

The Impact of Digitalization on Political Engagement Among Kazakhstani Youth: A Comparative Study Before and After "Qandy Qantar" (Sanguinary January) of 2022

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the political involvement of Kazakhstani youth prior to and following the tragic events of January 2022 in Kazakhstan. The utilization of social media played a crucial role in mobilizing Kazakh youth during the widespread protest against authoritarian governance in January 2022. The tragic events served as a catalyst, highlighting the inevitability of political and socio-economic reforms in the country. The study employed the theory of political engagement and apperception of the Internet as a virtual realm of political communication as an investigative tool to examine this issue. The article presents sociological data gathered collected from 2013 to 2022, aiming to offer into the impact of modern information technologies, specifically social networks, on the political engagement of Kazakhstani youth. The theory of political engagement enables the identification of the underlying nature of shifts in youth engagement and disengagement during the post-Soviet era. It was during the crisis that notable upsurge in political activity among young people became apparent. A comparison of the data gathered by various sociological centers, employing the respondent interviews, reveals contrasting trends. On the one hand, there is an increase in the activity of expressing personal opinions on social networks. On the other hand, there is a growing detachment from political participation, such as voting in elections and engaging in party memberships, among others. The findings of the study revealed that the political moods of Kazakhstani youth persist after January 2022 without undergoing a transformative shift toward increased party and movement affiliations, active involvement in election campaigns, and voting. Instead, protest sentiments are once again becoming dormant, which helps to explain the political absenteeism observed among many young individuals.

Keywords: Internet, Kazakhstani youth, political activity, political engagement, social networks

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Introduction

The crisis of the single-party regime of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), during the late 1980s, followed by its subsequent collapse in August-September 1991, signified the unavoidable downfall of the USSR, which eventually transpired in December of that same year. The termination of the single-party system following its collapse resulted in the cessation of mass political engagement among youth, which was previously organized and guided by the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union.

The emerging socio-political movements and parties, such as the People's Congress, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, the Social Democratic Party did not include youth organizations as part of their structure. Despite the adoption of the first Law “On State Youth Policy in the Kazakh SSR,” on June 28, 1991, the transformation of the Young Communist League of Kazakhstan from a large and influential youth organization to a smaller and less authoritative Youth Union marked the end of the organized and directed mass youth participation in politics dictated by the party “from the top.” During the late 1990s, there was a lack of significant political organizations for young people until the emergence of a new communist youth organization and a youth movement called “For the Future of Kazakhstan”. At the same time, the younger generation exhibited a passive level of political engagement⁴ in the socio-political landscape of the country. The aforementioned organizations no longer exist, due to young people being mere observers of the political developments transpiring within the country.

The indifferent attitude of Kazakhstani youth toward political changes can be attributed to several factors, with one of the main factors being the prevalence of a subservient political culture. The utilization of administrative resources raises concerns regarding citizens' ability to affect politics and has a detrimental impact on conventional forms of political engagement, such as voting in elections, participating in party activities and election campaigns, and overall involvement in the political life of society (Weiss, 2020).

The establishment of “Zhas Otan” organization as the youth wing of the “Nur Otan” pro-presidential party in May 2008 marked a shift toward engaging a supportive segment of the youth in politics. One of the consequences of the January crisis of 2022 was the transformation of the

⁴ According to E. Vyatr, passive political participants usually do not express an active interest in political life, do not participate in political actions, however, they can participate as voters in elections, and also express dissatisfaction if the policy of the authorities actively contradicts their interests and affects the standard of living.

Nur Otan party into the Amanat party, leading to the corresponding transformation of Zhas Otan into Zhastar Rukhy. The latter now has 105,000 members, which is twice half the number of the former Zhas Otan. The aspiration to organize and guide the involvement of the supportive segment of the youth was further augmented by the widespread use of social networks. This effort was reinforced by the implementation of the State Program “Digital Kazakhstan” for the period of 2018-2022, as outlined in the Government Decree No. 827 dated December 12, 2017 (“Digital Kazakhstan,” 2021).

A crucial component of the e-government system is the “Open Regulatory Legal Acts” (RLA) platform, which serves as a publication platform for draft laws, regulations, and other legislative acts. The “Digital Kazakhstan” program set forth its objectives to expedite the economic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan and improve the quality of life for its population by leveraging digital technologies in the medium term. Moreover, it aimed to establish conditions for transitioning the Kazakhstan economy onto a new development trajectory that would pave the way for the creating a digital economy of the future in the long term (“Digital Kazakhstan,” 2021).

