

# The role of the sense of nationhood and political participation in shaping anti-terrorist attitudes among the youth of the North Caucasus

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**Abstract.** The article reveals the state, dynamics and focus of political activity and civic participation of young people as one of the foundations for the formation of anti-terrorist attitudes. Young people have a high potential for socio-political activity and a demand for change. The ethnopolitical specificity of the North Caucasus increases the risks of its protest and conflict mobilisation. The authors analyse the 2019, 2020 and 2021 survey data from among students of leading universities of the North Caucasus. According to the research results, significant differences in the degree of readiness for various forms of political activity and civic participation depending on ethnic and confessional affiliation were discovered. Among the young people with the most pronounced attitudes towards political activity and civic participation are young people who can be characterised by low religious commitment and traditionalism, as well as pronounced individualistic attitudes. Most of the respondents are willing to vote in elections and participate in the activities of volunteer organisations. Over the past three years, the influence of the leading media and educational system on shaping the political views of young people has significantly decreased, while the influence of the blogosphere and social networks remains steadily high. The growth of individualistic attitudes is a long-term trend that has effect on the socio-political processes in the region.

**Keywords:** North Caucasus, youth, political activity, civic participation, world view

## 1 Introduction

The contemporary North Caucasus, despite the continuing huge diversity of ethnic and confessional communities, is largely a single region; it can be characterised by many social, economic and cultural ties between its subjects. The specificity of the region makes it a kind of ‘barometer of the country’ because the problems typical of Russia as a whole are more

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pronounced here, the risks of the actualisation of the destructive potential of socio-political conflicts continue to persist. The need to update the North Caucasus implies activating the human potential, developing the political activity and civic participation of young people, since it provides the basis for and is a driving force for the region's further development. Thus, R. Inglehart notes that the views and values of young people will become dominant in society after 10-15 years [1]. Modern youth is not internally homogeneous, a single community. It represents different micro-communities, which differ significantly from each other in both their value-based and worldview foundations and the level of socio-political activity. In a number of domestic studies, there is a departure from understanding the youth as an object of social and political processes. It is considered as a subject, an independent and full-fledged actor in the social and political life of the country [2, 3].

The Russian science has a developed sociological tradition of studying the public consciousness transformations, the nature and area of political activity of various age cohorts. A great contribution to the research into the characteristics of macropolitical identities, the political and ideological preferences of Russians, in the context of modern political transformations, as well as to the development of sociological survey tools, was made by many quantitative studies conducted by Russian sociologists and pollologists [4-10]. The use of a quantitative method (a sociological survey) in this research made it possible to measure the variables that reflect the degree and area of the political activity of the youth of the North Caucasus, to determine their attitude to significant socio-cultural and political processes, and to identify the dependence of the studied variables on both ethnic and religious affiliation.

The target of research in this article is the youth of the leading universities of the North Caucasus. The relevance of the choice of this target is determined by both the rather high potential of its socio-political activity and the demand for change that has developed among the youth, certain protest moods, and by the presence of the unlocked potential of its political and civic activism. The region's ethno-political specificity also increases the protest and conflict mobilisation risks among young people. The purpose of the research is to analyse the results of sociological surveys of the youth of the North Caucasus conducted in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and identify the current state, dynamics and line of political activity and civic participation of young people in the region.

## 2 Materials and methods

This research is based on a combination of qualitative ('conscious') and quantitative methods. The discourse analysis methodology is used to study complex and non-linear socio-political processes in the multi-ethnic youth communities of the North Caucasus, identify their connection with the global trends of our time which are eroding traditional value systems and macroidentities. Theoretical and methodological approaches to research into the background knowledge of the youth of the North Caucasus are supplemented by an analysis of the base of sociological surveys conducted in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The results of three sociological surveys conducted in 2019, 2020 and 2021 provided the empirical basis for assessments and perceptions of young people in the field of political activity and civic participation. The target of the surveys were students aged 18-24 years of the leading universities of the North Caucasus that accumulated in themselves young people, representatives of all territorial entities of the North Caucasus Federal District. The sample size was about 1,000 respondents. The surveys were conducted online. Survey tools, in addition to indicators aimed at determining the significance of political activity and civic participation for respondents, and some other variables aimed at identifying young people's ideas about the socio-cultural and political processes taking place in the region.

