



Protest Activity of Russian Youth: Motives & Factors and Value Dominants

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Abstract

The forms and mechanisms of civil and political participation have significantly transformed at present. While traditional and institutionalized forms are losing popularity, participation in protests is becoming an increasingly popular and relevant form of participation. At the same time, this tendency is more typical for young citizens who make up a significant part of the participants in protest actions. The study aims to determine the dispositions of Russian youth in relation to protest activity and to identify the factors influencing this form of participation. The research postulates that the main factor in the participation of Russian youth in protests is the desire to be part of a particular social group. The article presents the results of a survey of Russian youth conducted in July 2021 (n = 2302 respondents). Participation in protest actions for today's Russian youth is a manifestation of not only ideological sympathies but also the need to belong to a social group. However, protest behavior is associated with the absence of institutionalized channels of influence on decision-making, with the opinion about the high level of corruption and the assessment by young people of the ongoing political processes as a crisis of authority.

Disciplinary: Youth Study, Political Activism and Campaigning, Social Engineering & Social Networking.

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1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, researchers have recorded a decline in traditional (institutionalized) forms of civic engagement, for instance, participation in elections, membership in political parties (Norris, 2002; Putnam, 2000). At the same time, the frequency of protest activity

and the use of protests as mechanisms of influence is increasing (Dalton, 2017; Loader et al., 2014), especially among young people (Sloam & Henn, 2019; Sloam, 2013; Sloam, 2016). A number of researchers associate the growth of protest activity with the dominant motivation of social belonging (Bennett, 2012), which influences the formation of political identity and views, as well as mobilization of participation in protest activity.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to determine the level of protest activity of modern Russian youth and its value determinants. At the same time, foreign authors consider precisely the motive of social belonging as a determining disposition of youth participation in protest activity, which is due to their susceptibility to peer pressure (Renström et al., 2020).

2 Method

In July 2021, the authors conducted a study of the protest activity of Russian youth using a questionnaire survey. 2302 people were interviewed at the age from 14-35 years old. Let us present the characteristics of the sample structure by federal districts of the Russian Federation, by gender, age, and level of education. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by federal district. The study involved 50.6% of men and 49.4% of women. The distribution of respondents by age is presented in Table 2. According to the level of education (Table 3), most of the respondents either already have a higher education (28.7%), or are currently getting a higher education (24%).

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by federal districts of the Russian Federation

Federal Districts	%
Central Federal District	21.4
Northwestern Federal District	5.1
Volga Federal District	21.8
Ural federal district	16.3
North Caucasian Federal District	5.1
Southern Federal District	12.5
Siberian Federal District	12.8
Far Eastern Federal District	5.0
Total:	100.0

Table 2: Age of respondents

Age	%
14-17 years	11.0
18-21 years	33.4
22-25 years	24.8
26-30 years	18.7
31-35 years	12.1
Total:	100.0

Table 3: Educational level of respondents

Educational level of respondents	%
No education, primary	6.8
Incomplete secondary (basic)	9.6
General secondary, vocational school	11.8
Secondary specialized (technical school, college, etc.)	19.1
Unfinished higher	24.0
Higher (including bachelor's and master's degrees)	28.7
Total:	100.0

3 Study Detail and Result

3.1 Research Background

Before describing the results of empirical research, let us consider the content of protest activity and the study of disposition to protest behavior in sociological and political science literature. Protest is a distinct political phenomenon that includes a diverse range of activities, from online activities to violent riots. The specificity of a protest lies in its social character, in the performance of public actions in front of others in order to attract attention. Participation in this kind of political activity is always a social phenomenon. This essential feature of protest activity is indicated by various authors through research:

- social identification and collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2008);
- dominance of the motive of belonging to a group as a predictor of protest activity;
- insignificance of the result obtained in comparison with collective action;
- the influence of social networks on the mobilization of protest activity.

All this allows us to consider social incentives as the most important determinants of youth protest activity.

Some researchers suggest that cultural shifts towards post-materialistic values partially explain the above-mentioned changes, when political activity in modern societies is an expression of social identity (Inglehart, 2005).

Identity formation continues throughout life, but the peak of this process occurs between the adolescent and adult stages of life. During this period, it is peers who become more and more important. The growing uncertainty, commonly referred to as an identity crisis, is forcing many in this age period to explore and “try on” different identities.

Studies of age preferences in political participation show that young people are more inclined to participate in protest actions, while traditional forms of activity are characteristic of people of the middle and older age groups. The reasons for these processes are associated with the lesser responsibility of young people, limited access to status (power) positions, the dominance of the values of self-expression, individualism.

