

Political Culture of Urals Students: Results of Regional Monitoring (1995-2016)

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Abstract—The dynamics of the political culture of students of the Sverdlovsk region over the past 20 years is investigated. The methodological basis is the idea of the multi-factorial political preferences of students. Sociological monitoring was selected as the baseline methodology under a single mass survey program with a four-year step. The main elements studied are the attitude of students towards politics and political processes, the determinants of political apathy, the attitude towards political parties and the level of students' confidence in basic political institutions. Positive changes in the structure of students' political culture are revealed. Reflected nodal trends that allow to adjust the state youth policy on the formation of a civic culture of students.

Keywords—state youth policy, political culture, political institutes, students, civil society, authorities, Ural region, Sverdlovsk region, sociological monitoring

I. INTRODUCTION

The political processes of the mid-1990s led to the formation of a capitalist structure and the emergence of a new type of civic culture for Russia based on a multiparty system and ideological pluralism. The societal transformations of Russian society that followed in this connection continue to have a significant impact on the state of the regional community. The state of civic culture of students, its attitude to politics and political institutions is the most important indicator of the success of social development of specific territories, since it is students who are one of the most socially active groups and the foundation of the future professional and political elite of the country and specific territories. Therefore, the study of political attitudes and value orientations was the most

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important aspect of the long-term (1995-2016) monitoring of students of the Sverdlovsk region [1].

II. METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUE

The theoretical foundations, methodology and sociological tools are described in detail in the introduction and chapter I of the final monograph [1]. The theoretical and methodological basis of monitoring is the work of Russian scientists in the field of sociology of education, political sociology and sociology of youth [2, 3 and others]. When creating the toolkit, the authors relied on a systemic, institutional, resource, risk-based and other sociological approaches. At all stages of monitoring was maintained without changing the object of study is the third course students of universities in the Sverdlovsk region. The basic method of research is the mass questionnaire survey on the quota-cluster representative sample. Throughout the monitoring has been maintained and such an important characteristic of a sample as a direction (the profile) education: here we have the official classification of technical, scientific, humanitarian and socio-economic specialty. Reflecting the overall growth in the number of students in higher education area, and sample size: $N_{1995} = 851$; $N_{1999} = 994$; $N_{2003} = 954$; $N_{2007} = 1210$; $N_{2009} = 1495$; $N_{2012} = 1802$; $N_{2016} = 1827$. This allowed us to obtain comparable data for all seven stages of the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A study of the political culture of the students it is advisable to begin by analyzing his relationship to politics (tab.1).

Self-assessment allows students to identify a number of trends:

- policy is not a priority area of the interests and needs of students
- interest of students towards politics is essentially situational in nature, it is not indifferent to the

specific political developments in the country, the region, but the political the interest manifested it selectively (sporadically);

- the basic shape of her interest in politics-information.

TABLE I. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT POLITICS? (% OF RESPONDENTS)

Possible answer	1995	1999	2003	2007	2009	2012	2016
I am interested in actively participating in the activities of one or other of the parties, movements	1	2	4	3	4	7	2
I am interested in information about politics, but the active participation of not taking	45	64	49	54	56	51	50
I am indifferent to politics, I have no sustainable political orientation	47	28	42	35	31	30	38
I relate to politics is negative, try to stay away from it	7	6	5	8	9	12	10

The focus of our attention was a complex, contradictory phenomenon – apolitical. In the motivation of apolitical, subjective and objective factors are intertwined, since the respondents characterized not their motivation, but the motivation of their peers.

They were asked to determine why the modern youth manifest apolitical (fig.1)?

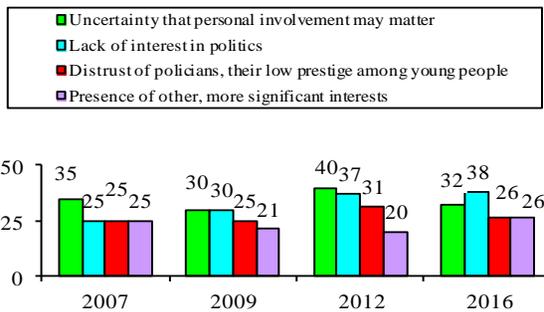


Figure 1. Why the modern youth manifest apolitical (in %)

Two aspects of the problem were clearly highlighted. On the one hand, the properties of the youth themselves are underlined: lack of interest in politics, poor awareness of political life (every fifth), and other interests. On the other hand, respondents noted the low real quality of Russian political life. It is precisely this that determines the political passivity and apolitically of students. Every third respondent is not sure that the personal involvement of a young person can somehow influence the political decisions taken. Every fourth person is supplemented with distrust of politicians.

