



## **Modern Social and Political Alternative Forms of Youth Civic Activities in Russian Municipalities**

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### **Abstract**

This work studies modern social and political alternative forms of civic engagement of young people, to analyze their impacts on public life. The research methods used the analysis of statistical data presented on the official website of Rosmolodezh, content analysis of the news sections of the website, and the official page of the Vkontakte social network "Young Guard of United Russia", as well as the website "Presidential Grants Fund". For studying the practice of youth participation in local self-government, the authors conducted an empirical sociological study in October-December 2020. The data collection method is a questionnaire survey of young Russian people aged 14-30 totaling 2026 people. This work provides a meaningful assessment of some innovative formats of civic activities (social and political). The article describes the elements of the theory of youth civic engagement. The ideas about modern social and political alternative forms of youth civic engagement have been expanded. The facts characterizing the experience and the need for youth civic activities in various forms are stated. The classification of forms of civic engagement is presented.

**JEL Classification:** D71, D72, H76, J13, L31, Z13.

**Disciplinary:** Youth Studies, Sociology & Social Engineering.

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## 1 Introduction

The process of democratization of public-state relations in the Russian Federation has led to the formation of a voluminous list of tools that allow society to independently solve emerging socio-political problems, as well as be responsible for the application of these tools. The described form of social development referred to as "civic engagement", is a set of methods, tools, and forms of society's influence on the solution of state or municipal problems. The consequence of this development was the formation of an expanded representation of the civic active population, which cannot but be assessed as an objective social actor, which should be built into the planning and implementation of state policy.

According to the Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, the surveyed categories of citizens identify young people as the most suitable social stratum for participation in civic engagement (WCIOM, 2020). Indeed, young people are the most mobile category of citizens who are capable of allocating personal time resources for socially significant work at the systemic level. In turn, the integration of youth into civic engagement gives rise to new forms of activity aimed at solving social problems, broadcasting public requests to the state, and determining trends in the development of society.

This article will examine modern and non-traditional forms of civic engagement of young people, analyze their impacts on the public and state agenda, and also attempt to analyze their impacts on public life.

## 2 Research Background

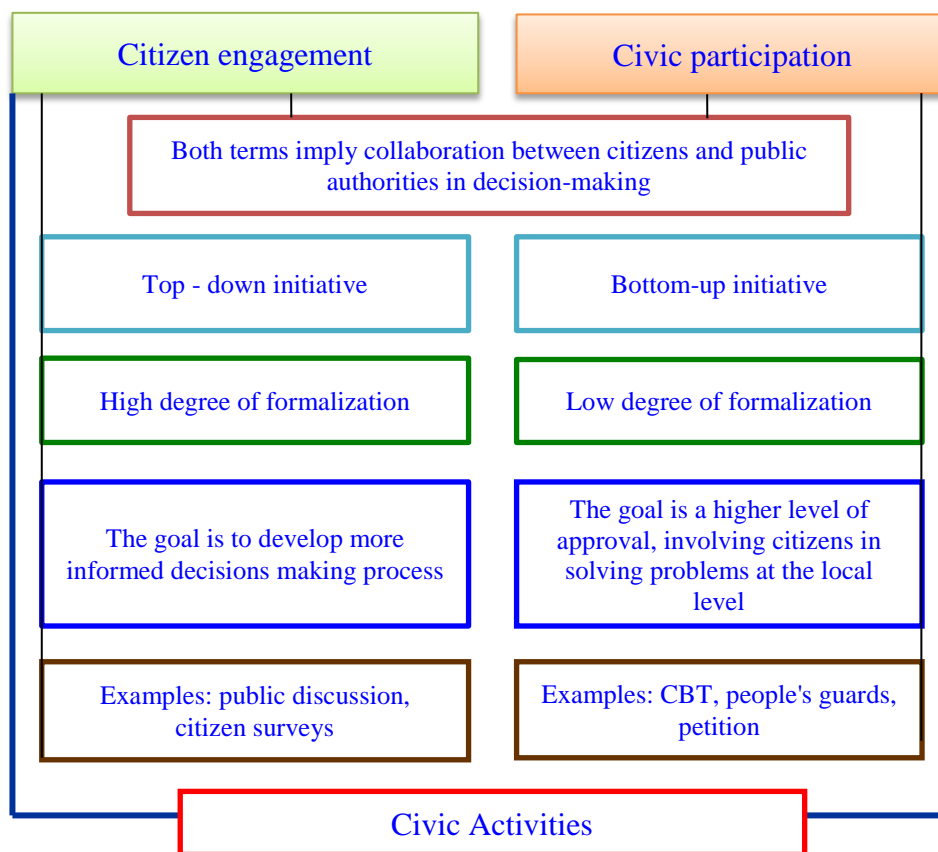
Recently, the number of scientific studies devoted to the involvement of citizens in solving issues at various levels of public administration has increased. At the same time, most authors record a decrease in the activity of citizens' participation and trust in political institutions and, as a consequence, the removal of the population from traditional forms of participation in politics (Norris, 2002). On the other hand, the growth of academic interest in the analysis of the practice of involving citizens in the process of adopting programs, projects, and other decisions of authorities and local governments is due to the development of horizontally organized forms of government, that is, mechanisms for taking into account the opinions of citizens, business, public organizations when making state or municipal decisions.

