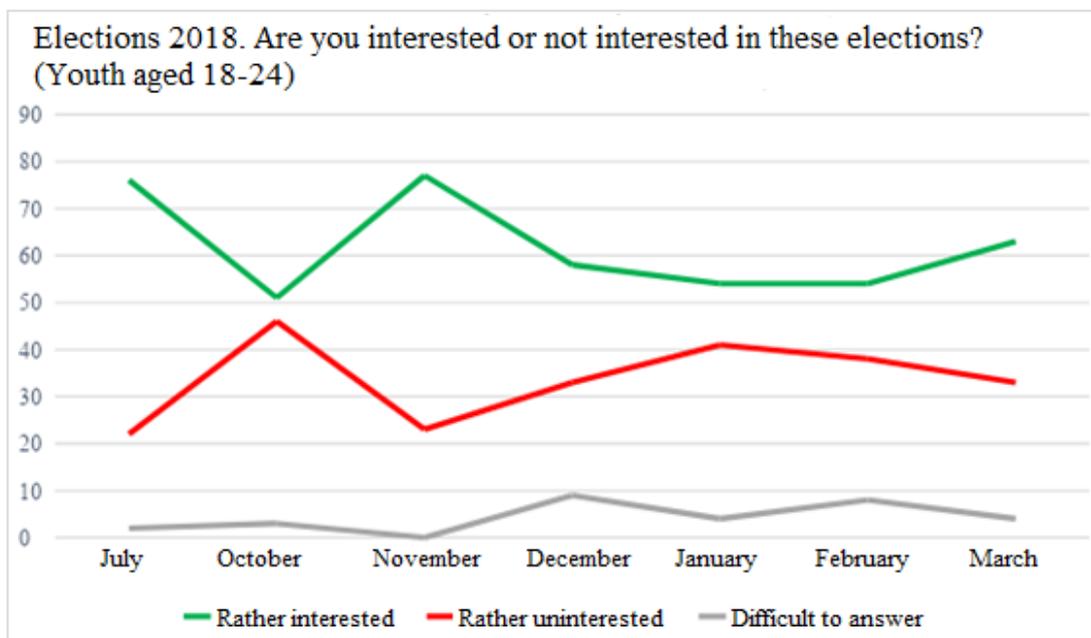


Figure 1. Level of interest in the 2018 Russian presidential election. Data on young people aged 18-24

Considering the interest of the aforementioned age group in the 2021 State Duma elections (Figure 2), we can note that after the information campaign, the share of respondents rather interested in the elections dropped by 3% compared to January 2021, amounting to 31% in September 2021 (VTsIOM-SPUTNIK, 2021a, 2021b). Thus, both before and after the campaign, only about one-third of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 showed interest in the State Duma elections. Considering this parameter for the audience of 18-24 years old, in both election cycles between 2018 and 2021, the initial level of interest was lower than that immediately before the elections. Such a negative trend in this aspect suggests that the events taking place during election campaigns and their information support reduce interest among young people between the ages of 18 and 24, indicating low efficiency of the measures of information support for elections.

