



## POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN STUDENT YOUTH (BASED ON THE RESULTS OF A SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY)

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### ABSTRACT

**Goal:** The paper reports the results of a study aimed to determine the level of political participation of youth and the preferences of young people regarding political news sources. The authors also assess the dynamics of youth involvement in political agenda compared to 2018. **Methods:** The primary research method is a survey. The survey was conducted in the fall of 2022 by the Department of Public Relations and Applied Political Science at the Higher School of Journalism and Media Communications of Kazan Federal University (Russia). The study includes 404 respondents between the ages of 14 and 29.

The results of the survey are compared with the results of a similar survey in 2018.

**Results:** The survey shows a high percentage of young people's interest in political life – 75.1%. 30% of respondents assess their interest as regular. Increased interest among respondents in economic news is also observed. The most popular sources of information according to the results of the survey are video blogs and Telegram channels.

**Conclusion:** The study indicates a natural increase in the level of youth engagement in the political agenda, given the recent developments in foreign policy and macroeconomic issues. Survey participants exhibit a need to seek answers to the political and economic agenda. The results of the survey suggest conclusions about the way effective political communication with this social group should be built.

**Keywords:** Youth; Political participation; Sources of political information.



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### **RESUMO**

**Objectivo:** O jornal relata os resultados de um estudo destinado a determinar o nível de participação política da juventude e as preferências dos jovens relativamente às fontes de notícias políticas. Os autores avaliam também a dinâmica do envolvimento dos jovens na agenda política, em comparação com 2018. **Métodos:** O principal método de investigação é um inquérito. O inquérito foi realizado no Outono de 2022 pelo Departamento de Relações Públicas e Ciência Política Aplicada da Escola Superior de Jornalismo e Comunicação Social da Universidade Federal de Kazan (Rússia). O estudo inclui 404 inquiridos com idades compreendidas entre os 14 e os 29 anos. Os resultados da sondagem são comparados com os resultados de uma sondagem semelhante em 2018. **Resultados:** O inquérito mostra uma elevada percentagem do interesse dos jovens pela vida política - 75,1%. 30% dos inquiridos avaliam o seu interesse como regular. Observa-se também um interesse crescente entre os inquiridos pelas notícias económicas. As fontes de informação mais populares de acordo com os resultados do inquérito são blogues de vídeo e canais de Telegramas. **Conclusão:** O estudo indica um aumento natural do nível de envolvimento dos jovens na agenda política, dada a recente evolução da política externa e das questões macroeconómicas. Os participantes no inquérito demonstram a necessidade de procurar respostas para a agenda política e económica. Os resultados do inquérito sugerem conclusões sobre a forma como deve ser construída uma comunicação política eficaz com este grupo social.

**Palavras-chave:** Juventude; Participação política; Fontes de informação política.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Due to several factors, the global information environment is currently undergoing very rapid change. Changes in technology, culture, and society are accelerating, leading to a rapid transformation of behavior patterns and objectively complicating the monitoring of ongoing changes and their timely comprehension. In this light, the analysis of the specifics of the sources and forms of obtaining political information and citizens' attitudes toward politics becomes a highly challenging task. Accordingly, the success of any political communication today directly depends on the quality of the collection and analysis of relevant information. In general, the political preferences of young people are a constant subject of research and publications (Arzhanykh & Pankratova, 2016; Kolobova, 2019; Korolev, 2014; Vakulenko, 2011; Zhirkova, 2013). Meanwhile, qualitative monitoring of public attitudes towards political institutions and processes is often hampered by problems of a methodological and organizational nature, which cannot but distort the final picture.

The forms and channels of obtaining political information are now subjected to rapid



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transformation. The development of information technology, the rapid evolution of information-receiving terminals, and the growing speed of data transfer all lead to rapid transformations in the way political information is consumed and perceived. However, the rate of change in these areas does not imply a lack of opportunity to monitor and comprehend the changes, without which it is impossible to ensure effective communication with society and its groups.

For objective reasons, young people are the most progressive part of society as far as the choice of channels and forms of information consumption is concerned. In today's conditions, sociological monitoring of the attitudes of Russian youth to politics and the study of the preferred ways and channels of information about political life should provide insight into the directions of development of modern Russian society, without which it is impossible to ensure the development, adjustment, and implementation of public and youth policy.

