

Protest attitudes of modern Russian youth

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Abstract. Studies of protest attitudes among young people have recently acquired great scientific research significance. Youth protest activity is an indicator of public sentiment and reflects the level of socio-political tension in society. Within the framework of this study, the main research task is to study the nature and dynamics of the protest attitudes of modern Russian youth, to identify the level of awareness of young people about protests in the country, their willingness to participate in them, the opinions of young people about possible drivers of protest activity. Basic research methods: sociological questionnaire survey of Russian youth aged 14-30 (n = 2302), focus group. As a result of the study, it was found that an extremely small percentage of young people have not heard about the protest activity in the country; the majority have acquaintances who have taken part in protest actions over the past three years. At the same time, the survey revealed that about 20% of respondents express their readiness to take part in protest events in their city. Thus, we can note the high protest potential of Russian youth.

1 Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a clear trend towards an increase in youth participation in protests around the world. In this regard, studies of protest values and attitudes among young people have recently acquired great scientific research significance. Youth protest activity is an indicator of public sentiment and reflects the level of socio-political tension in society.

The importance of discussing the problem of protest activity in the Russian political space is associated with the fact that this form of political participation is a new type of social practice, due to the difficulties of the transition period. Modern protest moods can be viewed as an indicator of the effectiveness / ineffectiveness of communication between the authorities and civil society structures.

The purpose of this study is to study the nature and dynamics of the protest attitudes of modern Russian youth, to identify the level of awareness of young people about protests in the country, their readiness to participate in them, and the opinions of young people about possible drivers of protest activity.

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2 Literature review

Protest is seen in modern scholarly literature as a prominent way in which citizens try to express their views on key issues. In a sense, a protest is a reaction of citizens to ignoring their opinion when making decisions and developing state policy. In this regard, it is necessary to understand the nature of protests and the underlying processes.

In the scientific literature, a significant number of studies are devoted to the issues of protest activity and their influence on the implemented policy. Researchers have revealed the social value of protest in a variety of areas, for example, in the struggle for democracy against authoritarian governments [1] and militarism [2], have identified the impact of protest on the results of public policy [3].

Various aspects of mass protest participation have been widely covered in foreign and domestic scientific literature. In the studies of foreign authors [3], a conceptual apparatus was developed and methodological approaches to the analysis of the factors of the emergence and development of political protest were proposed.

The significant activity of young people in protest movements in recent years has become one of the sources of potential problems for both non-democratic and democratic regimes [4]. In Russia, it is young people who have largely become the “face” of protest, especially after 2018. Youth protests put pressure on politicians and, to some extent, contributed to the collapse of individual political systems. However, most protests, not only in Russia, do not lead to regime change. Instead, either the policy is adjusted or the protesters are suppressed [5].

Elections are one of the key types of events that can lead to protests. Although there is a particularly low turnout of young people in elections in Russia and other post-Soviet countries, during the preparation for elections and after them, young people can express their political views outside the liberal sector. In other words, even subtle elections can increase the importance of politics in society and, therefore, increase the likelihood of voicing political demands. Thus, elections, as well as institutional changes or other events that are perceived as having the potential for institutional change, can change the perception of a system of opportunities.

3 Materials and methods

Studying the protest attitudes in the youth environment, the authors in mid-2021 conducted an empirical sociological study using the methods of a questionnaire survey and focus groups.

The questionnaire survey was conducted among young people aged 14-30 years (n = 2302 people) living in the territory of the Russian Federation. The research task was to analyze the practice of youth participation in protest activity. The empirical data were processed using SPSS Statistics 17.0.

The focus group was conducted among 10 people aged 21-25 years living in the city of Yekaterinburg.

4 Research results

As a result of the questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked to answer a block of questions devoted to protest activity and protest attitudes of modern Russian youth.

According to the data obtained, the overwhelming majority of respondents (92,5%) have heard about protests and rallies in the country (Table 1).

Table 1. Have you heard about protests or rallies in the country over the past 3 years?

Options	Percentage of the number of respondents, %
1. I heard and know what caused these protests and rallies	68,3
2. I heard, but do not know what caused these protests	24,2
3. Have not heard	7,5
TOTAL:	100,0

The nature of the protest potential of modern Russian youth can be characterized as "fashionable (hype)", non-systemic, situational, passive-active, digital, which is confirmed by the results of the focus group:

- *young people are passively active: write a maximum of comments or post "to get it" (Irina, 25 years old);*
- *In our country, it (protest activity) is aimed at the fact that young people want to show themselves, "hype" in Tik-Tok, show a video that they were at some kind of rally (Denis, 20 years old);*
- *our protest activity is passive-active situational (Andrey, 21 years old)*
- *The peculiarity of age and internal emotional state is a protest, therefore any youth will be protest, therefore I do not think that Russian, specifically, modern Russian youth is distinguished by some kind of super-protest. Indeed, situational protest (Nikolay, 22 years old).*

According to the data presented in Table 2, 42,6% of the respondents have no acquaintances who took part in the protests, however, the majority of the young people surveyed (57,4%) have acquaintances who took part in such actions (Table 2).

