

Political Views of Russian Youth as the Marker of Social Well-Being

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Abstract

This paper deals with the empirical-based analysis of various aspects of social feeling of Russian students based. Based on the analysis of the opinions and attitudes of students a conclusion has been made on the dynamics of social feeling under the influence of the social and economic and political factors, and the nature of the political positions of students has been determined. A key objective of the study is to determine the degree of students' satisfaction with the transformations having affected them, and to identify the most significant factors influencing their social feeling and political positions. The study has found neither apparent deterioration nor improvement of social feeling of students under the influence of economic and political factors. At the same time, the political positions of students reflect generally a satisfactory feeling of this group, which is formed mainly due to non-political factors of their being. The immature political positions and a high level of indifference in relation to economic and political issues are characteristic of some students. The revealed trends of social feeling of students demonstrate the dynamics of the students' views that reflects the quality and way of their life, and serve as indicators of social tension and social health typical of modern Russian students in general.

Keywords: social feeling, studentship, political position, the social and political potential.

Introduction

Young people, by virtue of their age, social, psychological characteristics, are susceptible to changes in society to a greater extent than other social and age groups. The modernization potential and prospects of the development of society largely depends right on youth self-determination, their attitudes and system of values. The study of social feeling of students as a group, which is a significant part of the Russian youth counting more than 33%, is particularly relevant in this context. According to the data of 2014, 5,646,700 people in the Russian Federation were college students [1].

Materials and methods

Studying at high school is an important milestone of a young person's life, which lays the groundwork in the form of the basic elements of lifestyle, develops habits, system of values and priorities, and political positions [2]. The material for this paper is the results of study of social feeling of Tatarstan students conducted by the researchers of sociological laboratory of the Kazan Federal University in monitoring mode. The survey, which was conducted in 2015 through electronic personal student rooms, involved 1734 full-time students of the 2, 3 and 4 year of study of all subdivisions.

Results

There are multiple different approaches to the definition of "social feeling"; the concept of "feeling" implies an associative connection with the physical state of a person, "feeling - a perception of physiological and psychological comfort of the internal state" [3]. The feeling concerns the field of perception, senses and experiences. Therefore, it is often defined as a conscious reflection to the own feelings, physical and mental sensations. The subject reflects and realizes that he/she experiences the excitement, anxiety, or, on the contrary, the feeling of comfort and satisfaction. Subjective feeling is determined by many factors [4]. Psychological comfort depends primarily on the material and social conditions of the individual, the nature of work, and the way of life. The social feeling is affected by the economic and political situation, which may adversely affect the psychological state of a person [5-7].

Social feeling is an integral characteristic, a complex emotionally-estimated state arising on the basis of the perception of reality and the own position in the society in terms of satisfaction, identity, and activity [8, 9].

In this paper, social feeling is understood to mean a psychological state (optimism / pessimism) that affects the display of either activity or passivity, an action or inaction.

The social changes taking place in society have a significant impact on the attitudes of young people [10]. If a person takes negatively the surrounding economic and political reality, as something threatening to his/her own well-being, and assesses pessimistically the position of the individual, than, even in spite of the excellent physical state, an individual will not feel satisfied, and the extent of its activity will decrease. Under the economic crisis, decline in production and living standards, unstable political situation in the country and in the world, growth of threats from authoritarian power, other countries, terrorists, etc. the pessimism, apathy and passivity prevail. At the same time, there is a shift of the political positions of a person: his attitude to politics changes, he is no longer interested in current events, more often negatively assesses the policies and criticises the authorities. On the contrary, under stable and positive politics the identity with the government increases, policies begin to be positively evaluated, and, as a consequence, satisfaction with the own position in society increases.

