

Potential of Voter Turnout among Young People in the Case of Application of E-Voting, Postal Voting, and Three-Day Voting

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Abstract

This study is aimed at discovering possible reasons for young people's refusal to participate in elections in Russia and studying the attitudes of young people toward increasing voter turnout via electronic voting, postal voting, and three-day voting. The authors conducted a sociological survey of young people aged 18 to 29, mostly from the Astrakhan region of the Russian Federation, relying on a non-institutional approach and rational choice. The research results showed that E-voting is more convenient for citizens with health problems, busy people, and those who do not have free time. Voting by mail can ensure that voting is accessible to all. The most important requirement for elections in the event of multi-day voting is legitimacy and recognition of the results by all political forces and society. Thus, voter turnout among young people might be increased via E-voting, postal voting, and three-day voting.

Keywords: voter turnout, absenteeism, E-voting, mail voting, three-day voting.

Introduction

At present, in most democratic states of the world, the electoral activity of young people is a fundamental factor in the effectiveness of state power, for it demonstrates the functioning of civil society and institutions to the proper extent. In Russia, on the other hand, the tendencies of apoliticality among young people are increasing, manifested in the shift of the value system toward family and material well-being. This may negatively affect the future of the state since this stratum of the population must make important political decisions in the future.

Logunova (2017) believes that it is precisely the low level of trust in the authorities and the political absenteeism of modern Russian youth that contributes to the spread of the opinion about the lack

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of legitimacy of the entire political system. In this regard, state structures should pay special attention to increasing electoral activity among this age group, which in the future can also have a positive effect on the development of civil society. According to the results of a joint statistical study with the Levada Center, “Russian Generation Z: Attitudes and Values,” almost 60% of young people are not interested in the political life of the state, and their trust in national government institutions is at the lowest level (Stiftung, 2020).

Usually, options are proposed for solving the problem of youth non-participation in elections such as improving the legal culture of voters and taking preventive measures for the future electorate. According to Makhora (2018), at the present stage, public authorities are striving to pursue a youth policy aimed at the legal education of young people and an increase in their electoral activity. Educational institutions offer classes on electoral law and often involve local politicians, teachers, and students to organize educational events (Mityunova, 2020).

Thus, there exists in the Russian Federation a problem of absenteeism from participation in elections among young people. Electronic voting, mail voting, and three-day voting were applied in the amendment to the electoral legislation of the Russian Federation in 2020, and we believe that voter turnout among young people can be increased if E-voting, postal voting, and three-day voting are used on an ongoing basis.

Research Questions

The following questions guide the research procedures in this study:

- 1) How do young potential voters perceive the application of E-voting, mail voting, and three-day voting in Russia in terms of participation, preparation, method, feeling, and attitude?
- 2) Which percentage of young people in the Russian Federation, on the example of the Astrakhan region, will take part in elections if the state uses E-voting, three-day voting, or postal voting?
- 3) What is the connection between the non-participation of young people in elections in the Russian Federation and the absence of the use of E-voting, three-day voting, or mail voting?

Theoretical Framework

Previous studies show that there is a problem of absenteeism, a decline in interest in participating in elections among young people in the Russian Federation. Ritter (2020) argues that effective social studies education should include an understanding of ourselves within communities of shared fate collectively building strategies of civility, that citizenship education should be

grounded in communities of fate rather than a sense of shared identity as a member of a particular country. Houdyshell and Ziegler (2020) consider that higher education needs individuals working with students to have the skills to handle a variety of issues related to success and well-being. Jeffries and McCorkle (2020) researched low youth voter turnout nationally by examining a study of teacher candidates at a South Carolina public university; the study is useful for understanding the civic engagement of two important demographics: youth voters and future educators. Political absenteeism is “a conscious decision not to participate in elections due to the lack of utilitarian motives and reasons for voting” (Savenkov & Sotnikov, 2020). Brager, Volkova, and Litvinov (2020) revealed the following signs of absenteeism as a deliberate boycott: “voters’ isolation from voting; conscientiousness of the actions of potential voters; the presence of prerequisites that push voters to refuse to take part in elections.” Mass electoral absenteeism hinders the formation of civil society, legitimate, effective government, and administration, which are indispensable institutions of democratic political systems (Kachalov, 2020).