Preserve attitude to politics as a “dirty business”. The monitoring results draw attention to the fact that respondents' assessments (who, because of the specific nature of the issue, act as peculiar experts) are not negative or indifferent to politics, not a lack of interest in it, but mistrust of politicians and participation can make a difference. There are several aspects to its interpretation. It certainly reflects the real political alienation of many young people. But more and more often - especially among students - it takes the form of rejection of dilettantism, lack of professionalism in any sphere of life activity.

For many years, the Soviet people have formed a stereotype that everyone should take (or, at least, strive for

it) an active part in politics, that politics is the highest sphere of human activity. Sometimes politics was declared the most creative activity. Apolitically was seen as evidence of underdevelopment. It was constantly recalled that in translation from Greek, “idiot” means not interested in the affairs of the policy, that is, in other words, apolitical – an idiot.

Back in the 1970s – 1980s, political apathy was viewed as a uniquely negative phenomenon that had to be “fought”, as an indicator of the crisis of the ideology of totalitarianism in the years of perestroika. Today it takes on new meaning. We are already talking about the loss of trust and disappointment in the new post-Soviet “democratic” values and ideals.

It is important to realize (after decades of superpolitization and ideologization of society) simple truth: for most citizens, politics should not be the main sphere of their life (M. Duverger: “Everything - or almost everything - has a political aspect and nothing - or almost nothing - belongs to politics entirely” [4]).

Apolitical can be a sign of the formation of civil society. After all, for a citizen of such a society, participation or non – participation in politics is a personal choice, not following external requirements. In civil society, political interference in human life is limited. Total control from the outside, when the power structures determine what is possible and what is impossible, is replaced by internal self-control of the personality: what it can and what it should not do. The important contradiction of political consciousness of youth was revealed: control from outside is not effective enough, self-control is not formed yet. But apolitical is not identical to citizenship. It also has a negative aspect – refusing to participate in any policy, thus being indifferent to the fate of society.

K. Marx warned about the negative consequences of the gap in understanding between the authorities and the people: “the Government hears only its own voice, and it knows that it hears only its own voice, and yet it supports self-deception, as if it hears the voice of the people, and also requires the people to support this self-deception. The people, for their part, either fall partly into political superstition, partly into political disbelief, or, completely turning away from public life, turns into a crowd of people living only private life” [5].

But if it is true – not everyone should be directly

involved in politics, the same is true of another – there cannot be a democratic society in which the majority is apolitical. “Society, – according to R. Darendorf, – reconciled with the long existence of a group within it, really not interested in it, is in danger. This means that the majority class is no longer confident in the stability of its position. He sets boundaries that should not exist and hesitates to comply with his own rules” [6].

So, it is not some a priori “apolitical youth”, as is often claimed by politicians and the right, and centrist, and left orientation. The main thing (and it reflects growing political activity of youth, especially student), as far as real political life allows (or – does not allow) it to feel as the subject of political processes and changes, as far as real politicians cause (or – do not cause) its trust, protect (or – do not protect) its vital interests (in this case the skew of almost all political forces of Russia in pre – election orientations on the electorate of older age is very indicative), confirm (or disprove) the stereotype “politics is a dirty business”.

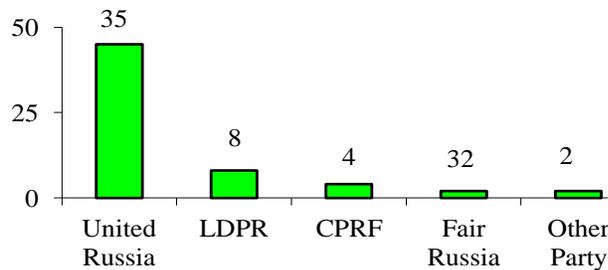


Figure 2. “If the elections were held next Sunday, for which party would you vote?” (in %)

In the conditions of the multi-party system established in post-Soviet Russia, an important indicator of the political

attitudes of students is their attitude to political parties. At the VII stage of monitoring (2016), the traditional question was included in the questionnaire: “If the elections were held next Sunday, for which party would you vote?” (Fig. 2).

The two main trends that emerged in the 2016 survey are as follows. On the one hand, the party system in Russia has acquired certain stability. For almost every second Respondent's main aim was the “party of power”, others the parliamentary received considerably less support (according to the norms of the electoral rights of the students in the Duma would have passed only the liberal democratic party, the other couldn't overcome the five percent barrier), even less had the support of non-parliamentary parties (including the liberal, whose rating in the early stages of monitoring was high enough). On the other hand, as before, two out of five respondents refused to trust all political parties.

