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THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CIVIC POSITION

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Abstract. *The statement about low electoral activity of young people is among the empirically proven ones. However, voting (or not voting) is not the only way for young people to participate in the electoral process. Election campaigns are a space of activity with a variety of functional positions that differ in qualification requirements and the size of payment. In this article, election campaigns are considered not from the standpoint of ideology, but as organizational formats to involve young people in activities related to the election campaigning in the Russian Federation. The article discusses the activities of young people as street agitators (traditionally called volunteers), organizers of the work in election headquarters, public observers or members of precinct election commissions. The article consistently answers the questions: what are the channels for mobilization young people in election campaigns? What is motivating young people? What forms of activity do carriers of differing motivations choose? How do young people summarize their experience of participating in election campaigns in terms of their political and career self-determination? The answers to these questions were obtained on the basis of interviews with persons under 28 who had experience of participating in election campaigns in the Russian Federation.*

Keywords: *political volunteerism • election campaigns • political technologies • motives for participation in election campaigns • forms of youth participation in election campaigns*

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The statement about low political activity of young people in current Russia became a cliché. The main argument in favor of the statement is low electoral activity of young people. [Martynova, 2013; Gorshkov, Sheregi, 2010]. However, electoral activity is not the only indicator of youth politization. The latent politization sign are young people's statements on the political system, their vision of the legitimacy of the current government. Such self-determination in the political space can bring the youth to active political actions under certain circumstances.

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Political self-determination, including consciously chosen political indifference, can happen against a background and under the influence of various events of micro- and macrolevel. The

important part in their interpretation belongs to mass media [Kazun, 2020; Kazun, Semykina, 2020]. But speaking of the *personal experience* space, immediately connected with the political sphere, the most important experience may become *participation in election campaigns* of candidates to elected government bodies. Election campaigns are a space of activity with a variety of functions, such as street propaganda work in favor of a candidate, work in election headquarters, the performance of duties of public observers or members of precinct election commissions. This vital experience in the youth civic education is very important for the formation of civic position of the young people.

Thus, in this research work we will try to describe the experience of participation of youth in election campaigns and to summarize, what conclusions the participants of the campaigns made, on what had influenced their self-determination in the political sphere.

The empirical base. In the framework of the research, there were collected 31 surveys with young people under 28 when they took part (in any way) in election campaigns. We did not limit ourselves with a certain region, period, or level. Our informants are people who, when schoolchildren, students, postgraduates or young specialists, took part in election campaigns of various levels. They got their experience in campaigns in Moscow, Novosibirsk, Ulyanovsk Region, and Krasnodar Territory.

The age restriction of the research (28 years) is related to the age at the time of participation in the election campaign, but not to the current age of respondents. Somebody participated in election campaigns of the mid-2000s, another told of the experience of the past year. Some respondents had a repeated and varied participation experience in election campaigns. Such a research design allows to compare the assessment and experience of those who participated in election campaigns in different years and in different capacities. The surveys mention respondents' status at the time of the survey, while at the time of their participation in election campaigns they were mostly students, sometimes seniors, postgraduates and young specialists.

The surveys were conducted in September-December 2020. To seek the informants, a short announcement of the research was posted on Facebook in order to get assistance with respondents. The surveys were being recorded in Zoom for 35–70 minutes and later they were transcribed.

Youth in common sense is considered to be the time of transition to social responsibility. The objective of this research is to test the hypothesis that the participation of young people in election campaigns is not a transition to social maturity, but its manifestation. The surveys were the attempt to obtain answers to the following questions:

Is the youth participation in election campaigns a sign of active civic position?

Is it well-grounded to define this phenomenon "political volunteerism"?

Is the participation of young people in election campaigns a stage of the involvement into the political process, or can it result in the opposite effect of depolitization?

The channels to get to election campaigns. There are no less as the two channels' groups to mobilize the youth. They are institutional channels and network ones.

The first group are formalized structures with granted powers to send young people to these or those positions in election campaigns framework.