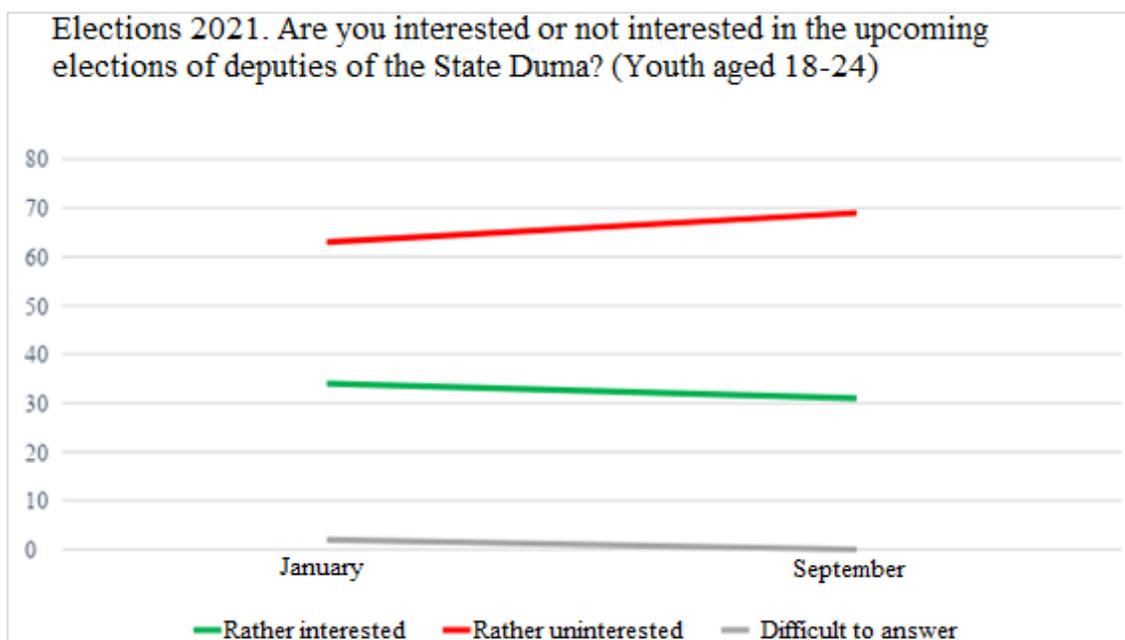


Figure 2. Level of interest in the 2021 State Duma elections. Data on young people aged 18-24

Reviewing the same parameter for youth aged 25-34, we note that the sum total level of interest in March 2018 (66% of respondents noting the elections being rather interesting) was 2% lower compared to July 2017 (68% noting the elections being rather interesting). Thus, practically the same number of respondents rather interested in elections was retained (VTsIOM-SPUTNIK, 2017a, 2018). All changes in the number of respondents more interested in the elections than not occurred without significant spikes and drops (Figure 3). In general, the number of voters interested in elections among young people aged 25-34 is less prone to fluctuations than the number of interested voters aged 18-24.

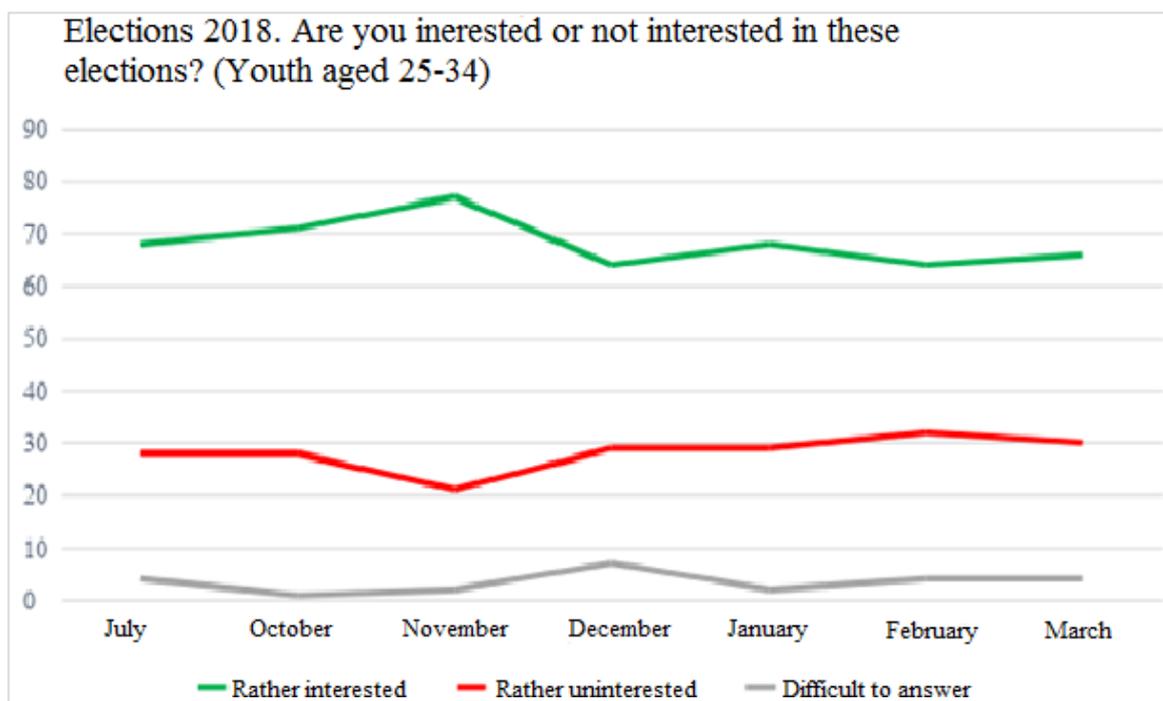


Figure 3. Level of interest in the 2018 Russian presidential election. Data on young people aged 25-34

The study of the 2021 elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation shows that the level of interest rose from 39% of rather interested voters in January 2021 to 48% in September of the same year (VTsIOM-SPUTNIK, 2021a, 2021b). In this case, we observe that the measures of information support for interest in elections were more efficient than in the previous cases. The dynamics of changes in the level of interest among respondents aged 25-34 (Figure 3) demonstrate that the level of interest in the 2018 Presidential election dropped by 2% between July 2017 and March 2018. Yet during the 2021 State Duma elections, the number of respondents interested in the elections (Figure 4), on the contrary, increased by 9%. This indicates that over this period, the effectiveness of information support measures related to increasing interest in the elections among young people aged 25-34 was successfully improved. However, it is crucial to note that the overall number of respondents interested in the Russian State Duma elections is lower than the amount of those interested in the Presidential election.