Table 2. Are there those who took part in real protest actions over the past three years among your relatives, friends, classmates?

Options	Percentage of the number of respondents, %
1. Yes, there are many relatives, friends, classmates	19,1
2. Yes, one or more people	38,3
3. There is no such people	42,6
TOTAL:	100,0

Only a quarter of the respondents (24%) do not know the reasons for these protests. In general, we can talk about a high level of awareness among young people about protests and the reasons that caused them (Table 3).

Table 3. Why do you think young people participate in protests?

Options	Percentage of the number of respondents, %
Out of a sense of solidarity	12,5
To express / defend your position	44,2
To make yourself popular, "hype"	20,7
For money only	11,3
For a company with friends	20,7
From political, ideological convictions	31,0
to spend time interestingly, to diversify impressions	12,6

Continuation of table 1.

Young people do not see other way to express their dissatisfaction	46,3
Difficult to answer	11,6
Unleash aggression	0,1
Believe they can change something	0,4
Active propaganda from the opposition	0,1
Young people do not understand anything, are subject to manipulation	0,1
TOTAL:	211,6 *

* The amount exceeds 100%, since the respondents could have chosen several answers.

The reasons for the protest activity were also in the focus of focus group participants. According to the participants in the group discussion, the main reasons why young people go out to protests are dissatisfaction with the prevailing socio-economic and political situation in the country, low income, low legal literacy, psychological and emotional immaturity of young people, and desire for wealth and material wealth, desire change something for the better:

- *I think that young people want to change their lives, the most active part of the population, they want to change their lives for the better, and they see protests as a way to change their lives. But sometimes this method does not lead to the goal that they set, it would be better if they were engaged in changing life through some other actions (Danil, 23 years old);*

- *Here I would single out a conscious youth, a conscious protest and a senseless, hype, I even want to say a protest (Leonid, 22 years old);*

- *Young people are not yet emotionally formed to the end, so young people always do not like everything, absolutely always! She doesn't like something, changed it, she don't like something else! For example, take as a basis when chaos begins at the same rallies, 80% is the fault of young people! Because they are very emotional (Nikolay, 22 years old);*

"But most of the protests are thoughtless, and people don't understand what they want, they don't know. They do not know the legislation, but they listened to someone and decided to go out to stand near the administrative building, we have long been due for this punishment (Andrey, 21 years old);

- *I do not agree that young people go to political rallies against the authorities, these are only a few. Power for many people is something ephemeral, incomprehensible. She, as a rule, is focused on some specific situations and cases. I'll explain what I mean. Look, here the problem seems to me much deeper than dissatisfaction and so on. At the moment, our system is built like this, and it goes in this direction, that we get a higher education, receive a diploma, we make efforts and are promised mountains of gold. Unfortunately, the reality is that, after graduating from University, most people are faced with the fact that they have to work 5 for 2 and earn 28,000 as a cashier there or 30,000 as a manager, and so on, that the standard of living is absolutely not meeting expectations, and compliance, the lack of correspondence between expectations and reality in people generates anger and discontent.*

And it is on these feelings that they play when a person is not satisfied with his life, in many ways young people are unhappy, because we really do not earn much and this is true, and when therefore situational cases show us that he stole on a golden toilet, and there are millions of wealth, and there he is to his relative ... And we are angry inside ourselves because why they get wealth so easily there. Why do they get high. And this anger, she accumulates, and opposition politicians mostly play on feelings of wealth and luxury (Irina, 25 years old).

According to the respondents, young people participate in protests out of despair (46,3%) in order to defend / express their position (44,2%) and from political convictions (31%). At the same time, a fifth of the respondents consider participation in protests as a kind of "hype", as an opportunity to spend their time in an interesting way (20,7%) or for a company with friends (20,7%).

According to the data presented in Table 4, protest activity of young people is caused by bureaucracy and corruption (35,4%), the financial situation of modern youth (31,4%), problems of the country's internal policy (29,2%) and other reasons (Table 4).

Table 4. What do young people dislike when they take part in protests, rallies, demonstrations?

Options	Percentage of the number of respondents, %
Problems of the country's domestic policy	29,2
Difficulties in finding a good job, running a business	20,2
Bureaucracy and government corruption	35,4
Crisis of the current government	27,2
Strict control of public life by the authorities	21,1
Tight control of freedom of speech on the Internet	18,4
Weakening of educational work in schools, universities	10,1
Lack of leisure time for young people, accessible sports and creative centers and sections	13,9
Financial difficulties of today's youth	31,4
The general decline in the cultural level of modern youth, the erosion of moral and ethical values	14,1
Poor social support for youth, young families	25,0
Difficult to answer	9,7
Other	0,4
TOTAL:	256,1

* The amount exceeds 100%, since the respondents could have chosen several answers.