Until recently in accordance with the decree "On the main directions of the youth policy in the Russian Federation" from June 3, 1993 the youth category included citizens from 14 to 30 years old. On November 11, 2020, the State Duma approved the draft on raising the youth age to 35 years.

For example, there can be parties or social movements empowered by law to send their representatives as public observers to polling stations on the voting day.

Another variant of mobilizing are nonformalized network structures as steady nonformal links on relation or friendly terms. The network mobilization forms confidence among the participants of the process: *"Everybody came by acquaintance. There was no advertising. There only were acquaintances' acquaintances. Random people did not come. That is why there was no danger of provocations or disclosure of secrets"* (masc., a postgraduate). The advantage of

network mobilization is the formation of network confidence. This is vitally important for the activity, attended with different violations facilitating the way to the victory.

Sometimes, mobilization can involve both network channels and formalized structures. Thus, a precinct election commission (PEC) membership is formally reconciled and approved by the city election commission. However, *"my father worked at school, was well acquainted with the schoolmaster, who offered me part-time job as a member of PEC"* (fem., an individual entrepreneur). In this case, the formal order was used as a tool for realization of nonformal agreements between the schoolmaster and the father of the future PEC member.

There are some differences in the channels of mobilizing progovernment candidates (formally independent or nominated by parliament parties) and forces united with the concept of nonsystem opposition to election campaigns.

Mobilization of youth to participate in campaigns of progovernment candidates is actively used by formal channels. They may be Youth social councils at regional election commissions, Youth Parliaments under regional administrations, etc. Thus, during S. Sobyenin's election as the Mayor of Moscow the active youth mobilization was conducted through the Development Center at Moscow Government and "Mosvolunteer", the Resource Center of development and support of Volunteers movement. It means that the leaders of political space actively use formal organizations and their administrative resources to involve youth in election campaigns. As a result, more than ten thousand volunteers took part (so far, leaving apart the disputable applicability of the term) [Барсукова, Ионова, Сафиуллина, 2020] in S. Sobyenin's headquarters.

The version of compulsory participation of youth in election commission was not approved in our surveys. The participation of seniors and students was voluntary, with no direct or indirect administrative compulsion from the side of educational institutions authorities. The only case of open pressure was shown in the story of a young official of the service of social defense: *"They told me: 'Either you will agitate or we will reduce you' So, I agreed not to lose the job. Of course, they did not say this directly. Just: You can refuse, but you are an adult and you understand all the consequences."* (fem., a specialist). The agitation for a member of United Russia Party was meant.

Small players of the political process and opposition candidates cannot lean for support on formal structures in seeking youth to participate in election campaigns. In this case, the mobilization is conducted through network channels. *"A friend of mine invited me there, my group-mate, who used to be in contact with 'The Apple'"* (masc., a student). Opposition candidates lean for support on volunteers with similar political views. *"I came to their headquarters myself. It was such an activity, as if self-organizing"* (masc., an employee of a company).

Among the youth participating in campaigns of progovernment candidates there were no uniform political orientations: the surveys showed both the open support and openly declared political indifference. But opposition candidates possessed a youth group of support, more uniform from the standpoint of political orientations.

Motivating of the youth participation in election campaigns. Let us see, why young people took part in this activity. This was a voluntary activity, with few exceptions.

The surveys analysis has shown five motives which in their combination urged to the participation in election campaigns. They are ideal types which divide up the principles of "payment/no payment" and "strong/weak politization".

Partiers. An election campaign to partiers is like a merry, sometimes dangerous adventure. Usually they get there by accident, with their friends, for the company. It is noteworthy, that sometimes the partiers do not remember who was elected and where with their immediate participation.

"I believe, in Duma.

What? State or regional?

Well... Do they differ? (Laughing)» (fem., a student).

The motivation "to hang out" is typical of seniors and students who have nothing to do during summer vacations. *"It was summer, everybody was away, I had nothing to do", "I thought,*

why not". The election campaign seems to be an interesting leisure, where young people meet to do a light work in summer. They are little interested in the political agenda and ideological discussion. *"I can tell many gags. I enjoyed myself"* (fem., a student).