Although the terms "civic participation" and "citizen engagement" are often used interchangeably, differences in how these concepts are understood should be considered. The key difference is the role citizens play in interacting with the government. When citizens are involved, the initiators of interaction are public entities (state authorities, local governments). Citizen Engagement is a top-down initiative from public law entities. For example, local authorities involve the local community in the consideration of draft municipal legal acts at public hearings, conduct surveys of citizens, etc. In turn, citizen participation encompasses those forms that come from the citizens themselves, that is, we are talking about the process of initiating decisions "from the bottom up".

It is also worth noting that formalization is more characteristic of the forms of involvement, while the forms of participation can be implemented without being fixed at the level of regulatory legal acts. Since local self-government is based on interaction with the local community, the governance process in a municipality must incorporate a variety of mechanisms for citizen engagement. In this case, citizen involvement becomes a formalized procedure, limited by the rules established by the municipality. So, for holding public hearings, a regulation is adopted on the procedure for their conduct, which determines the mandatory publication of documents, sets the time frame for discussion, etc.

Citizen participation is a tool for citizens to express their opinion on the decisions being implemented, but it is a rather informal process that does not require the development and adoption of special rules for articulating and implementing the population's initiatives. However, since it is not formalized, it cannot be applied to all decisions made but can be limited to a fairly narrow range of issues.

The relationship between the terms “civic participation” and “citizen engagement” is schematically shown in Figure 1.