Today, many scientists note the existence of the problem of political absenteeism in the Russian Federation. Citizens refuse to take part in elections at various levels (Bersh & Yakimova, 2020). Nebredovskaya (2013) notes that “from election to election, the Russian Federation is faced with such a negative social phenomenon as the low turnout of persons entitled to vote”; insufficient attention is often paid to the problem of population activity during elections, although the level of voter turnout has a noticeable effect on the outcome of the vote (Lukonina, 2007). Milaeva and Shikova (2014) cite the features of the current stage of development of the electoral process in the Russian Federation from the perspective of voter behavior. Bezverbnaya (2016) gives the main approaches to assessing the behavior of voters, presenting the results of a sociological study conducted by questioning the population on the issues of electoral activity in the Irkutsk region. Frolov (2017) presents the results of an index study of civic engagement in the Yaroslavl region. Zulyar and Grigoriev (2016) study protest voting as a factor in the election of the governor of the Irkutsk region. The decline in youth interest in elections is due to apathy regarding the political conduct of affairs by the government of the Russian Federation (Akhmadullina et al., 2020). Smulkina (2020) notes the results of a study of the rational and unconscious aspects of the role expectations of the voter among Russian citizens. The specifics of political absenteeism in various political systems raises the question of the causes of absenteeism, whether it is a consequence of political indifference or an expression of passive protest (Chertova, 2020).

A fairly large part of the scientific works of Russian scientists is devoted to political absenteeism among young people (Panova et al., 2020; Saenko et al., 2020). Topical issues related to the formation of the legal culture of young voters analyze factors associated with specific interests and values that affect electoral activity (Kalimullina et al., 2021; Lavrentieva & Kovaleva, 2020; Shatunova et al., 2021). Kochemasova (2018) presents the results of a survey of 700 people, including 100 senior schoolchildren, and reveals the tendency of the level of absenteeism depending on the gender of the respondent, substantiating the necessity and possibility of preventing absenteeism among the future electorate. Makhmudov (2018) looks at the key mechanisms for the development of absenteeism among Russian youth and, on the basis of this analysis, proposes effective forms of developing youth activity. Dareev (2020) studies the political absenteeism of student youth in the Republic of Buryatia. Vorobiev, Konstantinova, and Eremenko (2020) conduct research to determine political orientations and identify factors and motives that affect the political behavior of young people in Krasnoyarsk. Rastimeshina and Ogorodov (2020) cite the results of a sociological study on the degree of awareness of Russian youth about the adoption of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the degree of approval of these amendments. Basinov (2020) examines comparative psychograms of the groups of respondents formed on the basis of the reasons they expressed for not taking part in the elections. Our purpose is to study the electoral activity of young people, as well as the possibilities of increasing turnout among young people via electronic voting, postal voting, and three-day voting. We rely on a non-institutional approach, and a variant of this approach is rational choice.

Methods

Design

This study applies a descriptive design and a quantitative approach to analyze data (Creswell, 2014) using a social survey. Specifically, this study refers to an online survey on E-voting conducted in Russia. Our aims were to see possible reasons for young people declining to participate in elections and studying the attitudes of young people in Russia toward the introduction of E-voting, postal voting, and voting during a period of three days. In 2020, the Russian Federation introduced the possibility of using electronic voting, voting by mail, and multi-day voting; despite this, citizens have the right to independently choose their method of voting.

Our study took place in five areas of Russia: Astrakhan and its region, Moscow and its region, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, and Crimea Gomel.