The specifics of young people's attitudes to politics have always been a topical problem for the state and society (Zakso, Agung, Widiputera, 2019). For this, there are several reasons, including the characteristics of age psychology and the motivation of youth, the striving of young people to search for various information sources, and the well-known avant-garde approach to the choice of forms and channels of information. All this makes the construction of effective communication with the youth target audience a difficult task. Often the topics, formats, and channels of communication are chosen incorrectly precisely because of the above-mentioned reasons. The political views and self-consciousness of young people determine the fate of the state and its prospects. Speaking of the model of interaction between youth and the political system of society, it is important to bear in mind that finding an ideal model is a non-trivial task, and practice proves that solutions for it are not always effective. As a rule, young people in general have a low level of political activity (a typical feature of most developed countries). It is important to emphasize that in the medium and long term, the low level of youth political activity and involvement in political life may pose a threat to the legitimacy of the political system.

The issues of the political orientation and participation of young people are explored in several publications by Russian and foreign researchers (Germeks, 2015; Korolev, 2014; Laptev, 2015). The claim about the low motivation of modern Russian youth to political participation is often explained by the challenges of the "transition period", or "the era of transit" (Miuller & Fatykhova, 2016; Nogaeva, 2015). It is also a commonplace statement that low motivation to participate in political life is a



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consequence of the weak interest of today's youth in the political and economic life of the state (Pialchenkov & Shcherbakov, 2015).

Changes in the socio-economic and political situation in Russia in 2022 caused an increase in the audience of the news media (MediaScope, n.d.; Inc, 2022). The current state of the media sphere is characterized by constant and rapid changes and increasing diversification of information sources. Video blogs and numerous social networks have become sources of news and analysis of political and economic life alongside television.

Young people are the part of the target audience that is most responsive to new forms and channels of information transmission. In this regard, it seems expedient to regularly assess both the degree of youth involvement in the socio-political agenda and the most popular media sources among this social group.

The goal of the present study is to determine the level of student interest in the socio-political agenda in general and the problems of the socio-economic development in Russia in particular. In addition, the study attempts to establish the main sources of information that young people trust in obtaining information about the state of the Russian economy and to assess the dynamics of the level of attention to the socio-political agenda relative to previous years.

## **2 METHODS**

Since 2011, the Department of Public Relations and Applied Political Science at Kazan Federal University has been conducting a study called "Youth Attitudes towards Politics, Elections, and Sources of Political Information". The study described in this article was conducted in the fall of 2022 and is part of this project.

The method of collecting primary sociological information in the course of the study was a questionnaire survey. The survey was conducted from September 9 to October 14, 2022, in the city of Kazan. Young people aged 16-29 years living in Kazan were chosen as the general population. According to the data from the Open Tatarstan portal, at the beginning of 2021, the portal had 603,374 registered users belonging to this age group in Kazan (Open RT, 2022). The survey involved a quota sample, which was representative of the age group. Out of the 603.37 thousand people, 404 people were selected. The confidence probability was 97%, and the confidence interval was 3%. The participants of the survey were students of Kazan universities and senior grades of secondary schools.



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The questions asked in the survey concerned the main problems of today's Russian economy, the interest and awareness of respondents of the directions and specifics of current state policy in economic development, the key directions of current state budgetary policy, and the issues related to young people's assessment of the effectiveness of state policy in the development of the Russian economy.

The data obtained in the survey were compared to those of previous years.

### **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The survey results demonstrate that three-quarters (75.1%) of the respondents show interest in politics. 45% are occasionally interested in political events, while only 30% consider their interest to be regular. Importantly, overall, news information is not too interesting to young people – only 14.9% indicate this in their responses on interest in information. Entertaining and educational information is much more attractive to young people. More than a third of respondents give preference to this kind of information.

Of particular interest are the dynamics of young people's interest in political news information in light of previous research on the topic (Laptev, 2015; Morozova et al., 2015). While in 2018, 33% of respondents gave negative answers to the question "How often do you read news on political topics?", in the fall of 2022, the share of such responses was 28%. The percentage of respondents who turn to news on political topics only in connection with major political events grew very slightly from 44.3 to 46% in four years – from 2018 to 2022. It is important to emphasize that the survey was conducted in 2022 during a time of aggravation of the international situation, the special military operation, and partial mobilization. However, all of these factors had virtually no effect on the rise in youth interest in political news information.