Political interests and mobilization of young citizens are more dependent on social connections, and they are more inclined to actively encourage friends to participate in protests (Loader et al., 2014). Thus, it can be assumed that there are differences between generations in the motives for participation in protests and in the fact that social incentives are of particular importance for youth participation. The dominance of needs for belonging and self-expression makes young people more sensitive to social cues when choosing which activities to participate in, including political ones.

3.2 Demonstrations

According to the research data (Table 4), only 7.6% of young people have not heard about the protests in the country, while 68.2% of respondents believe that they know about the reasons

for the protest activity. The results obtained indicate a high level of awareness of protest activity, involvement and attention to this topic.

Table 4: Have you heard about protests or rallies in the country over the past 3 years?

Options	%
1. I heard and know what caused these protests and rallies	68.2
2. I heard, but do not know what caused these protests	24.2
3. I didn't hear	7.6
Total:	100.0

As for personal participation in protest actions, 44.3% of respondents did not take part, however, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they participated in discussing political issues on social networks (25.2%), liked and repost protest content (22, 5%), signed appeals, petitions (24%), joined groups discussing problems in the country (19.2%) (Table 5).

Table 5: Have you taken part in the following events in the last 3 years?

Options	%
Participated in rallies, demonstrations, pickets	9.1
Participated in strikes	3.5
Organized groups of volunteers to participate in protests	7.7
Collected signatures on appeals, petitions	8.0
Signed appeals, petitions, including online petitions	24.0
"Likes" and reposts of protest content on social networks	22.5
Participated in the discussion of political issues on social networks, messengers	25.2
Online subscription to socio-political publics, communities discussing problems in the country	19.2
Online subscription to socio-political publics, communities of opposition political forces	14.3
I have not taken part in such events over the past year	44.3
Others	0.1

Thus, over the past three years, most of the youth have taken part in various events that can be classified as protest activity, and most of this activity was carried out online. Only 12.6% of respondents took part in protests that took place offline.

Analyzing the relationship between the need for social belonging and protest activity, the respondents were asked about the participation of their acquaintances in real protest actions over the past 3 years. The majority of respondents (53.8%) noted that among their acquaintances there are those who have participated in real protest actions over the past 3 years (Table 6).

Table 6: Are there those who took part in real protest actions over the past 3 years among your relatives, acquaintances, classmates, classmates?

Options	%
1. Yes, there are many	19.1
2. Yes, one or more people	38.3
3. There are none	42.6
Total:	100.0

Such a high proportion of respondents with friends who have protest participants may indicate a high potential for involving young people in real protests if campaigns are launched to

mobilize protest participants. Such results are also associated with the specifics of youth as a social group, its dispositions, as well as a significant share of the online activity of modern youth.

In this regard, it is interesting to turn to the analysis of the reasons for not participating in protest activity. According to the data obtained, those who do not take part in real or virtual protest actions are characterized by pessimistic assessments of such events: “I don’t believe that my participation in protest actions can really change something in the country” (17.8%); “I am afraid of problems at work, school” (12%) and to be “under arrest, receive a fine” (9.2%), “it is better to use other ways of expressing your discontent” (13.5%). At the same time, it is noteworthy that 15.4% of respondents who do not participate in protest actions do not do so because of the rejection of the forces that organize them (Table 7).

Table 7: If you did NOT take part in real or virtual protests, then why?

Options	%
I am afraid that I may have problems at work / school	12.9
I am afraid that I may be arrested, imposed a large fine	9.2
I am afraid that my parents and relatives will scold and criticize me	5.7
I do not believe that my participation in protest actions can really change something in the country.	17.8
I do not support the forces that organize such actions	15.4
I think it's better to use other ways of expressing your dissatisfaction.	13.5
I don't think the reasons for such promotions are important.	8.7
Others	0.9
I don't see the point	0.5
Difficult to answer	15.4
Total:	100.0

An analysis of the respondents' opinions regarding the reasons for protest activity shows that young people do not see other ways to express dissatisfaction (46.3%), to express / defend their position (44.2%), from beliefs (31%), for the sake of popularity (20.7 %) and for the company (20.7%) (Table 8).

Table 8: Why do you think young people participate in protests? Choose no more than 3 answer options

Options	%
Out of a sense of solidarity	12.5
To express / defend your position	44.2
To make yourself popular, "Hype"	20.7
For money use only	11.3
For a company with friends	20.7
From political, ideological convictions	31.0
To have an interesting time, diversify impressions	12.6
Young people see no other way to express their grievances.	46.3
Difficult to answer	11.6
Others	0.7

Thus, in part, the hypothesis about the need for social belonging as a driver of protest activity finds its confirmation in empirical data. However, attention is drawn to the absence of other mechanisms of influence on the government, the low social capital of young people, the absence, in the opinion of young people, of mechanisms to convey their position.