People's opinions about government and their political positions are the measure of their social feeling. Their interest in politics, a positive attitude to the government, its support and idea about that an individual can influence government decisions reflect the optimistic mood, a sense of

confidence and hope for their future and the future of their country, the willingness to take a proactive position and to act, and make socially significant actions. On the contrary, the lack of interest in politics, the political apathy and political passivity go hand in hand with feelings of fear, uncertainty, hopelessness and anxiety. Both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the implementation of life strategy depends anyhow on the general political situation and the attitudes the individual has toward the political issues. Therefore, one should not underestimate the importance of political components in the social feeling of the individual.

Thus, one of the indicators of social feeling of people is their political positions. Having analyzed these positions, we can with some confidence say about social feeling, namely, about the socio-political component of social feeling.

The subject of the study is the social feeling of Russian students. This research is complicated by the fact that students are not fully formed personalities, with their positions often subject to change, often showing maximalism and ultimatism in making evaluations. This applies both to the assessment of own physical and psychological well-being in high school and in student's environment and their political well-being – those ideas, emotions, feelings and moods, which are connected with their place in the political system. Therefore, the analysis of the opinions and attitudes of students allows us to observe the dynamics of social feeling under the influence of the social and economic and political factors.

The study involved the reveal of views of students on the organization and provision of educational, scientific, cultural and sports activities at high school, the students' assessment of their career prospects, life chances, personal life and health, as well as the questions asked to determine students' attitude toward the political and economic issues.

The study found that generally the students show satisfaction with the conditions set by the university in the fields of education, housing, health, and relationships. Students are satisfied with the conditions of training (65%), recreation (61%), science (67%), sports (68%) and material equipment (49.0%). Three-quarters of the university students (75.5%) feel proud when saying their friends about studying at the Kazan Federal University. The proportion of negative answers about social well-being of university students, namely, dissatisfaction, low quality of education and life, dissatisfaction with the training and the conditions of study and life varies in the estimates of different sides of life activity, however, insignificantly (6-9%, and only on several issues - 18%).

However, the political component of the social well-being of students is ambiguous. The study found an immature nature of political positions of most of the students, their weak orientation in the current economic and political situation.

What kind of political positions have the students, and how do they reflect their social well-being in a difficult economic situation and the turbulent international situation?

Only a fifth (23%) of the surveyed students is constantly interested in politics. More than half of students is occasionally interested in politics, and a fifth of respondents (21%) is not interested in politics at all. Indifference towards politics is a common feature of the studentship. This is due to the dominance of the importance of non-political issues, such as social, cultural, environmental, etc., in the views of the respondents. For example, the question "Which of the problems of society do bother you?" was followed by the following answers: wages and standard of living (56%), alcohol and drug addiction (39%), poor quality of health care (29.64%), corruption (28%), environmental issues (27%), unemployment (27%), crime (22%), unaffordable and substandard education (13%), etc. Less than 3% of the students indicated such social problems as injustice and indifference of the state to the population, xenophobia, domestic fascism and imperialism, systemic crises in the spheres of education, health and agriculture. We may assume that the weak students' interest in politics forms a special psychological background, which has a risk of variability in the direction of discontent under the influence of immediate circumstances. Disinterest in politics and indifference

creates the ground for the change of social attitudes, and can be the basis for the deterioration of social well-being of students.

The respondents were asked to assess the domestic and foreign policy of Russia. 25% of respondents support the domestic policy, and 40% support it partially. 12% of respondents undoubtedly do not support the domestic policy. A bit different situation can be observed in assessing the foreign policy of Russia. It is predictably, that the activation of Russia's role in the world resulted in higher share of positive assessments of the foreign policy than of the domestic: 40% of students support it, 27% - partially support. A bit lower is the proportion of negative assessments – about 9%. At the same time, the share of those who found it difficult to answer is high enough - 23%, which indicates the immature political positions of almost a fifth of the students. Satisfaction with state policy, in our view, is an important component of social well-being. If we exclude the negative assessments, the policy of the Russian state satisfies two-thirds of respondents (65% - domestic policy, 67% - foreign policy), that is, a positive attitude to the Russian policy prevails among the students, with a significant group of respondents being indifferent and a small group of negativists.