### 3 Results

The 2019-2021 sociological survey results say that in the minds of young people there is a demand for the creation of a favourable social environment that provides a variety of opportunities to get involved in the socio-political life of the country. The majority of respondents consider it necessary for the young people to actively participate in the public and political life of the country (2019 – 77%, 2020 – 73%, 2021 – 71%). At the same time, the awareness of the need for active political participation characterises the Russian youth to a greater extent (75%) than the youth of the peoples of the Caucasus (63%). Differences within the framework of ethnic and religious affiliation can be explained by a greater distance of power and the traditional nature of political consciousness, the persisting traditional attitudes towards authoritarianism and paternalism, and less importance for the representatives of the North Caucasian peoples and Muslims of the principle of active political participation (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Respondents’ answers to the question ‘Do you consider the active participation of young people in the political life of the country necessary?’ 2021 (%).

	Ethnic group			Confession of faith		
	Total for the North Caucasus, n=1027	Russians	Peoples of the North Caucasus	Orthodox	Muslims	Not affiliated with any religion
Do you consider the active participation of young people in the political life of the country necessary?						
Yes	75	63	71	61	78	
No	9	17	9	11	11	
Difficult to answer	16	20	20	28	11	

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Most of the surveyed young people in the region believe that their social activity can influence the change in the socio-political situation in the country for the better. In 2019, there were 54% of such respondents, in 2021 – 52%. In their opinion, the strive for change can be realised through active participation in political processes. However, the absolute majority are not active actors in the political processes in the country and region.

Most respondents are also ready to get engaged in the activities of volunteer organisations (2019 – 60%, 2020 – 53%, 2021 – 65%). It is noteworthy that more representatives of the North Caucasian youth are ready to participate in the activities of volunteer organisations. Volunteering seems to young people a good school of social activity, solidarity and mutual assistance, an example of unselfish and altruistic activities.

In the research, it was essential to determine the risks of conflict among young people when defending their political views. When answering the question ‘Do you consider it possible for yourself to take a personal part in the conflict in defending your political views?’ more than a third of respondents considered it possible for themselves to take part in such a conflict. Differences in ethnic and religious affiliation are insignificant. At the same time, there are many more such young people (50%) among those who do not identify themselves with any religion (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Respondents' answers to the question 'Do you consider it possible for yourself to take a personal part in a conflict in defending your political views?' 2021 (%).

Do you consider it possible for yourself to take a personal part in a conflict in defending your political views?	Total for the North Caucasus, n=1027	Ethnic group			Confession of faith	
		Russians	Peoples of the North Caucasus	Orthodox	Muslims	Not affiliated with any religion
Yes		39	40	36	35	50
No		30	24	30	27	23
Difficult to answer		31	36	34	38	27

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

The surveyed young people's orientation towards individualism is manifested in the priority for the majority of individual success, recognition and well-being over the success and well-being of their people, and the greatness of the Motherland. When answering the question 'What is more significant for you?' the majority of respondents in the North Caucasus chose individual success, recognition and well-being, and not the success and well-being of their people, the greatness of the Motherland. Among them, the most individualistic are young people who do not identify themselves with any religion and are ethnic Russians.

Among the main actors, that influenced the formation of the political views of young people, according to the results of the 2019-2021 surveys, the environment in which young people communicate and spend a lot of time stands out (2019 – 73%, 2020 – 72%, 2021 – 72%). No less important for the majority is the influence of the blogosphere and social networks (2019 – 59%, 2020 – 58%, 2021 – 58%). The influence of close relatives also remains significant (2019 – 57%, 2020 – 50%, 2021 – 53%). For three years, the influence of those actors has remained virtually unchanged while the influence of the leading media (TV, radio, newspapers) has been significantly decreasing (2019 – 56%, 2020 – 43%, 2021 – 37%). This is most likely due to the fact that the content of the mainstream media arouses less and less interest among young people and is not consistent with the values, attitudes and lifestyles of most young people. Young people are much more active than older people, use the Internet and social networks, watch TV less. Focus is on the low influence of teachers and teachers, the state education system as a whole, the formation of the respondents' political views (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Answers of respondents to the question 'Who, in your opinion, influenced shaping your political views?' 2019-2021 (%).