Every citizen has the opportunity to review the draft acts and contribute their proposals for its enhancement, following the established rules of address. Digitalization is recognized as a mechanism for modernizing public administration, and the youth are considered key agents of the digital version of political culture.

The widespread adoption of smartphone-accessible social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and instant messengers like WhatsApp and Telegram has resulted in an unprecedented surge in the dissemination of information, including political news. According to the “Youth of Kazakhstan” study conducted in 2022, social networks, blogs, and instant messengers emerged as the primary sources of information about the political landscape in the country for 60.3% of young respondents (National Report “Youth of Kazakhstan,” 2022).

Currently, the Internet has become a crucial tool for activists to voice their political goals, public opinion, and protest sentiments within the domestic information sphere. Social networks play a substantial role in mobilizing the protest electorate during various types of conflict situations, rallies, and mass discontent in different regions of the country.

According to Acun’s (2019) research on social capital, the phenomenon of social media is characterized by individuals' efforts to be influential in social, political, educational and environmental matters, contingent upon their belief in and effective utilization of social media tools. Gilardi et al. (2022) highlighted that social media has evolved into an established channel

for political communication, which parties and politicians are keen to employ.” In the spring and summer of 2019, young individuals from the “Oyan, Kazakhstan” movement (“Awaken, Kazakhstan”), carried out separate actions. In June of 2019, there was a protest vote for presidential candidate Amirzhan Kosanov, who, according to official data, (“Presidential elections in Kazakhstan,” 2019) secured the second position with 16.23% of the votes. During the January events of 2022 in Kazakhstan, later referred to as “Qandy Qantar” (Sanguinary January), social networks played a pivotal role. The escalation of protest sentiments was prominently manifested during the days of “Sanguinary January” of 2022, where, as per official data, (“Protests in Kazakhstan,” 2022) 238 individuals lost their lives, and 4,353 individuals sustained injuries. In response to the protesters, law enforcement agencies resorted to a widespread internet shutdown as a primary measure to curb political mobilization across the country. The January events in Kazakhstan bear similarities to the “Arab Spring” that took place in several Middle East and North African countries in 2011. The active utilization of modern social networks allowed young users in the Arab world to express their dissatisfaction with authoritarian regimes, leading to these events being referred to as “Arab Spring” and “Twitter revolutions” (Di, 2013). Social networks emerged as an effective tool, previously unknown previously in the realm of political mobilization. As a consequence, of mass protests, the old regimes collapsed in various Arab countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Subsequently, the international community recognized the colossal influence of social networks on the political consciousness of Arab youth, and, consequently, on events unfolding in the Arab states.

The authors delve into the following questions:

- What impact do modern information technologies, in particular social networks, have on the political engagement of Kazakhstani youth?
- How do social networks promote political involvement among Kazakhstani youth?
- Is the main source of information for Kazakhstani youth traditional media or the Internet?
- What transformations are the motives of political behavior, moods and socio-political attitudes of the young strata of the population going through in the conditions of the modern information society?

The article is structured into three main sections. The first section focuses on the materials and methods used in the study. The second section applies the theory of political engagement within the framework of digitalization and emerging methods of information manipulation. Finally, the

third section presents the analysis of the results from sociological research and concludes with recommendations based on the findings.

Literature Review

Social Networks and Political Engagement: Theory and Kazakhstani Specifics

In the realm of social science, political engagement is described as the endeavors of citizens to exert influence on politics. In everyday practice, it is manifested through the active participation in political affairs, advocating for their interests, rights, and freedoms. According to the perspectives of Dalton, an American theorist (2008), (2008), the trajectory of political activity entails a shift in the style of political action, rather than merely changes in participation levels. Thus, with the evolving media environment, the forms of political engagement have also undergone a transformation. In fact, the opportunities available for citizens' political engagement have experienced substantial changes in today's context.

In the contemporary world, the active process of digitalization encompassing all aspects of human life is an outcome of the globalization process. The transition to a digital economy has resulted in a faster transformation of the world than previously anticipated. Digital technologies have transcended their initial purposes within academic science and the industrial sphere, significantly contributing to enhanced development efficiency. Today, these digital technologies are utilized by various segments of the population, including young people. According to Yestafiev (2018), the widespread adoption of information technology has gradually become a crucial element in modern social interactions and a significant factor in the political development of the younger generation. The Internet provides a unique opportunity for citizens to utilize new platforms for participation that are less time-consuming and costly in collecting signatures, such as an online petition, and voicing their opinions compared to the traditional methods of political engagement. In relation to this, several authors (Halim et al., 2021) argue that information circulated on social networks has the potential to stimulate youth engagement in political life. This is particularly relevant as certain circumstances have limited sections of the population in various countries from expressing their political views through traditional media (Acun, 2020).

