

TRANSFORMATION OF YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Some studies on political participation claim that recent decades in post-industrial societies, citizens have become increasingly disengaged from the traditional channels of political participation. Researchers are concerned about the declining levels of civic and political engagement, low electoral turnout, eroding public confidence in the institutions of representative democracy, and other signs of public discontent weariness, skepticism, cynicism and lack of trust in politicians and political parties. Moreover, there is a development of «critical citizens», who are not politically and civically active. The majority claim that young people are politically disengaged and apathetic. Nevertheless, a sizeable segment of young people are not politically disengaged, instead they just prefer non-conventional forms of political participation to rather than conventional methods. Despite the fact that the «ruling» consider today's adolescents to be politically passive and apathetic.

Young people are politically passive and do not care about what is happening in their country, young people simply have abandoned traditional (institutional) forms of political participation as voting, party membership, considering them to be dutiful. All of these researchers' observations are true. However, what are the possible reasons for such apathy among today's youth and why do they abandon traditional forms of political participation? This article considers the newly emerged forms of political participation and explains several reasons why the youth avoid traditional forms of participation. The author of this article analyzes the different factors which facilitate and inhibit the level of participation.

New typology of political participation and civic engagement

By reviewing literature on political participation, it is not always clear where political participation begins and ends. The problem of the theoretical framework of the literature on political participation is that there is no single typology of political participation. Every theorist makes own adjustments. It is very important to clearly know what political participation is and differentiate between its different forms, in particular to distinguish «political participation» from

other similar concepts namely «civic engagement».

It is well-known, that there are two commonly agreed types of political participation: conventional and unconventional political participation, or in other words, legal and illegal political participation.

Martin A. [1] in his work mentions that political participation before 1960s was associated only with the conventional types of political participation which are largely centered around the electoral world and political parties. For instance, Verba and Nie [2] classified four modes of political participation: voting, campaign activities, individual citizen-initiated contacting and group or organizational activity. However, as protests and other sorts of political participation increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s, research gradually came to reflect this; hence, Barnes and Kaase [3] took a broader approach and examined protest which was conceptualized as citizens' willingness to engage in strikes, boycotts, signing petitions and attending demonstrations. Their and other researchers' work on protest broadened the meaning of political participation by considering not only the electoral form of political participation but also the non-electoral form of political participation.

Thus, before researchers cared about the declining electoral participation and declining membership of political parties, with the emerging of non-electoral forms of participation, there emerged other studies on political participation, expanding the meaning of the concept of «political participation».

Now it is difficult to understand the meaning of political participation due to the fact that citizens' involvement in political processes which are changing. On the one hand, there is a world of state regulated, traditional forms of engagement undertaken by qualified members, while, in parallel to this world, young people engage in projects and institutions that display a form of self-organization that distance itself from conventional political engagement [4]. Researchers actively try to capture changes in citizens' participation and engagement in politics and society but there are so many forms of civic engagement as well as political participation that they have in stock. So, it is very crucial to understand what political participation is and know its forms.

Recent theoretical developments already mirror this very broad and diversified notion of civic and political engagement and participation. Berger [5], for instance, in his critical reflection about «civic engagement», he suggests that the concept of 'engagement' is unexplored and need to be developed, rejecting, therefore, a totalizing and a

simplistic definition. Berger argues that these two notions of political and civic participation are very broad and diversified. He argues that 'political engagement' refers to attentive activity, which involves the polity, i.e. affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action.

However, the civic concept is too wide, and have lost its meaning. On the other hand, the concept of 'political engagement' is too narrow, in the sense that its comprehensive definition to date encompasses only actions and activities that are in some way 'directed toward influencing political outcomes in society'.

In 2012 Swedish researchers Ekman and Amnå[6] proposed a new typology, combining all types, including conventional and unconventional types of political participation. They introduced a nuanced picture of the new typology which gives us the clear picture of the conceptual confusion that may be found in current research on civic engagement and declining levels of political participation. In their developed new typology they suggest two big groups of political participation: civil participation (or latent political participation) and manifest political participation (take a look at the Table 1).