Sample

The sample of the study were 85 people involved in voting in the three-day general election in Russia. The respondents consisted of 59 women (69.4%) and 26 men (30.6%) aged between 18-29 years, mostly from the Astrakhan region of the Russian Federation. The sample was recruited using systematic sampling techniques, applying to every five young people from 18 to 29 years old. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1.
Sample characteristics

Characteristics	Sample	
	F N=85	%
Gender		
Women	59	69.4
Men	26	30.6
Age		
18-20	27	31.8
21-24	30	35.3
25-29	28	32.9
Urban or Rural		
Urban	77	90.6
Rural	8	9.4
Place of Residence		
Astrakhan and Astrakhan region	71	83.5
Moscow and Moscow region	10	11.7
Karachay-Cherkess Republic	3	3.62
Crimea Gomel	1	1.18
Level of Education		
Higher vocational education	50	58.8
Secondary vocational education	9	10.6
Basic general and primary education	26	30.6

Research Instrument

This study uses an open-ended questionnaire as the research instrument. We argue that this kind of instrument is a flexible method for collecting data. The items are structured according to a pre-written script of six items, as follows:

1. How often do you take part in elections?

(The following questions are for those who answer “sometimes,” “rarely,” and “never”)

2. What needs to be done to make you go to the elections?

3. Which of the following voting methods do you consider the most convenient: E-voting, three-day voting, or postal voting?

4. How do you feel about three-day voting?
5. How do you feel about the introduction of postal voting?
6. What is your attitude to the introduction of E-voting in Russia?

We used open questions in a free text format, which allowed us to obtain new qualitative data. Open polls were specific enough that we received consistent responses from our respondents. The items of the questionnaire were developed by the researchers by applying two procedures. First, to identify proper topics and statements, the researchers consulted to the general election committee. Second, to check the validity and reliability of the instrument, the researchers conducted a pilot study assigning 20 young people from a specific age range and geographical location. The results of the pilot study indicated that some wording should be rephrased to adjust for age, education, and experience of the participants. In addition, the researchers also learned how to identify themes and frequency of respondent answers so that data analysis was properly conducted.

Data Collection

Data was collected online from 100 respondents in five regions of Russia: Astrakhan and its region, Moscow and its region, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, and Crimea Gomel. The data collection was completed in three weeks. Procedures to collect data are as follows:

First, prior to data collection, the researchers distributed 100 six-item open-ended online questionnaires to anticipate a sample of 85 respondents. Some responses were defective and did not provide complete data appropriate to our analysis. In this regard, 92 replies to the six-item open-ended questionnaire were available; the researchers selected 85 replies. This technique confirmed that the selected 85 respondents returned their answers properly.

Second, the researchers distributed the six-item open-ended questionnaire in one day to 100 respondents residing in five regions of Russia. The 100 replies were returned fully in three weeks: the first week 36 replies, the second week 45 replies, and 19 in the third week. As soon as the replies were accepted, the researchers identified their answers, categorized them according to the themes, and classified the themes into the proper research questions.

Third, after the 100 replies were accepted, the researchers sorted the answers and selected the fixed 85 replies. The replies that were not used especially were the respondents residing in one region,

as the replies were appropriate but the respondents' ages were not as expected. The responses were identified based on the properness of items 1 to 6 to display in Tables 1-6.

Data Analysis

We used descriptive statistics to analyze data using SPSS package version 29. The data were particularly analyzed in the forms of frequency, rate percentage, and table. Steps to analyze data were as follows:

First, narrative data or text data were identified by their themes and unit of analysis. Responses of six items were classified and changed into frequency and rate percentage. This data was classified according to the same themes and each data was identified as numeric data. The results relevant to the research questions were displayed in tables.

Second, categories of data were confirmed to attributes of the respondents, namely: region, gender, age, and education in tables relevant to items 1 to 6 of our open-ended questionnaire. Each item of the questionnaire served one table containing respondent's answers on the first item. We crosschecked each item and the proper answers of the respondents and displayed them in tables.

Third, after the displays confirmed the attributes of the respondents and answers, the researchers calculated the frequency and rate percentage of each table. Each table and answers was matched to the research question to see whether the data answered the research question appropriately.

Results and Discussion

Participants in Elections

To the question "How often do you take part in elections?" our findings show that 15.3% of respondents answered that they rarely participate in elections, 24.7% responded that sometimes they take part in elections, 25.9% said that they always take part in elections, and 34.1 % of respondents answered that they do not participate in elections.