As a result of these restrictions on the active segment of youth and civil society, virtual space is considered an alternative to political engagement. Internet communication is particularly attractive due to its speed, accessibility, timeliness, openness, quality, and perception of it as reliable information. In the context of Kazakhstan, Facebook has emerged as a communication

channel that provides the population with socio-political information and serves as the primary platform for political discussions in KazNet. The spread of the Internet usage in Kazakhstan in recent years has given rise to new sources of political and social information.

The widespread adoption of smartphone-accessible social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and instant messengers like WhatsApp and Telegram has revolutionized information dissemination and empowered civil society organizations in their pursuit of political goals. According to TNS data, the number of social media users in Kazakhstan has also experienced remarkable growth since 2020. In January 2021, the number reached 12 million people, marking a 26% increase (2.5 million people) compared to the beginning of 2020. In 2020, social networks firmly established themselves as the primary communication channel with any audience. Overall, the percentage of social media users in Kazakhstan stood at 63.5% in 2021 (Zhussupova, 2021).

The impact of digitalization and social networks on the political engagement of young people in Kazakhstan exhibits a unique specificity. As Dalton's statement mentioned earlier suggests, changes in the style of political actions through digitalization do not necessarily translate to an increase in political activity. This observation helps to explain why social networks have emerged as a new platform in Kazakhstani society for disseminating political information and fostering discussions outside the traditional media landscape, which is often subject to government control and funding limitations.

Moreover, the significance of social networks in the country's political landscape, particularly in terms of political mobilization and participation, remains a topic of debate. It is important to acknowledge that digital technologies also have negative consequences, including the dissemination of destructive political views, manipulative and provocative information, as well as the proliferation of "fake" news. These factors can potentially disorient society and have a negative impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the country's youth. According to the Strauss-Howe generation theory, modern youth, born between 1995 and 2012 and socialized in the digital environment, belong to Generation Z (Schroer, n.d.).

Generation Z is characterized by impatience and a tendency to seek immediate solutions, influenced by their habit of quick online communication. Furthermore, they demonstrate a concern for environmental and political issues within their country. However, there is indeed a significant risk that Generation Z can be easily influenced by manipulative tactics through the dissemination

of biased information broadcast by various modern information channels. These influences can have a detrimental effect on their political awareness and consciousness (Lailiyah et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the widespread circulation of short posts and videos on social networks such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram has a notable influence on the development of a clip consciousness among young individuals. As noted by Berezovskaya (2015), TikTok specifically represents an endless stream of short videos accompanied by vibrant music, often devoid of any substantial ideas beyond entertainment or shock value.

This creates a generation of consumers who are essentially zombified, seeking only entertainment. The fragmented and superficial perception of information poses a danger as it hampers the development of analytical skills and the ability of young individuals to process large volumes of information and draw logical conclusions. The concept of “clip thinking” appeared in the 1990s, describing an individual's capacity to perceive the surrounding reality as a series of short and vivid images, akin to merging them into one video clip (Bukharbayeva & Sergeyeva, 2020).

The term “clip culture” was initially introduced by the American cult futurist Toffler (2002) back in 1980. He defines it as “a fundamentally new phenomenon, which is considered as a component of the general information culture of the future, based on the endless flashing of information segments and comfortable for people of the corresponding mindset”. Russian scientist Mirzoyan (2021) conducted an experiment involving schoolchildren and university students between the ages of 13 to 24. The objective was to assess the extent of social networks influence on the minds of adolescents and prevent potential negative consequences.

The researcher arrives at the conclusion that bloggers play a significant role in disseminating both entertainment content and political ideas to the masses. Young people, under the influence of these idols, often fail to recognize the main ideas of promotion enter their minds.

Another manipulation technology identified is the deliberate distortion of reality, wherein initiators of provocations frequently employ rumors and conjectures. Their primary objective is to get as many individuals as possible to their side. The network approach emerges as a significant theoretical concept applicable to studying the active political engagement of Kazakhstani youth in social networks. Proponents of the network approach assert the importance of investigating the objective model of connections that unite members of society.