Their new typology makes a clear distinction between 'manifest' political participation and less direct or 'latent' forms of participation, as well as between 'individual' and 'collective' forms of participation in order to cover conventional and new forms of participation. This typology by Ekman and Amnå captured basically all types of political behavior: attentiveness and interest to politics, civic engagement which includes voluntary work and social and political activities based on personal interest, formal political participation (voting, membership in political parties and organizations), and extra-parliamentary participation which encompasses legal and illegal political activism.

Complexity of choices of political participation

Youths are considered an important segment of a country's population. The youth plays significant role in the process of progress and development of any country. If young people opt for non-action and non-participation in politics and voting, it could bring forth a negative effect on the overall political process of the country. Many Kazakhstani researchers and public figures claim that Kazakhstan youth is politically disengaged and apathetic at all. Young people in Kazakhstan are less exposed to political information, showing lower level of political knowledge.

Table 1 – Latent and manifest political participation by Ekman and Amnå

Civil participation (latent political participation)		Manifest political participation		
Involvement (attention)	Civic engagement (action)	Formal political participation	Activism (extra-parliamentary participation)	
			Legal	Illegal
Individual form				
Personal interest in politics and societal issues Attentiveness to political issues	Activities based on personal interest in and attention to politics and societal issues	Electoral participation and contact activities	Extra-parliamentary forms of participation: to make one's voice heard or to make a difference by individual means (e.g. signing petitions, political consumption)	Politically motivated unlawful acts on an individual basis
Collective forms				
A sense of belonging to a group or a collective with a distinct political profile or agenda Life-style related politics (e.g. identity, clothes, music, food, values)	Voluntary work to improve conditions in the local community, for charity, or to help others (outside the own family and circle of friends)	Organized political participation: membership in conventional political parties, trade unions and organizations	Loosely organized forms or network-based political participation: new social movements, demonstrations, strikes, and protests	Illegal and violent activities and protests: demonstrations, riot, squatting buildings, damaging property, confrontations with the police or political opponents

However, there is yet another contradictory opinion concerning the political activity of the youth. Farthing [7] suggests that it is not possible to use a simple approach to analyze the complexity of young people's civic and political engagement. Instead, she argues that 'a more helpful conceptualization requires moving beyond the claim that young people are either politically engaged or disengaged, to acknowledge that both engagement and disengagement are simultaneously occurring'.

On the other hand, some studies suggest that the new generation when compared to previous generations of youth has access to a plethora of choices in regards to political participation. Furthermore, the youth prefer more personalized politics of self-actualization through digital networking or consumer activism [8]. The popularity of non-institutional forms of political participation of youth is caused by the attractiveness and simplicity of self-expression by protests as one of the means of political involvement.

According to Verba, extra-parliamentary forms of participation are a peculiar message from young people with limited political resources. It is easier and more convenient to express your relation

towards different political questions using extra-parliamentary forms of participation. This change with the expansion of protests is because it allows for richer forms of individual self-expression than voting or mere membership in a political party does. This greater freedom and precision in expressing individual preferences fits better with the emerging post-materialist values [9].

The preference for an extra-parliamentary way of participation seen among various Kazakhstani youth is explained by recent emergence of new political behavior among youth. It is a change of political values and attitude seen in youth's values and attitudes. According to Inglehart, younger generations in advanced societies are experiencing a transition from traditional (materialist) values to secular-rational values much like the change from survivalist to self-expressionist values (post-materialist values).

In the case of Kazakhstan, protests, boycotts and other types of non-institutional participation are evaluated by citizens of Kazakhstan as the preferable way of confronting and challenging the political system and its elites. Hence, it functions as the channels of expression for social dissatisfaction.

What factors facilitate and inhibit political participation of Kazakhstan youth?

Apathy among youth can be a fundamental problem because it can spread indifference among individuals, ultimately distracting from sociopolitical affairs of life [10]. Here, we consider several explanations of political apathy and disengagement from decision-making young people.

Firstly, they are exposed daily to a large number of social activities, objects, cultural norms, religious beliefs, etc. Because of their limited time, they select only personal life, education, work and are engaged in the growth of well-being. This inevitable limited choice can produce political disengagement among people, especially youth. As a result, it is generally accepted that youth in Kazakhstan are politically passive, though they could have an interest in politics and desire to be active citizens who contribute to the growth of their country.