Careerists. They take the election campaign as an element of career-making: some plan to get the profession of a campaign manager, others try to become a party administrator or an assistant deputy. Thus, one of the respondents dropped out of the institute and began working in the apparatus of a politician. Ambitions to become a politician are not excluded.

But even if they do not plan to connect their career with politics and elections in the future, "careerists" find opportunities to benefit from the participation in election campaigns, for example to acquire connections for future recommendations or a line in a resume. Somebody tells what an important thing for one's image are selfies with famous politicians.

Of course, not all the parties and not all the candidates are equally good from the standpoint of a "careerist". The work for "United Russia" is considered the most valuable. But other parliamentary parties have their advantages, too. *"Communists clearly need fresh blood. Now it is easy to stand out there to be seen and advanced"* (masc., an unemployed).

Wish to earn. Some young people participate in election campaigns mostly for money.

In mass media street agitators are often called volunteers, but this is not always correct. The volunteer works for free, proceeding from inner beliefs. But many respondents were paid. *"They paid, but still called us volunteers, because it was a slush fund, we got cash-in-hand"* (masc., a student).

It should be said that among street agitators there are those who can justly be called political volunteers. Usually, they take part in elections on the side of nonsystem opposition. We cannot judge the financial aspect of these elections, but most ordinary street agitators worked for free. The possible cause is not the tight budget, but the protest rhetoric addressed to the active civic position, which make the money question irrelevant. *"What money? Do you like corruption in our country and everything? I don't like it. That is why I have come to you. Where do they get money, if they are combatting corruption? Everybody worked for free there"* (fem., an employee of the social movement apparatus).

But such political endeavor is rather the exclusion of the rules. The idea of the paid labor prevails. Young people can earn good money in election campaigns. In some places they were paid daily, in others they were hired on a piece-work basis relevant to the activity. But it was very good money for seniors and students. [Barsukova, Ionova, Safiullina, 2020]. Those who were mostly motivated with money had little or no interest in the result: *"On the eve of the elections they invited us to their office. They said that we have done a great work, but nobody cared for them. Everybody wished to be paid"* (masc., a student).

Typically, street agitators are hired with no formal contracts. Unreported funds of election campaigns are spent for the purpose. [Gel'man, 1998; Barsukova, Denisova-Schmidt, 2020]. *"We signed something, but there were no the precise figures there"* (masc., a student). One of the reasons for unreported employment was that the personnel of street agitators is not constant (many of them refused in several days) and the documentation of their activity would significantly increase administrative costs.

It should be emphasized that "the love of money" does not mean political indifference of this motivating type. Political ideas can be present. But the decision to participate in the election campaign is adopted for the sake of earning money.

Advocates of honest elections. Some young people participating in election campaigns wish to ensure the maintenance of electoral process: "it must be honest".

Advocates of honest elections find themselves as public observers and members of precinct election commissions, where they are ready *"to invest their time into the feeling that you follow your ideals, that the elections at this precinct were honest thanks to your participation"* (M., an employee of a company).

Public observers in election commissions possess high social and civic activity [Skokova, 2015; 2016]. The public observer is in the position of an arbiter. He is above the fray and takes care to ensure that the strongest wins. And it may happen that the strongest political force is

not the object of his affection. This motivation type is ready to victimize own political preferences for the sake of the formal process. In the scale of their preferences the observance of the law is higher than the political force they are voting to. Despite philistine skepticism the activity of public observers can restrain falsification of the result of the vote, when not remove it [Korgunyuk, 2008].

Fighters for political ideas. Politicized young people are forging victory of “their own” candidate. This motive is emphasized among opposition young people. *“I agitated actively for Navalny, when he was a candidate for the mayor. I got propaganda materials, tried to distribute them in the underground, spoke to people. I had full-time work then and after the work I made this propaganda. It was the perfect volunteerism, the work for free; it was such an intensive initiative from below”* (masc., a young specialist).