In the broadest social sense, a network refers to an activity space created and maintained by activity nodes and communication channels, which facilitate the flow of activity between them. A network encompasses a set of agreements that enable the collaboration of two or more independent

participants in one or more territories. The aim is to collectively achieve the goals of each participant by sharing resources and competencies (Pavlyutenkova, 2015).

Some authors posit the hypothesis that Internet technologies have the potential to change the level and quality of political engagement. Ryabchenko and Miroshnichenko (2012) claim that the online space fosters the development of constructive and sustainable competition among various socio-political actors within the network information sphere. However, the network approach also reveals that the nature of digital communications and their mobilization capabilities are limited by the size of the network community. The transformation of political behavior of Kazakhstani youth transformation, who dedicate a substantial amount of their free time to the Internet, holds significant importance in the application of sociological methods and approaches to studying social processes and forming opinions and shaping opinions and behavior. Kazakhstani sociologist Ileuova (2021) has observed that there is an accumulation of a considerable number of individuals who, largely, have low income and limited consumer potential. Consequently, they may not set high goals, resulting in a general sense of inhibition within society. We must consider the "youth factor" in our analysis. The country is witnessing an accumulation of protest potential. In a questionnaire administered to 1080 respondents, an assessment was sought regarding the democratic processes unfolding in the country.

In 2004, 39% of respondents believed that the country was gradually progressing toward a democratic society. This percentage increased to 43% and 49% in subsequent years. However, by 2021, support for the actions of the authorities experienced a significant decline, dropping to only 13%. The number of individuals who feel compelled to adapt to the situation has remained relatively stable over time, hovering around 39%–40%. Notably, well before January 2022, there was already a sense of alienation and a lack of understanding regarding the policies pursued by the authorities.

Materials and Methods

The study employed various methods of analysis. The theory of political participation was utilized to understand the dynamics of engagement and disengagement among young individuals during the post-Soviet era. Functional analysis was employed to explore the concept and role of digitalization in contemporary circumstances, as well as to track the nature and scope of its impact on political participation. Functional analysis involved examining activities of respondents in terms of information seeking, expression of citizen interests, and the formation of a behavioral

model. Logical analysis was employed to identify the distinctive characteristics of political engagement since the early 1990s. This method facilitated a better understanding of the relationship between conducive and protest moods and political engagement through comparison, analogy, analysis, and generalization. Surveys were conducted to gauge the interest in politics and political engagement. The study utilized data from sociological studies conducted by various sociological centers on this subject. In October-November 2018, a survey was conducted as part of the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (2017-2020) (hereinafter – WVS 7) in Kazakhstan. The survey encompassed questions regarding the political activities of the respondents. In total, 1276 individuals above the age of 18 were interviewed across the country, including 3 cities of republican significance (Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Shymkent) and 14 regions. Among the respondents, 308 individuals belonged to the age group of 18–29. Within this group, 64.6% lived in cities, while 35.4% in villages. All subsequent percentages are presented in relation to the number of young respondents (308 respondents = 100%) (Haerpfer et al., 2020). It is important that this analysis is based on the understanding of young people in accordance with the legislative framework in effect until March 2023 in Kazakhstan. It should be noted that in accordance with the legislation in effect until December 2022, citizens aged 14-29 were classified as youth. However, the law "On State Youth Policy" was amended in December 2022, expanding the definition of youth in Kazakhstan to include citizens aged 14-34. The use of abstraction technique enabled a focused examination of a specific aspect of the issue, namely, digital competencies. This approach helped to elucidate their place and role in shaping political activity. The hypothetical-deductive method was employed, involving the formulation of statements as hypotheses and subsequent empirical testing. This approach was particularly useful in studying the impact of digitalization on interest in politics and political participation. The methods of functional and logical analysis, abstraction technique, and hypothetical-deductive method were utilized to analyze sociological study data from a theoretical perspective.

Findings

Sociological Dimension of the Political Engagement of Kazakhstani Youth

The evaluation criteria for political participation included interest in politics, potential participation in political actions, and involvement in specific political events. The political behavior of young individuals is influenced by their attitudes toward politics, their level of interest, and their experience and skills in engaging in political activities.

When respondents were asked about the importance of politics in their lives, 10.7% answered that it is very important, while 37.3% of respondents, aged 18–29, considered it rather important, totaling 48%. Also, 31.8% of respondents viewed politics as rather unimportant, and 18.2% believed it was not important at all, totaling 50% (see Figure 1).