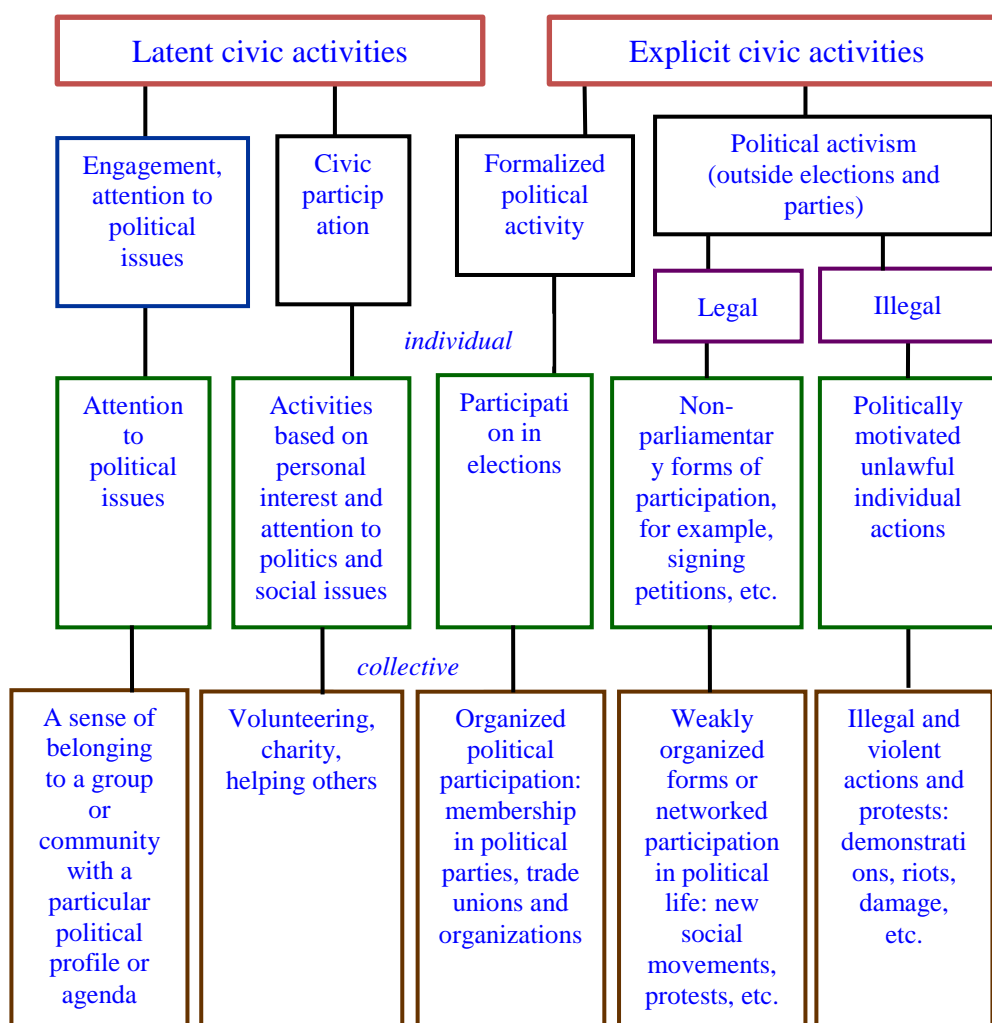


**Figure 1:** Schematic relationship between "civic participation" and "citizen engagement".

It should also be emphasized that such a division is rather arbitrary since the forms of citizen engagement can be initiated by citizens themselves, while significantly transforming the content of a particular decision. One such example is the protests in Yekaterinburg against the construction of a temple on the embankment of the Working Youth. The active participation of citizens led to the

initiation of a survey on the choice of a site for the construction of the Cathedral of St. Catherine, while the survey itself is a form of citizen involvement.

This study uses the concept of civic activities, which unites both civic participation and forms of citizen engagement. By civic activities, we mean explicit and latent actions of citizens, which are aimed at influencing the decision-making process in the field of state and (or) municipal governance. At the same time, it is the latent forms of civic engagement, such as discussion in social networks, reading information about what is happening in the city on city portals, public pages, and so on, are of the greatest scientific interest. Closest to the concept of “latent participation” is the concept of “controlling citizens” (Shudson, 2015) that citizens are not indifferent. They simply take a deliberately forward-looking stance and follow what is happening in politics. When they feel really necessary, they will intervene/participate in explicit forms of civic engagement (Schudson, 2000). Figure 2 shows the forms of civic engagement.



**Figure 2:** Covert and overt civic engagement

Youth civic engagement represents a wide range of forms of activity that is difficult to quantify. This is due to the constantly evolving means of communication between people and the peculiarities of their functioning. Young people today are interested in youth socio-political associations, namely in systemic purposeful activities related to the formation of public and

political benefits. Today in Russia there are several types of social and political associations available to involve young people, including

1. Youth-political organizations, as associations, duplicating government bodies;
2. Youth wings of political parties;
3. Independent socio-political organizations.