The latter circumstance also correlates with the motives of youth protest activity: bureaucracy, corruption (35%); power crisis (27.2%); material difficulties (31.4%); domestic policy problems (29.2%); poor social support (25%); tight control of public life (21.1%) and tight control on the Internet (18.4%) (Table 9). Thus, the protest is motivated by political and economic problems. Most of the respondents are unanimous in identifying the reasons for protest activity.

Table 9: What are the youth participating in protests, rallies, and demonstrations dissatisfied with? Choose no more than 3 answer options.

Options	%
Domestic policy problems of the country	29.2
Difficulties in finding a good job, running a business	20.2
Bureaucracy and corruption of power	35.4
The current government crisis	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, available sports and creative circles and sections	13.9
Financial hardships 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
All of the above	0.1
Others	0.3

Assessing the potential of youth protest activity, let us consider the attitude of young people to protest actions. Despite the fact that every third respondent is indifferent to protests (35.4%), and 13.2% of respondents want to disperse the speakers, every fifth respondent (22.4%) wants to take part in these protests (Table 10). Similar results were obtained when answering the question about the possibility of joining the protest action. Every fifth (20.3%) expresses readiness to join a real protest action in his city (Table 11).

Table 10: What do you feel when watching protest demonstrations on the Internet?

Options	%
1. I just want to see, but not participate	18.3
2. I am tempted to participate in these performances	22.4
3. I want to overclock these speakers	13.2
4. I am indifferent	35.4
5. Difficult to answer	10.7
Total:	100.0

Table 11: If protest actions, rallies or demonstrations take place in your city (locality), will you personally take part in them?

Options	%
Yes, definitely	5.8
Most likely I will take part	14.5
Most likely I will not take part	35.4
No, I will not accept	32.8
Difficult to answer	11.5
Total:	100.0

All this testifies to the high mobilization potential of youth protest activity, which is significantly constrained only by the lack of faith in positive results, the fear of punishment and distrust of the organizers of the actions.

However, 57% of respondents are potentially ready to participate in protests. The most important motives for participation in real protest actions for young Russians are economic, political (taking citizens' opinion into account when making decisions) and environmental problems (Table 12).

Table 12: If you are ready to take part in a protest action, rally or demonstration, then on what problems?

Options	%
Political issues (participation in elections of individual candidates, vote counting, etc.)	12.9
Opposition political meetings	12.9
Economic issues (issues of declining income, economic crisis, falling living standards)	34.8
Issues of interaction between the authorities and society (taking into account the opinion of the population when making decisions, violence from the security forces, etc.)	25.6
Environmental issues (placement in the city or near your house of hazardous production, landfill, etc.)	24.0
Rally on national issues, against migrants	7.8
Infringement issues	11.9
Deceived equity holders, housing and communal services, sealing buildings	6.3
Dissatisfaction with the social policy of the state	11.8
I'm not ready to take part in the protest	43.0

Thus, it can be stated that the hypothesis about the connection between the need for social belonging among young people and protest activity has been confirmed. At the same time, the prevalence among modern Russian youth of individualistic material values and economic interests over the interests of society can also be used in the framework of mobilizing protest behavior (Table 13).

Table 13: What are your most important life values?

Options	%
Striving to have an interesting and highly paid job	31.1
Become a good specialist	13.6
Take an appropriate position in society	12.6
Acquire the desired profession, major	14.4
Live and work among educated and cultured people	21.9
Achieve better material security	31.4
Become useful to society and your country	15.8
Get an "easy" and profitable job	10.0
Family happiness	34.8
Your health and those of your loved ones	52.2
Quality education	7.1
Career	12.3
Restful life	14.8
Satisfaction with what has been achieved	10.1
Entertainment	3.7
Freedom and independence	12.6
Achieve everything with honest work	5.6
Public recognition, respect and honor	5.2
Difficult to answer	2.0

4 Conclusion

The results obtained in the course of empirical research confirm the hypothesis that participation in protest actions for modern Russian youth presupposes the manifestation of not only ideological sympathies, but also the need to belong to a social group. According to every fifth respondent, young people take part in protest actions “for the company”. However, protest behavior is associated with the absence of institutionalized channels of influence on decision-making, with the opinion about the high level of corruption and the assessment by young people of the ongoing political processes as a crisis of power. Attention is drawn to the importance of material well-being, while the importance of quality education and public recognition is low. In this context, participation in protest activity can be viewed by young people as a social lift for improving their situation in society and as a source of income. Individualistic interests and their influence on the level of protest activity can become the subject of further research on this topic.

5 Availability of Data and Material

Information can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

6 Acknowledgment

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