These assessments have also emerged as part of the broader issue of students' trust in various social institutions (Tab. 2).

Most of the monitoring respondents showed distrust to the majority of social and political institutions. This largely reflected the prevailing sentiment in Russian public opinion. In particular, according to the sociologists, in the early 21st century, only 4-6% of respondents positively assessed people in power. Every third-fifth rated them as honest, but weak or incompetent (with a marked reduction in the number of supporters of such an assessment). At the same time, almost two-thirds of respondents expressed obvious distrust of people in power, considering them, first of all, careerists. And the number of supporters of such an assessment has grown markedly. This could not but be a significant factor negatively affecting the formation of civil culture of students.

TABLE II. THE DYNAMICS OF TRUST TOWARDS VARIOUS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (INDEXA)

Social and political institutions	1999	2003	2007	2009	2012	2016
The President of the Russian Federation	-0,48	+0,31	+0,32	+0,18	-0,26	+0,44
The Government of the Russian Federation	-0,40	-0,29	-0,04	-0,02	-0,34	+0,06
The State Duma of the Russian Federation	-0,56	-0,62	-0,66	-0,46	-0,58	-0,30
The Federation Council of the Russian Federation	–	–	–	–	–	-0,02
Army	–	-0,59	-0,54	-0,32	-0,32	+0,06
State security agency	–	–	–	–	–	+0,20
Governor of Sverdlovsk region	-0,26	-0,50	-0,32	-0,36	-0,46	-0,22
Sverdlovsk region government	-0,28	-0,60	-0,32	-0,32	-0,34	-0,10
Legislative Assembly of Sverdlovsk region	-0,33	-0,65	-0,42	-0,42	-0,40	-0,14
Enforcement authorities	-0,46	-0,68	-0,36	-0,28	-0,28	–
Court	–	–	–	–	–	+0,22
Prosecutor's office	–	–	–	–	–	+0,16
Police	–	–	–	–	–	-0,13
MEDIA	+0,04	-0,43	-0,38	-0,52	-0,42	-0,62
Nonprofit organization	–	–	–	–	–	-0,42
Church, religious organizations	-0,12	-0,26	-0,02	+0,02	-0,04	-0,32
Unionists	–	–	–	–	–	-0,14
Political parties, movements	-0,57	-0,83	-0,68	-0,66	-0,56	-0,58

^aThe index was calculated as the result of summing positive (Yes, trust; +1) and negative (no, not trust; -1) estimates / 100.

According to the results of the VII stage of monitoring (2016):

- significantly increased the confidence of students to the President of the Russian Federation (the problem of the “gap” of the trust even increased confidence to many other socio-political institutions became even sharper);
- trust in the Federal authorities has also increased (although the priority of the Executive over the legislative bodies has been preserved; with regard to the latter, the peculiarity of the 2016 survey was the inclusion in the list of institutions of the Federation Council: students' distrust of this institution is much lower than that of the state Duma; perhaps their less awareness of its work);
- significantly increased the confidence of students to the army; still higher the confidence of the students to the agencies of state security, included for the first time in 2016 in the list of institutions for evaluation;
- positive point is the growth of confidence in law enforcement agencies, not only to the court and prosecutors, but also to the police;
- decreased mistrust of the regional authorities – the Governor and – half, to the Government and the Legislative Assembly three times (but still identified already in the 1990s the gap, the demands of the residents to more adjacent local governments and regional authorities consistent with their authority and financial and economic opportunities);
- there is still a serious distrust of political parties and movements, but the last place in the rating of distrust in the media (distrust of which for 2012-2016 increased by 1.5 times);
- distrust of the Church and religious associations has increased noticeably.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The problems and contradictions identified in the study regarding trust or distrust of certain social and political institutions made it possible to significantly adjust the work on optimization of student youth at the regional level within the framework of the state youth policy. In particular, in the recently approved concept of the Strategy of youth policy

and patriotic upbringing of citizens in the Sverdlovsk region up to 2035 [7], upbringing of a wide range of patriotism is put in the first place among the tasks, and as a result of its implementation civil, social activity and high patriotic attitudes of youth region. In the framework of this task, the indicators of the projects Active Citizenship and Pride of the Motherland, the value of the culture of the country have been adjusted.

At the same time, the study of the political culture of the students brings to the new research issues - the study of conditions for the organization of a fair society, comfortable for all social groups. In this regard, the assessments and expectations of Ural students recorded at the end of 2016 are indicative [8]. Students still rate Russian society as rather unfair (3.78 ± 0.13 points on a ten-point scale, 0 is absolutely unfair, 10 is absolutely fair), including due to insufficiently developed political institutions and civil society institutions.

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