When characterizing the reasons for protest activity, it is necessary to note their complex, complex nature and the relative unanimity of the respondents regarding the drivers of protest behavior.

The main factors that determine the specifics of the protest behavior of modern Russian youth include the influence of Internet practices, blogging, the virtual environment in general on the nature of protests, economic, socio-political factors (trust in the authorities, the electoral process):

- *Bloggers. I think bloggers and media personalities in general (Denis, 21 years old);*
- *I think bloggers too. It seems to me that in any area a certain person may appear, a certain situation, when there will be a surge, in the economy, in politics, in other areas (Danil, 23 years old);*
- *I think that economic factors will influence to a greater extent. If there is economic stagnation in the country, then protest will grow, it will embrace not only young people, but also people of the older generation. And if somehow we have economic growth, then protest will decline. People just want to live well (Leonid, 22 years old);*
- *The economic aspect is important. If the same government starts, as with the pension reform, the people reacted mega negatively to this, protest rallies began. And if the authorities continue to strangle the people with such a noose, they will increase taxes, reduce wages, well, this is figuratively, then this is also a strong aspect, people will go to protest, hold meetings (Vsevolod, 22 years old);*

- *Social, political, and economic factors all influence strongly. For example, social - health care, which was completely destroyed and hospitals, especially in our small town, in small towns, political - lack of confidence in the authorities, the electoral process, economic - economic crises. But protest activity will develop very strongly if we have a strong, united opposition. (Andrey, 21 years old);*

- *The main problem of the opposition, which should stir up protest, is the lack of its consistency. The systemic opposition that we know is no longer an opposition. They are loyal to the maximum power. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation only recently, and then only for show, in my opinion. And if we are talking about small fragmented parties, for example, "New People", "Yabloko" and other noun names, noun names are conditional, because they do not gain more than a percent. The most important opposition party that we know is Yabloko, its main problem, it cannot even deal with itself, with its rulers: Moscow drives them to the regions, the regions to Moscow, then the whole opposition drives them to small new parties that appear, including "New people". Accordingly, if they cannot make friends and understand why we are, then what kind of heating of protest we are talking about. What else can stir up protest - the action of the authorities. They do not want this, but it turns out that the same corrupt new cases that are being opened, the same actions of the security officials, add fuel to the fire. I very much agree, I put at the forefront the material well-being of a person, we really now have economic stagnation, stagnation, everything is heading towards a crisis, by all indicators, the same distribution of money that will lead to inflation, this is the exhaustion of national welfare, this will all lead to the deterioration of a person's life, an increase in protest, and, unfortunately, I think that protest will increase, there is no strong leader to lead. Will he appear in the near future, I think not, all attempts to create such a leader are immediately extinguished by the authorities (Irina, 25 years old).*

Speaking about the further fate of youth protest activity, it is worth noting that protest attitudes are difficult to predict, situational in nature. According to the majority of focus group participants, the protest attitudes of modern Russian youth will remain the same, but there are also those who spoke in favor of transforming the model of protest behavior towards digitalization:

- *It seems to me that the number of active users who have spent their entire lives with a telephone, with the Internet will increase, a new generation, we are already buzzers with you, who have been using telephones since the age of two, their Internet environment is more primary than the social environment, so protest will increase (Irina, 25 years old);*

- *Young people are not politically educated. In the best case, the constitution will be read in 3 years. But youth is like a match. If a person appears who can ignite, then something may happen, if not, we will continue to sit, like (Vsevolod, 22 years old);*

- *I think the protest will increase. Because in connection with the coronavirus, we are all going online. All the procedures, go to the MFC, the right to receive, medical services, we are doing everything online now. This did not happen two years ago (Elizaveta, 23 years old);*

- *It was a revelation for me, over the past year there are a lot of adult users in Telegram. They began to read public places there, to be active, not only Odnoklassniki, who are generally a cloaca, into which no one enters. And in Telegram, people began to really do something, an interesting case (Denis, 21 years old).*

5 Conclusion

Thus, analyzing the protest attitudes of modern Russian youth, one can note the high protest potential of Russian youth. Despite the fact that the number of young people ready to go to protest actions is relatively small (about 20%), the presence of currently unsolved

problems can increase the protest potential of young people and their protest activity. The study also revealed the non-binary nature of the protest activity of young people, caused to a large extent by low institutional trust.

The nature of the protest potential of modern Russian youth can be described as “fashionable (hype)”, non-systemic, situational, passive-active, and digital. Active tendencies are outlined for the transfer of protest activity to an online format.

The main reasons why young people go out to protest are dissatisfaction with the prevailing socio-economic and political situation in the country, low income, low legal literacy, psychological and emotional immaturity of young people, striving for wealth and material wealth, a desire to change something for the better.

The main factors that determine the specifics of the protest behavior of modern Russian youth include the influence of Internet practices, blogging, and the virtual environment in general on the nature of protests, economic, socio-political factors (trust in the authorities, the electoral process).

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