Let us define what apathy is in political context. *Apathy* is defined either as a particular state of mind wherein there is a lack of feeling, passion, or interest or as a type of behavior indicating the lack of participation and lack of action [11]. Both the symptom and the syndrome of apathy are of conceptual interest because they signify loss of motivation. Loss of motivation due to disturbance of intellect, emotion, or level of consciousness defines the symptom of apathy. Marin [12] conceptualized apathy as a loss of motivation not attributable to emotional distress, cognitive impairment, or diminished level of consciousness.

Apathy is another term for passivity, submissiveness, and even numbness reaching epidemic proportions when it comes to social, economic, environmental, and political issues. Symptoms of apathy include lack of awareness, concern, social responsibility, and prevents participation and actions including voting. This is particularly apparent for those in the age group 18 to 24 years of age.

Apathy is not simply the absence of political engagement or lack of motivation. According to Gordon and Taft [13], apathy among youth is actively shaped through multiple social processes and points of social marginalization. They further supported the assumption that youth apathy is the normal and pre-socialized state of being young. Many studies have suggested that apathy leads to non-action and nonparticipation in the social and political affairs of society during an individual's life. So it is assumed that the apathetic person fails to take part in the social and political sphere of life

because he or she lacks any feeling or interest in the matter at hand.

So in order to be politically active, there is a basic need – the existence of interest towards politics. Further development of civic education is supported by *political interest* of a person. Without political interest there is no motivation to follow the news and gain a deeper form of knowledge. Political interest also is a main index of a lifelong political participation. There should also exist a desire and pride of being a member of society, and part of a political context.

What are the other factors which facilitate political participation of citizens? Surely, it is important to avoid presenting a compartmentalized vision of the factors that influence people's civic and political participation. However, the author tried to mention all those factors which facilitate and inhibit the level of political participation of a citizen.

From an individual approach, we can underlie such factors as *education, level of informatization, the role of educational institutions, family and media*. Education has a positive impact on political interest because it provides individuals with the resources and the civic awareness to understand the world of politics, in addition to giving them greater capacity to influence it [14]. Civic education is strongly and positively correlated with political engagement, increases the effectiveness of political participation. Civic education is the 'preparation of young people so that they possess the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for an active participation in society. The improved levels of education go hand-in-hand with a genuine revolution in access to information.

The *media* plays an important role by directly linking individuals to politics. Traditional media (radio, TV, newspapers) and new media (social networking websites, blogs) have a tremendous influence on political and civic knowledge and the level of activism in a group of people. Internet offers enormously diverse and rich ways to access political information. People can now choose the content and ideological perspectives of their political information from a very long catalogue. Young people are more able to establish a direct relationship with political causes of their interest and have less need for intermediary organizations, parties or institutions due to a greater cognitive mobilization than previous generations. Mobilizing role of Internet is also known for political participation, for instance, Arab Spring mobilization of youth.

In Kazakhstan young people also widely use Internet as a tool for access information. In popular social network as Facebook young people promote,

share and «like» different political and social materials, post their own thoughts and observation, engage in different discussions in commentaries, add to popular politicians and public figure to their friend lists.

Initially, civic education and political socialization are obtained at *educational institutions* (schools, colleges, universities) and within families, where a person gains political and social knowledge, learns to discuss public problems with others. Political and social subjects (courses) are mandatory at schools and universities of Kazakhstan regardless the specialty. There is no doubt, that students do gain knowledge in social sciences. Schools' and universities' public life are rich in different debates, discussions, local elections, etc. Thus, educational institutions are one of the main places where the youth learn to socialize and participate.

Families play a special role in political socialization of youth and in the development of

social and civic education of a person. Political preferences and political views of parents could have a big impact on political preferences and views of their children. The existence of books and journals at home, the style of parents' communicating, their civic volunteerism, etc. influence the level of politicization of their children. Moreover, some children bring 'family traditions' such as watching news on TV and reading newspapers to their new families.

As previously mentioned, political activity of people includes complex factors such as the presence of interest in politics, high level of informatization, civic education, etc. In order to be highly informed there is a need of access to the Internet in order to monitor all socio-economic and political news in the country. If a person is able to be informed about news in the country and have a good knowledge of government laws, then he or she will have an accurate understanding of the current socio-political situation in the country.

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