These organizations include youth self-government bodies: Youth Parliaments, Governments and Election Commissions of the regions, as well as “youth backup” of federal bodies. They provide not only an educational function but also an advisory function when young citizens must understand a social problem and explain the position of young people, involve them in helping to solve it.

Civic activity in this context is manifested as the involvement of young people in the activities of the legislative and executive authorities, reflecting its function as educational for the rest of citizens aged 14-30 years.

Today, a clear division of civic engagement of young people into social and political has been formed. We consider the political forms of civic engagement of youth, in which such forms as the use of active and passive electoral rights, the organization of forums and political associations, work in political parties, and the participation of youth in the formats of political protest are indicated (Milorava 2017).

To bring many forms of civic activity into a systematic form, Table 1 compiles the distribution of non-traditional forms of civic engagement in social and political directions.

**Table 1: Classification of forms of civic engagement by areas**

№	Social forms of civic activities	Political forms of civic activities
1.	Collective improvement of entrances, houses, playgrounds, surrounding areas	Participation in the election campaign
2.	Fundraising, things for people in dire straits	Participation in rallies, demonstrations, pickets about events in the life of the country, region, your locality
3.	Participation in the activities of public and charitable organizations	Participation in the activities of political parties, movements, trade union organizations
4.	Participation in the work of house committees, cooperatives, local public self-government	Membership in political youth movements
5.	Participation in strikes	Political blogging

In addition to youth governing bodies, there are the so-called youth wings of political parties, concentrating youth with political values and ambitions. This format of civic engagement, one might say, was created artificially. The activities of such organizations are conditionally divided by us into two areas: social and political.

### 3 Methodology

The study methodology is based on a systematic approach. Research methods are the analysis of statistical data from the official website of Rosmolodezh, content analysis of the news

sections from the website "Molodaya Gvardiya Yedinoy Rossii", social network Vkontakte, and the website "Presidential Grants Fund". The authors conducted an empirical sociological study in October-December 2020. The data collection method is a questionnaire survey of Russian youth aged 14-30 years (n = 2026 respondents). The research objective is to analyze the practice of youth participation in local government in various forms. The data were processed in SPSS Statistics.

## 4 Demonstrations

To test the revealed theoretical model, we carried out a content analysis of 150 news sections of the website and the official page of the social network Vkontakte of the public organization "Molodaya Gvardiya Yedinoy Rossii", as well as 75 news sections of the Rosmolodezh website. The results of the content analysis of the news sections showed the social and political projects implemented by young people (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Frequency and proportion of references to social and political civic projects implemented by young people in the news media: results of content analysis.

Social projects			Political projects		
Mention of one or another thematic news section:	Frequency	Proportion, %	Mention of one or another thematic news section:	Frequency	Proportion, %
Adaptive wakeboarding fest	35	15.5	Anti-fake squads	20	8.8
"Another University" fest	63	28.0	Political Startup	37	16.4
"Walls of Meanings" fest	61	27.1	50 days of summer	52	23.1
"StopHam" fest	59	24.2	Anti-fake squads2	49	19.4

Let us analyze the activities of the public organization "Molodaya Gvardiya Yedinoy Rossii" (MGER). As part of the analysis of social networks and the MGER website (MGER, 2020), it was revealed that the organization has many social projects: the "Adaptive Wakeboarding Festival", "Another University", "Walls of Meanings", "Veteran's Diary", etc. Each of the projects has its own target audience, goal, and KPI, which is the criterion for the social effectiveness of the project. As part of the implementation of the Veteran's Diary project, the latest technologies were applied to broadcast socially useful information through the audiobook format posted on popular music streaming services. Civil activity, in this case, is manifested in the most primary sense, which we described at the beginning of the article. However, this format of the organization also implies political work.