Who, in your opinion, influenced shaping your political views?	Key actors of influence	2019	2020	2021
	Communication environment		73	72
Blogosphere and social networks		59	58	58
Close relatives		57	50	53
Leading media (TV, radio, newspapers)		56	43	37
Instructors, teachers		53	32	34

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

Today, the state educational system remains the main tool for the socialisation of young people, the creation of the foundations of the civil-patriotic worldview of new generations. The loss of its former significance and prestige, the replacement of the authority of the

teacher-educator, by the influence of various bloggers and mass culture figures, often broadcasting openly destructive content, certainly provides a serious challenge with far-reaching consequences.

## 4 Discussion

In overseas political studies, a trend that is becoming increasingly pronounced today, namely the departure of the ‘public person’ from the political sphere to that of private life, is substantiated [11-13]. In trying to identify the place of politics in an ‘personalised society’, Z. Bauman writes about ‘erosion and gradual degradation of the ideas of citizenship’, about ‘colonisation of the ‘public’ by the ‘private’’, about the emasculation of the ‘public interest’ [14]. In such a society, the usual political figures of authority disappear, the resulting void is filled by the ‘individual ‘I’.

The results of this research indicate the internal heterogeneity of the younger generation, and it does not always depend on ethnicity. The majority of young people can be attributed to the ‘self-sufficient’ part of the Russian society, for which the importance of state paternalism and authority acquired by virtue of their position or seniority is decreasing, while public or state interests give way to the interests of individual citizens. At the same time, ‘self-sufficiency’ should not be considered as a destructive and conflictive setting. The region’s youth, regardless of ethnicity, is rapidly assimilating contemporary ideas about life, patterns of behaviour and interpersonal relationships. For her, issues related to the lack of opportunities for successful self-realisation are becoming increasingly important. The weak pace of socio-economic development in the North Caucasus, unemployment, low living standards and complicated conditions for doing business and social activities often become factors contributing to the desire to leave the region.

It can be assumed that the emergence of young people, who put individualism above collectivist principles on the political stage, will lead to the updating the demand for change in society, while it is not at all necessary that this will take destructive and protest forms [15]. In the context of the growing instability of the modern world, a ‘strong’ state endowed with the necessary resources and powers is seen as the only effective multi-purpose mechanism capable of successfully responding to ever new challenges, addressing domestic and foreign policy challenges, expressing the interests of the majority of citizens, formulating goals and programmes for future development. Subject to the development of a state ideology adequate to present-day developments, an increase in the efficiency of the work of government institutions and the level of political and legal culture, individualism and ‘self-sufficiency’ can become resources for modernization and ensure the innovative development of the North Caucasus, one of the foundations of the anti-terrorist consciousness of youth.

## 5 Conclusion

In the minds of the young people of the North Caucasus, there is a demand for the creation of a favourable social and political environment that provides various opportunities for political and civic participation. The results of surveys in 2019, 2020 and 2021 discovered differences in the level of readiness for political activity and civic participation among the youth of the region depending on ethnic and confessional affiliation. Differences in ethnic and confessional affiliation can be explained by the greater traditionalism of the worldview of the youth of the North Caucasian peoples and Muslims.

Overall, over the past three years, among the youth of the region, the indicators of political and civic engagement have remained fairly stable. Most of all, young people are ready to vote in elections and engage in the activities of volunteer organisations. The influence on

shaping the political views of the environment in which young people communicate and spend a lot of time, as well as the blogosphere and social networks, remains consistently high. The influence of the mainstream media has declined significantly. Young people are becoming less and less exposed to the state-controlled media. In the past two years, the influence of the education system on shaping the political views of young people has also sharply decreased, which is largely associated with the self-isolation and distance learning modes.

According to the research results, it can be assumed that the majority of young people with the most pronounced attitudes towards political activity and civic participation are representatives of the most educated youth, who can be characterised by low religiosity and traditionalism, as well as pronounced individualistic mindsets. For them, the importance of such politicised modern values as freedom, tolerance, minority rights, gender equality and civil patriotism will increase as the basis for political identification and the formation of new ‘solidarities’.

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