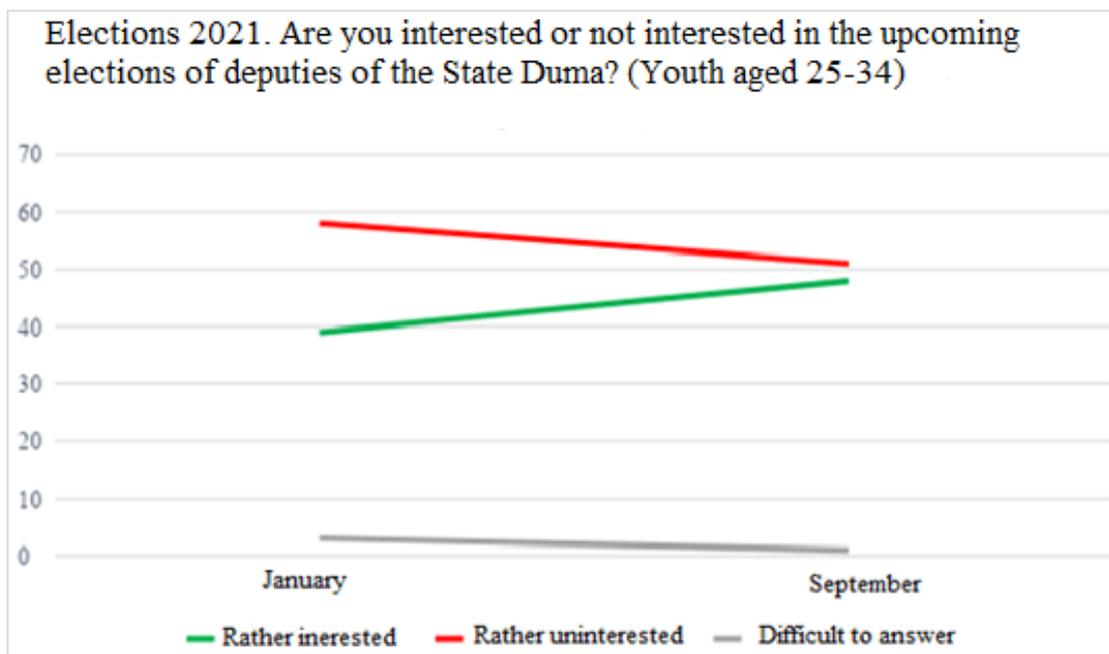


Figure 4. Level of interest in the 2021 State Duma elections. Data on young people aged 25-34

To summarize, we can point out that the level of interest in elections among respondents aged 18-24 only increases in the short run, while closer to the election itself, it invariably falls below the initially observed figures. In the group of youth aged 25-34, there is either a minimal reduction in the number of respondents interested in elections or a steady rise in interest. Judging by the number of respondents showing interest in elections, the measures of information support for the level of interest in elections prove more efficient with the audience aged 25-34.

Both of the examined age groups are marked by a rather low interest in elections. This, in turn, is one of the factors that affect the intention to vote and voter turnout. It is essential to increase the proportion of people interested in elections and do so actively, not only during the election campaign but also immediately before elections. Furthermore, continuous work is needed on improving interest in elections and electoral culture in general. The reasons behind the lack of interest are very similar to the reasons why the youth electorate does not participate in elections:

- the lack of intrigue during elections;
- a large number of opportunities and other activities that young people are passionate about, elections not being in the first place by interest and importance;
- the quality of content and the level of work related to information support does not ensure strong emotions and involvement, resulting in no significant increase of interest in the election procedure;
- the existence of other priorities for young people.

Overall, with a competent approach, information support for elections can neutralize these obstacles and raise the number of voters interested in elections.

4 CONCLUSION

Information support of elections does not fully provide for an increase of interest in elections, In other words, not all instruments, forms of communication, and types of messages work to the full, meaning that a certain share of the measures is taken ineffectively. For a more efficient interaction with youth, a different level of analytics is needed in the information space. One such tool is big data analysis (Franks, 2018). Young people spend a lot of time in the media space. Therefore, it is advisable to obtain data on what young people engage in on social media, what they are interested in, how they respond to different information occasions, and what content interests and engages them more effectively. There is a need for big data analysis of the real behavior of youth because it will reveal the true interests of young people and thus provide an opportunity to establish fruitful and effective communication with them (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017).

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