Such a motivation type could be met among advocates of nonsystem opposition. There were no passionate defenders and conductors of progovernment candidates’ interests during the surveys. On the contrary, young people who had worked at election campaigns of progovernment candidates, who leaned for the support on the administrative resource and understood its importance for the election result, got a great dose of cynical attitude to the electoral process.

Youth participation forms in election campaigns. Our research revealed several youth participation forms in election campaigns which differed both functionally and also from the standpoint of activities organizing, qualification requirements and possible reward.

Here is a short description of these forms of activity in the Table.

Table

The Participation Forms in Election Campaigns and their Features

Forms	Functional	Duration	Qualification	Channel of mobilization	Wage
Public observers	Not to allow violations at the PEC during voting	The vote period	The minimal training or instructing	The appointment from a party or a social movement	For free, rarely a reward about 500 rubles
Members of precinct election commissions (PEC)	To ensure voting process	Preparation (lists of electors, absentee ballots, the placing) and voting process	Training, instructing, courses for PEC chairmen	PEC is formed mostly of the social sphere employees (voluntary and obligatory character)	Guaranteed payment from the budget for hours worked. Usually 2–4 thousand rubles
Street agitators	To attract attention to candidates, to urge voting for them	From some days to several weeks according to the election campaign design and its budget	Communication skills are necessary	Mobilization announcements or network contacts	Variants: from assistance for free to generous remuneration
Team leaders of street agitators	Organizing activity of street agitators	Period of conduct of street agitation	The experience of organizing activity	Mobilization announcements or network contacts	Paid work, even when agitators worked for free
The election headquarters members	Organizing election campaigns	Involvement 24/7 during the entire period of election campaign	Creativity, the experience of conducting campaigns	Political analysts mobilize “their” teams on the base of network contacts	Payment depends on the budget of campaigns

It is obvious that young people choose different functional roles related to their dominating motivation.

"Partiers" prefer streets and various adventures in headquarters: street agitation, door-to-door making, distributing agitation materials in public places, organizing meet-and-greet, etc. They do not wish to be public observers at polling stations or to work as members of precinct election commissions. *"What is the commission? The head teacher and other teachers. There is nobody to have parties with"* (masc., a postgraduate).

"Careerists" prefer to work at headquarters. They can see politicians, future deputies there. They are not interested in other activity forms.

Those who wish to earn avoid the work of public observers (nearly always for free) or members of a PEC (guaranteed but very modest payment). They prefer to work at headquarters or as a street agitator, where seniors can earn good money for their age. But with an important reservation: the payment depends on the company's budget, i.e., it differs by different candidates. So, this motivation type seeks for the "costliest" company.

Advocates of honest elections find themselves as public observers and PEC members, where they oppose violations during the voting. They will not agree to tear their competitors' flyers away, to fabricate fake news etc., so, they are not well either for street agitation or for work at the headquarter, with their principle of "victory at any cost".

At last, fighters for political ideas, on the contrary, are not public observers or members of the PEC. They need actions to promote their interests' representatives. Therefore, they work at headquarters or (when having no experience) in the streets: to stand on curbstones, to distribute flyers, to agitate, to collect signatures, etc.

Thus, functional variety of the activity allows to involve differently motivated youth into election campaigns.

The conclusions made by election campaigns participants. Campaigns come and go and their participants remain. The experience they have got in campaigns determines significantly their further attitude to political processes, impact their political self-determination.

As a whole, young people's recollections of their participation in election campaigns vary from extremely negative to enthusiastic ones. Negative recollections concentrate on the following three moments: the activity organizing, the payment of the labor and the application of the administrative resource.

The activity organizing. Young people mostly expected election campaigns to be the territory of the partner management style and of team spirit. Bureaucratic management style and the leaders' authoritarian inclinations were an unpleasant surprise for many of them: *"What I disliked much in this headquarter ["The Apple" headquarter.– Author], what upset me much, was the bureaucratic atmosphere, stupidity in organizing everything"* (masc., a student). *"On the whole, organizing was a full thrash. To tell honestly, the candidate was quite inadequate, very toxic. Nobody loved him. That is why, were it was possible to skip work, everybody did. Working for the candidate everybody wished him a failure"* (masc., a postgraduate).