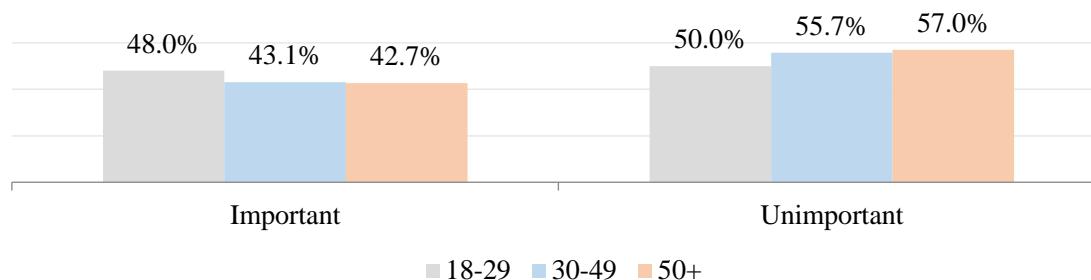


Figure 1. Importance of the Politics in the Lives of People According to Their Age Group

The WVS 7 poll reveals that a significant portion of Kazakhstani society considers politics rather unimportant. However, there is still a substantial proportion of individuals who express interest in politics, particularly among the younger population compared to those over the age of 30. Interestingly, the division of young people into two contrasting groups—those interested in politics and those uninterested in it—can be observed. This observation has led to certain perceptions of Kazakhstani youth as being disinterested in politics. Young respondents expressed an interest in politics, while 54.8% stated that they were not interested in politics. However, politics does serve as a topic of discussion when meeting with peers, albeit infrequently. Approximately 6.5% of respondents reported often discussing politics with friends, 57.9% stated they sometimes talk about politics, and 32.5% indicated that they never engage in political discussions.

The survey results indicate that the majority of young people surveyed did not belong to any political party (82.8%). Only a small percentage were identified as inactive party members (8.8%), and an even smaller percentage were active members (1.6%).

The notable difference between the proportion of young individuals interested in politics (42.2% of respondents) and those actively participating through political parties (8.8% and 1.6%) is significant. The findings of the sociological study indicate a low level of political activity among young individuals, which can impede the progress of developing democracies. Since 2022, efforts have been made by the state to actively engage young people in the political life of society, including in the decision-making process.

Legislation has been implemented to ensure a 30% quota for youth, women, and persons with disabilities. Political parties are required to adhere to this quota when forming party lists for elections to representative bodies and subsequently in the allocation of deputy mandates.

The level of trust among young individuals toward political institutions and public authorities reflects a nearly equal extent of interest and disinterest in politics. According to the results of the WVS 7 survey, 71.7% of respondents express trust in the government, while 27.3% do not. In regard to the Parliament, two-thirds of young respondents (66.6%) trust the central representative body, while three out of ten (30.9%) do not. Similarly, 65.3% express trust in the courts, while 33.4% do not. Trust in political parties is relatively lower, with slightly over half of the respondents aged 18–29 (56.1%) indicating trust, while a significant proportion (41.2%) do not trust them (Figure 2).

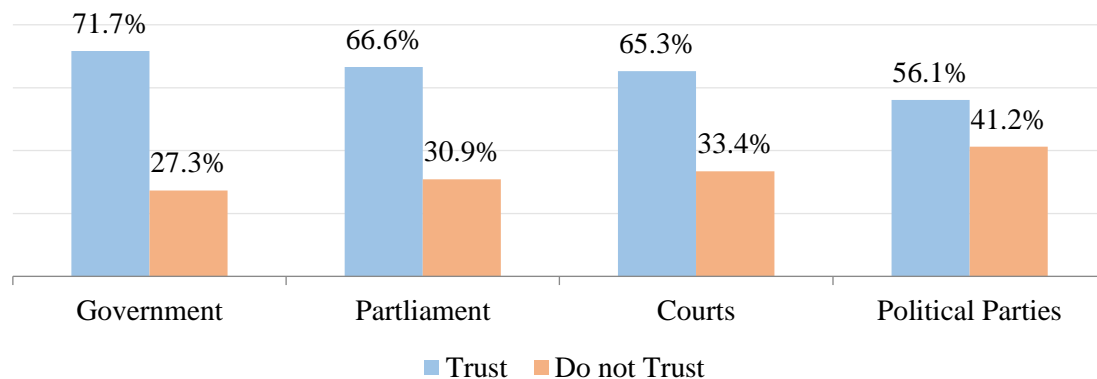


Figure 2. Level of Political Institutes' Credibility Among Youth

The political culture of modern youth, including Kazakhstani youth, encompasses their involvement in various forms of political activity facilitated by the Internet or social networks. However, the results of the WVS 7 survey conducted in October-November of 2018 indicate that Kazakhstani youth have limited experience in political participation through these platforms. Only 13.0% of respondents reported that actively seeking information about politics and political events online, while a mere 4.9% had ever signed electronic appeals and petitions. Furthermore, only 1.0% of respondents indicated their participation in organizing political actions and encouraging others to participate in such activities.