The political activity of the work is both systemic in the form of the implementation of socio-political projects on the territory of the regions of Russia, and spontaneous like the mobilization of resources during the election campaign. The system of socio-political projects is based on monthly competitions for grants from the Central Headquarters of MGER (the body that ensures the activities of the central bodies of the organization). Members of MGER take part in the grant competition, who have filled out and sent the project card in due time. It is worth noting that in comparison with applications for grants of competitions of social projects, this card has several important differences. When comparing the map of the MGER project and the map of the project of the Presidential Grants Fund in the first object of research, we can note the presence of the item "significance of the project", which describes the political and corporate significance of the project.

In this case, the implementation of this type of project is aimed at achieving political goals through solving social problems. This format of activity is definitely a form of civic engagement since it is meaningful in the public context.

The spontaneous nature of the political activity is a specific form of civic activity, which does not always set itself the task/method of achieving political goals in response to social demand. Avdeeva et al. (2015) note the main format of the political actionism of young people in the form of mass news broadcasts. According to the Izvestia News Agency, on the single voting day, MGER launched “Anti-fake squads”, which revealed false complaints about the voting process (Iz, 2020).

The main difference between independent social and political associations is the formation of a non-partisan position on certain issues, as well as the solution of social problems on behalf of young people, and not from the state or party apparatus. From the history of social and political organizations, we can cite as an example the OURS Movement, which existed as an association of caring young people with street specificity of social activity (Loskutova, 2008). Their most successful, in terms of information coverage, the StopHAM project is a massive form of civic engagement that has been implemented in most regions of Russia, bringing together thousands of young people.

Assessing the mass character of such a form of civic activism as participation in the activities of public and political organizations, it is worth noting that about a third of the young audience is interested in such formats of civic activism (Osokina and Prudnik, 2017). According to TASS, the number of volunteers in Russia has tripled over the past 5 years (TACC, 2019). If we consider the possible options for the development of young people's interest in social and political activities, then it is worth paying attention to the development of media content in social networks. Boyd (2014) analyzed the interpersonal interaction of adolescents in virtual and real spaces. Thus, in his work Boyd identifies the need for youth to belong to networked publics. The author notes that for the past generation, interactions in common urban spaces (courtyards, squares, playgrounds) were inherent, and today young people are adding another form of interaction - a social network. Unfortunately, today we cannot name successful social networks, in terms of media coverage, of existing social and political organizations, which significantly reduces their competitiveness in the market for civic engagement formats.

The second major form of civic engagement, which requires detailed consideration, is social design and the implementation of community projects. This direction is proposed to be considered from the side of youth participation in a grant competition from the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (Rosmolodezh). The Rosmolodezh grant competition is a special tool for allocating part of the federal budget for the implementation of social projects for youth. The competition involves young people through correspondence formats, and in full-time form with an additional stage of selection in the form of full-time defense (Iz, 2015). This format of civic engagement helps to provide direct resource support to the most powerful social cases.

According to the 2019 statistics of Rosmolodezh, more than 24 thousand people took part in this competition (Table 3). This indicator reflects the high interest of young people in obtaining additional financial resources for the implementation of socially significant initiatives.

**Table 3:** Statistics data of the All-Russian competition of youth projects of Rosmolodezh

Indicators	2017 (FADM, 2017)	2018 (FADM, 2018)	2019 (FADM, 2020)
Amount of allocated funding	250 million Rubles	2.5 billion Rubles	2.7 billion Rubles
Number of participants in the competition, people	More than 10 000	19 837	24 346
Number of winners, people	1459	3825	3218

Civic activism, in this context, manifests itself not only in the desire to solve a social problem, but also in attracting resources to their territory, which is an additional factor in assessing young people's approval of forms of civic engagement.

The project approach is the most effective method for solving social problems and tasks since it has a specific KPI, a limited period for the implementation of the initiative, as well as the entire set of project solutions is diversification of not only the budget but also the toolkit, which increases the efficiency of the social policy. There is also a problem associated with the lack of mechanisms for finding a team: a project can only be implemented with a team, the quality of which is also assessed on the platform we are considering. This format of civic engagement enables young citizens to realize their social initiatives and offer the solution to the problem that, in their opinion, is the most effective.