Thus, we can once again state that the interest of student youth in political information is still situational and associated primarily with major socio-political events. Furthermore, this attention to political events is highly short-term and episodic, quickly subsiding and returning to a state of overriding indifference.

Given that, of special interest is respondents' ranking of problems in the country's life that they are most concerned about. Although the study was conducted in the fall of 2022 (see above), students express the greatest concern about inflation and rising prices (58%), and only 53.8% are alarmed by the deteriorating situation in the international arena. In the meantime, concern about the situation of external affairs has



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more than doubled since the spring of 2018 (from 22.4 to 53.8%), and the proportion of respondents worrying about the threat of aggression from abroad grew by 50%, from 20.8 to 30.5%, over the period under review. Another remarkable trend is the change in the degree of concern about the problem of corruption in governmental structures – since 2018, the share of those voicing concern about this issue has decreased by 45%, from 53.2 to 29.8%.

The portion of respondents who consider the problems of health care and education, unemployment, and the weakness and dependence of the Russian economy to be significant has significantly increased during this period. In particular, the share of those interested in the state of the health care and education systems has increased from 33.4 to 38.5% over the past period. The proportion of respondents considering the problem of unemployment more than doubled – from 14.4 to 32.3%. The share of people who believe the problems of weakness and dependence of the Russian economy to be significant has also increased by almost 50% – from 24.7% in spring 2018 to 35.1% in fall 2022.

Furthermore, the degree to which the youth target audience is invested in the problems of the spiritual life of Russia's population is of note. Whereas in 2018, only 12.3% of respondents expressed their concerns about this topic, by 2022 this share almost doubled, amounting to 22.5%.

Even more noteworthy is the investment of young people in environmental issues. The share of respondents considering these topics to be important has grown by almost 2.5 times in the 4.5 years – from 12.3% in 2018 to 27.4% in 2022. Overall, the share of youth actively interested in the environmental agenda shows a gradual upward trend (Germeks, 2015).

Of special interest is the dynamic of the attitudes of the youth audience to the balance of civil rights and freedoms on the one hand, and the provision of security and well-being on the part of the state on the other. Specifically, respondents were asked the question "Are you ready to give up your democratic rights (freedom of conscience, speech, press, etc.) in exchange for material well-being and guarantees of security from the state?". While in 2018 only 2.6% of respondents expressed a willingness to completely give up their democratic rights, in 2022 the proportion of respondents who gave an affirmative answer increased almost tenfold, reaching 21%. The proportion of those ready to give up some of their civil rights increased by more than 50% over the four years, from 19 to 31.2%. The percentage of respondents who answered this question negatively decreased by half during the period under consideration – from



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66.8 to 47.8%. Such changes in the attitudes of young people are understandable given the complicated international situation, as well as the objective increase in the level of anxiety in society.

Another issue that draws our attention is the dynamics of forms of youth political participation in general and specific forms of such participation in particular. In general, political participation and, in particular, the electoral behavior of student youth is regularly subject to research (Pialchenkov & Shcherbakov, 2015; Safonova & Pokutniaia, 2014). The most pronounced trend is observed in participation in elections: while in 2018, 37.6% of respondents reported taking part in elections, in 2022 only 17.8% of those surveyed said so. This marks a more than a two-fold decrease in participation in elections. Simultaneously, the share of those who take part in the work of political parties and socio-political organizations climbed from 2.6 to 7%. The rise in the share of respondents involved in the work of public organizations is particularly marked – since 2018, this indicator increased from 1.6 to 8.6%. The percentage of respondents taking part in the work of public movements to solve individual problems, including volunteering, fell during the period under consideration from 23 to 14.2%. It is also interesting to note that the share of young people reporting previous participation in demonstrations, rallies, and pickets remains approximately at the same level in 2022 (4.9% in 2022 against 6% in 2018).