By 2019, there were indications of an increase in youth activity, particularly in a protest-oriented manner. Kazakhstani youth constitutes a significant portion of the society, with approximately 3,833,435 individuals aged 14–29 as of the beginning of 2022. The recent amendments to the law

on youth policy have further expanded the age limits of young people, resulting in a substantial increase in their numbers. As of the beginning of 2023, there were 5,726,627 people aged 14–34 in Kazakhstan, accounting for 28.9% of the population (“Bureau of National Statistics, n.d.”).

Table 1

Readiness to Take Political Action Using the Internet and Social Networks (%)

	<i>Information search about Politics and Political Events</i>	<i>Signing e-appeals and e-petitions</i>	<i>Agitation of Others to Organize or Take Part in a Political Action</i>	<i>Organization of Political Actions, Events, Protests</i>
<i>Done so</i>	13,0	4,9	1,0	1,0
<i>Could do so</i>	28,9	16,6	14,6	8,8
<i>Would never do so</i>	43,5	60,1	66,6	71,1
<i>Could not answer</i>	9,4	12,0	11,7	13,0

The experience of political activity among Kazakhstani youth is predominantly centered around information-seeking rather than organizing or participating in real political actions. Digital platforms play a significant role in their engagement with politics.

According to the WVS 7 study, a notable percentage of young respondents (28.9%) expressed their willingness to seek political information using information and communication technologies (ICT). Additionally, 16.6% indicated their readiness to sign electronic appeal or petitions, 14.6% expressed their willingness to use social networks to encourage others to participate in political actions, and 8.8% stated their readiness to engage in organizing political events through the Internet and social networks (Table 1).

It is notable that a relative majority of young respondents indicated that they would not engage in various forms of political activity, including seeking political information (43.5%), signing electronic appeals and petitions (60.1%), encouraging others to participate in political actions (66.6%) and organizing political actions, events and protests (71.1%). It is also worth mentioning the significant proportion of respondents who found it difficult to provide a clear answer, ranging from 9.4% to 13.0%. This suggests the potential for some youth to be influenced toward different forms of activity or support within the realm of real or virtual political participation.

If the WVS 7 study provides an independent assessment of the events occurring in Kazakhstan, it is crucial to examine the case studies conducted in the Republic of Kazakhstan. In this regard, the findings of one such study are documented in the National report titled “Youth of Kazakhstan – 2022.”

According to the report, at the beginning of 2022, the share of young people under the age of 29 among civil servants of central government bodies is 20%, while in local government bodies it is 17%, as reported by the Agency for Civil Service Affairs (ACSA) (“Youth of Kazakhstan,” 2022). According to the survey, 9% of young respondents show regular interest in news, 33% follow the news from time to time, 21% show interest in politics during resonant events, while 37% are not interested in politics at all (Figure 3).

It should be noted that a direct comparison of these indicators with the results of WVS 7 survey is appropriate due to differences in survey methodology and data collection tools. However, there is a general trend of increased interest among young people in the political life of society through the Internet rather than traditional media, political advertising, and agitation.

During March-June of 2019, the “Oyan, Kazakhstan” movement and the protest vote in the presidential elections in June 2019 highlighted the increased political interest and engagement of young people in Kazakhstan. These events marked a significant period of youth activism and political awareness.

The shift toward political reforms following the “January tragedy” can be explained for the necessity to address dissatisfaction arising from incomplete power transition in March 2019.

Throughout the electoral cycle, which encompassed the constitutional amendment referendum on June 5, 2022, early presidential elections on November 20, 2022, and parliamentary elections on March 19, 2023, both the government and society focused their attention on addressing internal issues within the country.