Payment of the work was "a hot point" in relations with the employer, because nearly always the unreported budget of election campaigns was used for the salary of street agitators. *"The payment scheme was changed many times. At first, they said that would pay once a fortnight, then that they would pay once a week, then every day, but they did not pay. And the rumors increased that they would not pay at all, that they would screw everybody"* (masc., a student).

Virtually all the young people who wanted to work up in campaigns, understood in some degree that the deal was unreported one. Many street agitators hoped for an oral agreement and usually they got cash-in-hand. Some tried to guess where do they get money to pay them: *"Clearly, they saved on typography. The paint was left on my fingers. And T-shirts? They were utter crap, the cheapest stuff. They laundered the money there"* (masc., a student).

One of our respondents, a young employee of a regional administration, spent two months in rural constituencies, organizing the work of election headquarters. He was regularly paid a salary of a specialist of the department he was listed in.

Thus, the participation in election campaigns was for young people an excursus to the unreported economy with risks and insecurity of labor rights typical of it.

The use of administrative resource also belongs to unpleasant discoveries of young people. Some of them resumed their experience of participation in election campaigns like parting with illusions regarding political contest. The participation level was of no importance; everybody spoke of the administrative resource, from street agitators to PEC members.

Thus, an ordinary student, a team-leader of street agitators, discovered for himself that *"flyers were to be put up at night. Then all the flyers except those of "the United Russia" were soon taken off."* (masc., an unemployed). In this way a young man got acquainted with what is usually called an administrative resource.

A member of a PEC tells: *"at the end of the elector day came women from the administration, moaning and clucking, some voices are wanted for somebody. ... It was clear, that they want to change the election results. I was indignant in my young mind, and after that I concluded that the elections were not honest"* (fem., an individual entrepreneur). A member of election headquarters told of the campaign organizing in rural constituencies, where he was sent by the regional administration: *"Our work was to hamper our competitors in every way possible. For example, the competitor is planning his meeting in a square. I must phone the head of the village: do what you like, a combines' exhibition, or dig the square..."* (masc., a young specialist). So, the participation in the election campaign was a strong personal feeling, the awareness of the administrative resource power.

Only those who participated in election campaigns for free, i.e., were true volunteers, had positive recollections. *"It was such a heady feeling that we can really change something"* (masc., a marketer). Bearers of positive recollections describe the time of their participation in the election campaign like personal contacts with associates and like a participation in an important and useful action.

The action organizing and the labor payment were mentioned only in the case of negative recollections. These factors did not get into positive assessments register, regulating just the discontent degree of young people. In case of positive recollections, there was a feeling of participation in the processes, important and meaningful ones for the society.

It is noteworthy that positive recollections usually related to campaigns that took place in this country several years ago. Many respondents, evaluating their participation experience positively, said: *"this cannot be repeated", "it is impossible now"*. Such respondents consider the situation in this country like the window of opportunity closed for political changes, with the addition of the disappointment in the former political idols. In retrospect, even those who have positive recollections are not ready to repeat the experiences of the past.

Disappointment is the often-repeated refrain in the surveys. *"I have put the politics aside, because there is no politics in Russia. It is a hard work, to be busy with what is absent. Now, there is nobody for who I ripped the throat out"* (masc., an individual entrepreneur).

Our respondents tend in their thoughts to comprehend the specificity of Russia, its political system, which impacts all the social aspects. *"I am both disappointed and grown up. I understand that all our parties and associations are of the Führerprinzip. Now Putin is the leader. If Navalny comes to power, he will be the leader of this type. We have leaders, who keep some small structures for themselves. Even Higher School of Economics. They said that this is the highly liberal educational institution. But the authority of this highly liberal educational institution has never been changed, never. This is the educational institution of the Führerprinzip type. The same story"* (masc., marketer).

Having taken part in election campaigns young people came to conclusions, which to some degree corrected their behavior. The respondents' opinions were that their participation in election campaigns had the following consequences for them.