In addition, 83.5% of all respondents take part in elections "always," "sometimes," and "rarely." To the question "Indicate the reasons why you do not take part in elections, if your answer to the previous question was 'always,' 'sometimes,' or 'rarely,'" the answers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.*Main reasons why young voters participate in elections*

Reasons and Examples of Responses	% of similar answers
- "I care about the future of my country"; "I'm trying to change something"	3.5%
- "I'm interested in this"; "I'm interested in how they are conducted"; "there is a desire"	5.9%
- "I hope that my vote is important"; "participation in elections is like informing the state about your opinion so that it in turn will take it into account"; "perhaps it is my vote that can be decisive"; "I hope that the voice of citizens will someday be heard as a part of the most important resource of the state"; "...of the people, who, according to the law, have the right to vote, which reminds the authorities of what we agree with, or vice versa"; "every citizen should use his or her right to vote at elections of any level"	8.2%
- "I express my point of view"; "I think that every citizen should show his active civil position"; "I want to express my point of view"; "I have an active civil position"	9.4%
- "I feel civic responsibility"; "this is my duty"; "it is necessary"; "I have to"	10.6%

The main reasons why young people take part in elections are the following: 1) there is an interest and desire to participate in elections; 2) participation in elections is considered a duty or obligation; 3) participation in elections in order to express their point of view; 4) participation in elections in order to take into account voters' opinions; 5) participation to change the future of the country.

Not Participating in Elections

We identify that 74.1% of all respondents take part in elections "sometimes," "rarely," and "never." To the question "Why do you not take part in elections (if your answer to the previous question was 'I don't take part,' 'sometimes,' 'rarely')," the answers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Main reasons why young voters do not participate in elections*

Reasons and Examples of Responses	% of similar answers
- "it is not interesting"; "I am not interested in politics"	11.8%
- "I don't participate because I don't believe in elections honesty"; "I don't trust the results"; "lack of faith in the candidates"; "I don't participate because of possible falsifications of the electoral process"; "I consider the elections a formal procedure"	9.4%
- "there is not always enough time"; "busy at work"; "sometimes there is no time"	8.2%
- "it does not change anything"; "there is no particular sense"; "I consider elections a formal procedure"; "my vote does not decide"; "I see no point in this, since the same person wins"; "almost there is no real political opposition, and the small one that exists is not allowed to the elections"	7%
- "I am in another place"; "sometimes there is no physical opportunity"; "being busy at work"	4.7%
- "I do not participate, as I am a foreign citizen"	2.35%
- they take part in separate elections, depending on the status of the election campaign ("I participate only in elections at the federal level"; "I am not interested in some types of elections")	1.17%

Based on the data of Table 3, it follows that the main reasons why young people do not participate in the elections are: 1) there is no interest and desire to participate in elections; 2) there is not enough time; 3) they do not see competition in the elections and any changes after the elections ; 4) they are in another place on the day of the elections; 5) they do not trust the institution of elections and are not sure about the reliability of the electoral system; 6) they do not participate as they are citizens of foreign states.

For the respondents who take part in elections “sometimes,” “rarely,” and “never,” we asked an additional question: “What needs to be done to make you go to the elections?” Let us single out the most frequent answers to this question: 1) “I will take part if E-voting is used” and “In order to take part in the elections, voting must be made independent of the voter’s location and at a convenient time for him”; 2) “The honesty and openness of the electoral process must be ensured, elections should be as transparent and legitimate as possible, to increase the competitiveness of elections so that one can choose from a larger number of candidates and political parties”; 3) “Observation of the polling station should be toughened: it is necessary to invite independent experts to observe the vote counting process”; 4) “For people who do not go to elections, it is necessary to create mechanisms to motivate them to express their civic position, for example, to more actively invite citizens to participate in elections, you can create a system of incentive measures or create a project that demonstrates the importance of the voice of each person”; 5) “The main thing that is important to do is to ensure control over the implementation of the election program, fulfillment of election promises by candidates or political parties, and the disposition of people towards themselves by their work.”

Then we found the answer to our second research question: Which percentage of young people in the Russian Federation, on the example of the Astrakhan region, will take part in elections if the state uses E-voting, three-day voting, or postal voting?

Introduction to Three-Day Voting

To the question “Which of the following voting methods do you consider the most convenient: E-voting, three-day voting, or postal voting?” the following answers were received: E-voting was chosen by 52.9% of respondents, traditional voting at a polling station by 42.4%, and 4.7% preferred to participate in the elections by postal voting. Table 4 presents the answers to the question: “How do you feel about three-day voting?”