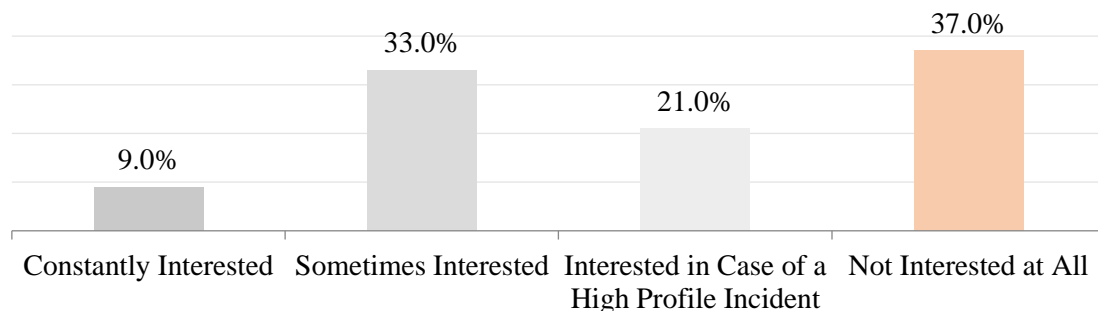


Figure 3. Politics Interest Rate Among the Youth

The fluctuating interest of young people in politics necessitates identifying the primary source of information through which young Kazakhstanis obtain knowledge about political events in the country. The findings of the study reveal that both traditional media and the Internet, including social networks (as depicted in Figure 4), serve as the main sources of political information for young individuals.

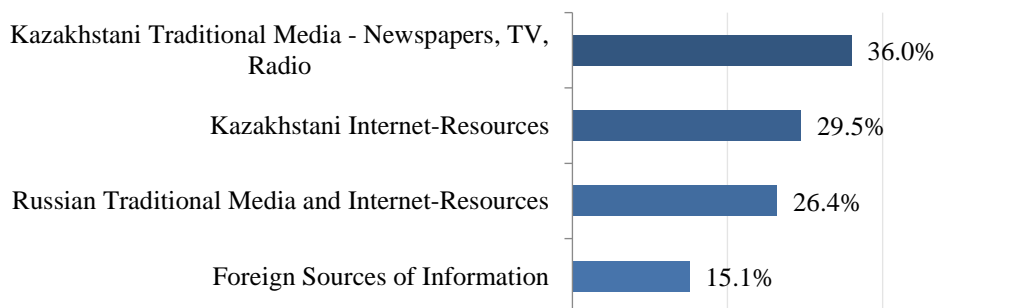


Figure 4. Sources of Information About the Political Events in Kazakhstan

The "Youth of Kazakhstan" study for 2022 reveals that social networks, blogs, and instant messengers are the primary sources of political information for 60.3% of young respondents. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are particularly popular among them. However, only 10.2% of young respondents fully trust the information they receive from the Internet. At the same time, 27.8% of the respondents express trust but emphasize the need to double-check information from alternative sources. Regarding young participants, 46.2% reported that they sometimes trust information obtained from Internet resources, while 14.1% of all respondents do not trust such information at all.

Kazakhstani traditional media, including newspapers, television, and radio, serve as the primary source of information for 36.0% of young respondents. Additionally, 29.5% of respondents rely on Kazakhstani Internet resources for political information. When comparing Kazakhstani media and Internet resources to their Russian counterparts, it is evident that the former holds more influence. Specifically, 26.4% of young respondents turn to traditional Russian media and Internet resources for information. Moreover, 15.1% of respondents seek information from foreign sources. A significant aspect of the political culture of modern Kazakhstani youth is their inclination toward institutional participation in the political life of society. This involvement encompasses activities

such as working in the civil service and engaging in the electoral process, aspiring for esteemed positions. Furthermore, the access to the Internet empowers young individuals to observe and stay informed about political developments abroad. Consequently, young Kazakhstanis demonstrate support for foreign political actions. For instance, they express solidarity with movements like the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and exhibit sympathy toward supporters of Alexey Navalny. However, it is worth noting such forms of political engagement are often more categorized as informal participation.

Discussion

Three points of view on political engagement of Kazakhstani youth

Let's compare three points of view, each supported by research data. The Kazakh research group PaperLab conducted a study titled "Activists 2.0. Transformation of civic engagement in Kazakhstan in the digital age." This study presents three different points of view, each supported by research data. Sociologist Beisembaev, the head of the Kazakh research group PaperLab, concluded in September 2020 that the rise of this phenomenon is closely linked to the extensive development of information technology. "The emergence of such phenomenon is associated with the widespread development of information technology. For example, more and more people are expressing their opinions and being active in social networks" (Tapayeva, 2020).