The most popular is the practice of involving young citizens in decision-making at the municipal level. Local self-government is a reliance on broad forms of representative participation of citizens in defining development goals and priorities, involving citizens in solving problems of the local community, and support from local self-government bodies for civil initiatives and projects.

To study the practice of youth participation in local self-government, the authors conducted an empirical sociological study in October-December 2020. The data collection method is a questionnaire survey of Russian youth aged 14-30 (n = 2026 people). The respondents were asked to answer a set of questions dedicated to their level of civic engagement, the degree of trust in local government bodies, as well as the preferred forms of civic participation in municipalities. The research task was to analyze the practice of youth participation in local government in various forms. The empirical data were processed in SPSS Statistics.

Analyzing in general the values of civic participation of young people in the life of the city, positive results should be noted. More than half of the respondents consider themselves active citizens who are directly involved in various activities aimed at improving the lives of the city (Table 4). During the sociological survey, the respondents were asked questions about the practices of participation in local self-government in traditional (Table 5) and alternative forms (Table 6).



**Table 4: What is your civil position?**

Questionnaire answer to the civil position	%
1. Active	26.5
2. Rather active	40.1
3. Passive	13.2
4. Rather passive	11.7
5. Find it difficult to answer	8.5

**Table 5: Traditional forms of youth participation in local government, %**

№	Events	Participate	Does not participate	No answer
1	Local referendum	21	58	21
2	Voting on the recall of a deputy, a member of an elected local self-government body, an elected official of local self-government, voting on changing the boundaries of a municipal formation, transforming a municipal formation	22	57	21
3	Gathering of citizens	23	56	21
4	Lawmaking initiative of citizens	19	60	21
5	Territorial public self-government	19	60	21
6	Public hearings, public discussions	28	51	21
7	Assembly of citizens	27	52	21
8	Citizens' conference (meeting of delegates)	19	60	21
9	Citizens survey	43	36	21

As can be seen from Table 6, alternative forms of civic participation are more popular among today's Russian youth.

**Table 6: Alternative forms of youth participation in local government, %**

№	Events	Participate	Does not participate
1	Collective landscaping porches, houses, playgrounds, surrounding areas	49	51
2	Assistance in organizing and conducting an election campaign in your city (village)	33	67
3	Collecting funds and things for people in dire straits	53	47
4	Participation in rallies, demonstrations, pickets about the problems of the country, region, settlement	28	72
5	Participation in the activities of public organizations	45	55
6	Participation in the activities of political parties, movements, trade union organizations	26	74
7	Participation in the work of house committees, cooperatives, local public self-government	20	80
8	Participation in strikes	18	82
9	Signing appeals, petitions about events in the country, region, locality	39	61
10	Participation in charity	57	43
11	Flash mobs	45	55
12	Volunteering	55	45
13	Participation in activities for young people (competitions, forums, conferences)	58	42
14	Participation in the activities of the Youth City Council / Youth Council under the Local Government	30	70
15	Online activity on the life of the country, region, your locality	48	52

From the data obtained, it follows that the most popular are such alternative forms of participation as a charity (57%), fundraising and collecting things for people in difficult situations (53%), volunteering (55%).

## 5 Conclusion

Today, youth civic engagement is represented in a variety of forms that are constantly changing. Various forms of youth activities are being adapted to current trends, technologies, and social needs of society. In this article, an attempt was made to study some innovative forms of civic engagement of youth at the municipal level.

The development of civil society institutions is characterized by the development of forms of civic engagement of the population. Youth is both a social and a political force capable of influencing various processes occurring at the municipal level. Young people are quite actively involved in solving social problems. The civic engagement of young people at the municipal level, to one degree or another, influences the development of municipalities. The model of dividing civic activity into political and social, proposed by the authors, draws a dividing line that will allow a more precise study of the motives and goals of youth participation in both political and social activities.

## 6 Availability of Data And Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding authors.

## 7 Acknowledgments

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