Table 4

Results of the answer to the question about the introduction of three-day voting

Examples of Responses	% of similar answers
Adversely, negative, bad, not okay	38.8%
Positive, good, regular, not bad, quite good, approve	35.3%
Neutral, I have no specific opinion	15.3%
Refrained from answering	8.2%
There is no point in voting like this	1.2%
As something real	1.2%

Reasons why the respondents do not approve of three-day voting include: 1) they believe that the introduction of three-day voting may increase the possibility of election fraud (5.9% of the total number of responses); 2) they believe that this may not be legitimate, they do not see the reasons why it is needed (2.4% of the total number of responses); 3) they believe that it is better to vote on one day (1.2% of the total number of responses).

Feelings toward Postal Voting

Table 5 presents the answers to the question: “How do you feel about the introduction of postal voting?”

Table 5

Presents the answers to the question: “How do you feel about the introduction of postal voting?”

Examples of Responses	% of similar answers
Adversely, negative	35.3%
Neutral, I have no specific opinion, I have no idea about it, I do not care	27%
Excellent, positive, good, regular	20%
Refrained from answering	8.2%
Satisfactory, average	5.9%
Pointless, irrelevant	2.4%
Ambiguous	1.2%

We indicate that 9.4% of respondents said that postal voting is not convenient for them, 2.4% of respondents indicated that this measure can increase fraud, and 1.2% of respondents said that 1) it will be more convenient for the elderly; 2) the election process will take a long time; 3) postal voting will be convenient for people with disabilities and for people who are not at the place of registration at the time of the elections, but it is still better to hold elections in person.

Attitudes toward Elections

Table 6 presents the answers to the question: “What is your attitude to the introduction of remote electronic voting in Russia?”

Table 6

Presents the answers to the question: “What is your attitude to the introduction of E-voting in Russia?”

Examples of Responses	% of similar answers
Positive, good, normal, I approve	48%
Adversely, negative	23.5%
Neutral, no difference	14%
This is something new for me, this is interesting	3.5%
Refrained from answering	7%
Ambiguous, positive on the one hand, negative on the other	3.5%

The respondents consider electronic voting as a new voting tool that has not yet been used in the country, they believe that it is convenient, and, in order to take part in the elections, it will not take much time, it inspires confidence in the electoral institution, for voters this way of voting can be simpler. According to the respondents, E-voting can increase voter turnout: It is better to use E-voting so that people can express their position than non-participation of voters in elections at all. The respondents named the disadvantages in the case of using electronic voting: There is no guarantee of confidentiality of voting, I may lose personal data, the electronic voting system can be hacked, and before introducing it, it is necessary to check its security well, there are fears that the electronic system will be used in their interests with a possible correction of the election results, in the case of using electronic voting, it is impossible to identify the voter.

Thus, we can confirm that with the introduction of electronic voting, the number of young voters will increase among those who do not take part in the elections on a permanent basis. The use of E-voting, three-day voting, or mail-order voting can stimulate the participation of young people in elections in the Russian Federation, according to the example of the Astrakhan region.

We can present the answer to our third research question: What is the connection between the non-participation of young people in elections in the Russian Federation and the absence of the use of E-voting, three-day voting, or mail voting? Data show that 8.2% of the respondents answered that they do not have enough time to take part in the elections, or they are busy at work; 4.7% of respondents answered that they are in a different place on Election Day, or they have no physical opportunity to vote. Some of the respondents who answered that they take part in elections “sometimes” and “rarely” to the question about what needs to be done to make them participate in

the elections, answered that they are ready to take part in the elections if electronic voting is introduced. Finally, the main result of our research shows that 48% of all respondents reacted positively to the introduction of electronic voting, 35.3% to the introduction of three-day voting, and 20% to the introduction of voting by mail. We are considering a link between the use of E-voting, three-day voting, or mail voting and youth voter turnout. Thus, in the Russian Federation, work on the creation of new voting methods continues, and changes to the electoral legislation, including the expansion of the possibility of expressing the will of voters using E-voting, voting by mail, and three-day voting, will contribute to the development of the institution of elections.