On the contrary, Mednikova, the chairman of the Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan (MISK), stated in her interview on the topic "Political participation of youth in Kazakhstan: the role of digital technologies" in July 2022 that while there is a growing interest among Kazakhstanis in political processes, it does not necessarily imply that young people are prepared ready to actively participate in the country's affairs ("Political Engagement of Youth in Kazakhstan: The Role of Digital Technologies," 2022).

According to Zhusupova (2017), a prominent Kazakhstani sociologist and expert at the Eurasian Center for People Management, citizens in Kazakhstan demonstrate a low level of political and civic engagement both in practice and on social networks. The primary use of networks among Kazakhstanis is for entertainment and communication with close acquaintances. Three experts have provided insights on various aspects of political engagement and mobilization, with each study conducted at different times. Beisembaev's findings in September 2020 revealed an increased level of activity among young people in discussing political matters and expressing their opinions. Zhusupova's study in October 2017 drew attention to the low level of civic and political engagement among young individuals, particularly in response to the activities of the political

actor, namely the executive branch. Mednikova's perspective, expressed in July 2022, aligns with the notion that although there is an increasing interest in political processes, there is a lack of transition to active engagement. This viewpoint is consistent with the observation that individuals tend to primarily express their opinions on social networks while remaining distant from political activities such as voting in elections or becoming members of political parties.

The lack of transition from interest in political processes to real influence on politics is attributed to the concept of "managed democracy." Introduced by Yermukhamet Yertysbaev, the president's political adviser in 2002, "managed democracy" entails controlling certain aspects of democracy to maintain stability and political control.

The main idea of the concept of managed democracy is that democratization in the country should be carefully guided by the state authorities. They establish the pace of this process, set its parameters, and impose restrictions (Ismagambetov, 2018). In the Kazakhstani expert community, there is no consensus regarding the extent to which the Internet has emerged as an alternative platform for political activity among Kazakhstani youth. It is believed that the lack of an objective scientific assessment of the consequences of the development of digital technologies is a fundamental issue, not only for Kazakhstani society but also in a broader context. The impact of these technologies requires comprehensive evaluation.

Conclusion

Based on the application of the theory of political engagement and sociological research, the following conclusions can be drawn: Upon comparing data from various sociological surveys, it becomes evident that young people exhibit low levels of participation in traditional forms of political engagement. Nevertheless, it is evident that there is still an existing interest in politics among young people. Specifically, during October-November of 2018, there was a noticeable inclination to participate in political actions, with a minimum participation of 8.8%. Moreover, a sense of alienation from the policies implemented by the authorities prior to January 2022 coincided with an increase in protest sentiments.

Furthermore, in the years leading up to January 2022, there was a clear decrease in the attractiveness of actions organized by higher authorities. The rapid digitalization has played a significant role in transforming the activities of young people, leading to a partial shift of engagement toward the virtual realm. However, observations and experiences from other countries

suggest that it is insufficient to solely rely on modern information technologies, including social networks, to create an alternative political agenda. These technologies primarily function as a medium for disseminating information about different events. The hypothesis that Internet technologies can change the quality of political engagement has not been substantiated. In practice, Internet technologies can contribute to the widespread dissemination of thoughts, ideas, and symbols, thereby influencing quantitative measures of awareness.

The quality of political participation, in this context, entails the shift from mere protest sentiments to active involvement, such as joining parties and movements, participating as campaigners, agitators, observers, and engaging in election campaigns and voting. However, the success of this transition relies on the attractiveness and credibility of the agendas put forth by political parties. Unfortunately, such an agenda does not yet exist. Part of the Kazakhstani youth exhibits fragmented consciousness, making it challenging for them to establish relationships between various political facts and translate political sentiments into concrete political actions. The Internet has emerged as the primary source of information for Kazakhstani youth, serving this role during periods of stability and calmness, as well as times of crisis when political activity intensifies. This preference for the Internet as an information source surpasses the reliance on traditional media platforms.

The absence of a compelling agenda, along with factors such as a high inflation rate of 20% in 2022, ineffective management, the lack of popularity of ruling figures, and other issues, is further exacerbated by administrative barriers, particularly the permissive principle of registering political movements and parties.

Taking into account the factors outlined above, along with those mentioned in points 1–7, it is evident that the political sentiments among Kazakhstani youth have remained unchanged since January 2022. This lack of transition to a new level is characterized by limited engagement, such as increased party and memberships, participation as agitators or observers in election campaigns, and active voting. Consequently, protest sentiments remain dormant, leading to political apathy among the majority of Kazakhstani youth.

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