Depolitization. Some young people lost their former interest in the political sphere. "Well, if I am offered to be a public observer now, for sure I will tell them to leave me alone" (masc., an employee of a company). The former interest in politics is interpreted like a manifestation of being young and stupid. Later they "became adult and clever". Our respondents often explained their conscientious refuse to vote as the direct sequence of what they had seen and learned when they participated in election campaigns. "Since then I have not voted. I believe, it is just the waste of time" (fem., an individual entrepreneur).

Protest politization. Some young people, who formerly sympathized with a certain political register, during campaigns were among their associates and experienced bright emotions of political struggle. As the result, they progressed in their political opinions and in readiness to defend them, became firmly convinced in their political predilections. This tendency is especially notable between those who participated in election campaigns of candidates from nonsystem opposition.

Capitalization of political activity. Some young people understood that participation in political processes can be a kind of the window of opportunity. They began to consider work in a party apparatus, as assistant deputies or in a public council etc. as a career. Thus, through her participation in an election campaign, a young journalist was among nomenclature activists, took part in a forum and decided to specialize in political journalism, which meant to report about the initiatives of regional authorities.

Intentions to emigrate. Our respondents often mention the theme of possible emigration. Of course, this cannot be the direct sequence of their participation in election campaigns, but the respondents themselves touched the emigration theme in the contexts of their assessment of the political contest level in this country. Two respondents when being interviewed had already left; one for England (to work), the other in Germany (to learn). "When I think of these themes, I consider them from the standpoint of how my children will live, in what country... This year I have decided for myself to leave Russia. In five years' prospect, I would not be a citizen of Russia" (fem., an individual entrepreneur).

Thus, the participation in election campaigns has had its result. Some young people having examined election technology closely, have decided never to vote in the future, others, on the contrary, have strengthened their wish to action and defend their political ideals. Someone has found new career opportunities, another interpreted one's experience as an argument in favor of emigration.

Conclusion. The variety of election campaigns, differing with their finance opportunities and ideological tendencies, supplemented with variety of functions in every campaign, gives an opportunity to attract young people with different motives and skills. The mobilization channels can be informal network or formalized ones, clearly or concealed jointed to the authorities. In the latter case the mobilization of young people, usually called volunteers, is a form of the conversion of the administrative resource into the electoral victory, i.e., into political resource.

The motivation of the youth who participates in election campaigns is not limited with the support of political forces arousing the greatest sympathy. This motive is demonstrated openly mostly by advocates of the extreme political register, i.e., nonsystemic opposition. In the rest space of parties and candidates the attraction of youth to participate in election campaigns is realized with different motives, reduced to such concepts as crowds (parties), money, career. Such young people choose for themselves the work of street agitators or political operatives. The motivation reduced to the respect for the law, mobilizes young people to fulfil the duties of public observers or members of precinct election commissions.

Widely spread use of the "political volunteerism" term applicated to young people, street agitators or those who distribute campaign production, is often unjustified. They may not share the views of a promoted candidate or a party (they may be indifferent or even critical to them) and consider the work to be done exclusively for the sake of money or experience. But it does not mean that political volunteers as such do not exist.

The imitation of volunteerism has a positive impact on a candidate image. Also, it removes the problem of the payment for young people labor, which nearly always points to the campaign's unreported budget. Formally, they are volunteers, because they have no written labor contract. The payment is made by the oral agreement with every risk of informal transactions.

It is important that in young people perception their participation in election campaigns does not mean long-term reputational risks for them. With a rare exception related to the extreme pole of nonsystem opposition young people do not associate themselves with candidates and parties. Many respondents remember the fact of their participation in election campaigns, but they find difficulty in naming the party they worked for, especially as the parties could differ in various election campaigns.

The consequences of such a participation are extremely contradictory. On the one hand, having got an experience of electoral struggle, some young people get interested in politics and are involved in electoral process. On the other, the opportunity to see elections from within often leads young people to political indifference and full detachment from electoral matter. The space of instrumental application of skills having been got during election campaigns is spread between these two poles.

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