Multi-day Voting Format

Voting by post in Russia was carried out in 2011 at the elections of the Legislative Assemblies of St. Petersburg and the Murmansk region. In St. Petersburg, 1,564 voters voted, and 489 voted in the Murmansk region (Interfax, 2020). Until 2020, voting by post in the Russian Federation was optional. The head of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation considers the voting method to be outdated due to the presence of the “Mobile Voter” mechanism in Russia, which provides an opportunity regardless of the place of registration of the voter. However, the head of the CEC admits the possibility of voting by mail for certain regions of Russia (Kommersant, 2020). Consider the results of the WCIOM poll (WCIOM, 2020), which was held among residents of the regions in which elections were held in September, 2020 (see Table 7).

Table 7

Results of the poll “Multi-day voting format: For and against in Russian Federation”

Examples of Responses	% of similar answers
- are positive about the opportunity to vote within three days	61%
- consider it convenient, since you can come to the polling station at a suitable time for the voter	49%
- note the sanitary safety of the election procedure in connection with COVID-19	37%
- believe that more people will be able to take part in the elections	24%
- no queues, fuss and crowds	7%
- spoke out against voting within three days	22%

Among those polled by WCIOM, 24% confirmed that the introduction of voting in different elections for three consecutive days allows more voters to take part in the elections.

The above results address the following discussion. E-voting, three-day voting, and mail voting were applied in the amendment to the electoral legislation of the Russian Federation in 2020. The

use of E-voting, three-day voting, and mail voting in elections can solve the problem of absenteeism among young people. The highest level of support for voting via the Internet is recorded in the 18-34 age group, which participates in traditional voting less than others and more often adheres to the strategy of situational participation (Center for Political Conjecture, 2020).

The results of our research complements other research on this topic and shows that respondents react positively to the introduction of electronic voting, three-day voting, and mail voting. On the first research question, we can say that previous studies do not indicate the percentage of respondents among young people who participate in elections on an irregular basis. The answer to the second research question shows that voter turnout among young people can increase in the case of using electronic voting, three-day voting, and voting by mail. The answer to the third question allows us to conclude that there is a connection between the use of electronic voting, three-day voting, and postal voting that makes it possible to increase the voter turnout in the Russian Federation (as, for example, in the Astrakhan region).

In our opinion, electronic voting has the prospect of becoming an equivalent method for expressing the will of voters, along with traditional voting at polling stations, because 48% of all respondents prefer to vote by electronic voting, and 20% of young voters are ready to take part in elections using mail voting. Voting by mail can further draw voters' attention to electoral participation. We found that among young people, 35.3% would like to participate in three-day voting. Indeed, there is a tendency for voters to vote comfortably within three days. E-voting, three-day voting, and postal voting are suitable for voters in such cases as they may not always have 1) the opportunity to vote in the place where their polling station is located, 2) free time to vote, or 3) they may not be at their place of residence on election day.

The study was conducted mostly in the territory of the Astrakhan region in the Russian Federation. In order to further add value to the study, it can be carried out in the territory of other constituent entities of the Russian Federation. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the use of electronic voting, three-day voting, and postal voting is not enough to increase voter turnout among young people. Young people also point out that there must be other mechanisms to motivate them to express their civic position, for example, creating a project that demonstrates the importance of the vote of each voter. Thus, in our opinion, E-voting, three-day voting, and mail voting have the prospect of becoming equivalent methods for expressing the will of voters.

Conclusion

In summary, we have researched the reasons and factors affecting the low electoral activity of young people. It is necessary to consider the main ways to increase it, as a result of which it is possible to increase the degree of interest of young people in the political life of the Russian Federation. At the same time, it is important to implement mechanisms aimed at mobilizing young people as an important electoral group, most often passively related to taking part in voting or elections. We came to the conclusion that in the Russian Federation, the use of E-voting, voting by mail, and three-day voting are of great interest to the younger generation. Young voters who do not participate in elections consider E-voting to be most convenient. Three-day voting and mail voting is not so popular among young people, but it also empowers the voter to choose the most convenient day and time to vote.

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