A separate block of the study is devoted to the preferred sources, forms, and channels for the consumption of socio-political information. Concerning the sources of political (same as any other) information preferred by modern youth, we can once more state the predominance of Internet sources (Gazeta. Ru, 2018; Granados, 2018; Technavio, 2019). 65.7% of study participants report Internet sources, including social media and news portals, as being their preferred sources of news information. However, more important is the 29% who note Telegram channels as such a preferred source. Another issue of importance is trust in news sources. Answering the question "What source of news information do you trust more?", 37% point to Telegram feeds, 28% – to news portals, and 19% – to social networks. An important result is the level of trust in traditional media, as only 9% rely on them.

The majority of respondents – 71% – spend no more than 1 hour a day consuming news information. Furthermore, of importance are the factors that influence respondents' choice of information sources. Of those surveyed, 82% cite personal experience, 43.6% refer to recommendations from friends or colleagues, and 38% – to recommendations from opinion leaders.



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No less significant is the issue of young people's attitudes to traditional media (television, printed press, radio). 43.6% of the survey participants report occasionally using television as an information source. The printed press is cited as such a source by one-fifth (20.1%) of those surveyed, and only 9% mention radio. Even more important, however, is the level of trust in traditional media. In this regard, 46.2% identify bias in traditional media as a disadvantage. Almost a quarter (23.7%) of respondents note the inconvenience of use as a shortcoming of traditional media. 18.8% mention as a disadvantage the fact that materials in traditional media are not interesting for them because of their content.

Of great interest in this context is the respondents' ranking of Internet resources as sources of information (any, not only news or socio-political) by frequency of use. The majority of respondents (69.8%) prefer to use video blogs (YouTube, TikTok) to obtain information. In second place in popularity are Telegram channels (54%), and in third place come social media communities mentioned by 47%. The level of trust in Internet information sources remains high – 63% of respondents gave a positive assessment of the credibility of Internet sources, and 37% assessed it negatively.

Worthy of attention are also respondents' assessments of the degree of engagement of social networks and messengers as sources of socio-political information. 40% believe these sources are, in principle, pluralistic. Approximately equal shares of participants believe that such sources express the position of either state authorities (23%), or opposition forces (20%).

In addition, the study examines respondents' perceptions of the influence of information sources on the political consciousness of citizens. In this instance, more than 40% of respondents refer to social networks as the main agent of such influence, a quarter of respondents consider blogs of opinion leaders to be such, and 17% point to Telegram channels. When asked about the extent to which social networks and messengers have a mobilizing influence on young people, respondents' opinions are divided evenly: 44.4% believe that this influence is direct (i.e., young people listen to the opinions expressed), and 44.7% believe that in this case, the context is important and, hence, this influence is indirect.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

The conducted study demonstrates a fairly high level of awareness among young people about the main problems of the country's development. The nature of the



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answers about current problems of the Russian economy is strongly influenced by the agenda related to foreign policy events and macroeconomic problems.

The work of building communication on the Internet appears to be the most promising in terms of attracting the attention of today's youth. It should be noted, however, that almost 40% of the total number of respondents find it difficult to answer the question "Do you trust the information from official Internet sources?". An important and stable trend of growth in young people's trust in Internet sources is noticeable.

It is important to note the significant and noticeable rise in the interest and trust of student youth in Telegram channels as a source of news information. In 2022, the significance of Telegram channels as sources of news and socio-political information shows an especially considerable elevation. Furthermore, a steady increase in attention to Telegram channels as a trustworthy information source has been noted in the Russian media sphere for at least the last five years, and this growth has not been affected by the measures taken by the government to block the messenger.

Especially notable is also the fact that the respondents rather highly rate the political mobilization potential of social networks and messengers. This finding deserves special attention, as the indicated instruments turn out to be the most promising from the point of organizing efficient political communication with this social group. Furthermore, a particularly critical condition is the preservation of the fundamental opportunity for users to obtain unbiased and complete information.

The study demonstrates that contemporary student youth is actively interested in the state of the Russian economy and experiences major concerns about these issues. Survey participants demonstrate the need to search for answers to questions arising in this light. The results of the conducted research also indicate that contemporary Russian student youth, while maintaining a fairly high level of attention to the socio-political agenda, are quite cautious in their readiness to participate in actual political behavior acts. The observed reduction in the share of respondents participating in elections with a simultaneous rise in the proportion of people who take part in the activities of public neopolitical organizations points to the persistent skepticism of young people about politics as a part of society, and about participation in the political life of the country.



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