Social well-being is a situational phenomenon. Public attitudes can change into positive or negative direction under the influence of specific political events. One of the events that affected the social well-being was annexation of the Crimea to Russia. 33% of students felt proud of the annexation of the Crimea to Russia, 18% were satisfied. Thus, almost half of the students (47%) shared a positive attitude towards this event. In their answers, the respondents pointed to such positive feelings as “the pride and happiness”, “love to the Crimea”; “we won it back”; “historical justice”; “pride and joy, “a sense of patriotism”; “interest”; “it was expected”; “in regard to the Crimea, everything fell into place”; “in terms of the historical practice, it was expected”; “with the annexation of Crimea to Russia, I experienced the joy for the safety of the Crimeans”. However, there are about 11% of those who have experienced negative feelings (shame, frustration, anxiety). Negative feelings about the annexation of the Crimea to Russia were expressed by students as “nuisance”; “fear, anger, despair”; “a kind of feeling that someone wanted to jump over his head”; “why do we need the Crimea?”; “a good way to distract people from domestic problems”; “we’re fed up with the Crimea!”. The survey showed that more than a third of students is neutral to this event: 35% had no emotions experienced in connection with the annexation of the Crimea to Russia. In contrast to the findings of all-Russian surveys where the share of the undecided is extremely small, and extremely high share of those supporting the Russian policy, the students have shown indifference in this matter.

One of the recent events that could potentially affect the social well-being is the sanctions imposed by the international community against Russia. This issue has been widely discussed in the media and the Internet. There are different points of view, both optimistic and pessimistic, which could become the basis for the spread in society of different moods such as euphoria, fear, apathy, hopelessness, etc. The question of what students think about these sanctions resulted in the following responses received: approx. 35% of respondents believe that the sanctions will not significantly affect our country, and about 15% - that this is the result of wrong policy of Russia the population has now to pay dear for. It should be noted that 9% of respondents having chosen “Other” said that the sanctions is either the ability for the development of the country, or the result of wrong policy of foreign countries. Thus, most of students who gave the answer have positive attitude towards sanctions and have no fear of their imposition. However, attention is drawn to the fact that 40% of students does not want to take part in the assessment of these sanctions. As we can see, as well as in the responses to the previous questions, here prevails a group of students having no own position.

The question of how the current economic crisis has affected the lives of students turned out

to be easier than the previous ones: only 7% of respondents found it difficult to say anything definite about it. Most students (70%) said that the economic crisis has partially affected their lives through increased prices, etc. 12% believe it has influenced them greatly. One of the possible consequences of the crisis is a change in the attitude and social well-being, a willingness to take some active steps, or a wait-and-see attitude. Therefore, the planned strategy of the respondents' behavior upon worsening of the economic and political situation in Russia is of interest. 43% of respondents said they would take no action and adapt to the current situation. A fifth of respondents will make efforts to improve the situation with the help of active operations, and about 7% will try to move to another country. A share of the undecided is high enough; these are about a quarter of the respondents, which indicates an immature and unstable political position of students, and poor orientation in the current socio-political and economic situation.

The attitude towards Ukraine and Ukrainian events was in the focus of the next block of questions. The students' awareness about the situation in Ukraine is as follows: 83% of students are aware of the current situation (highly aware - 41.95%, or have a sidilight - 42%). Nearly 16% of respondents are not interested in this question. Regarding Ukraine, both positive ("As to the fellow people" - 45%) and indifferent opinions (40%) prevail. About 8% of the students consider Ukraine to be underdeveloped and corrupt country. The variant "Other" was represented by different views: a neutral attitude, ambiguous attitude (positive to the population, and negative to the leadership of the country), a negative attitude to the country as a whole, without an appeal to the underdevelopment and corruption, as well as a positive attitude as to an independent country with a future (irrespective of the neighborhood with Russia). The study found that the attitude towards Ukraine do not significantly correlate with socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: it does not depend on nationality, gender or place of birth.

The university students primarily assess the relations between Ukrainian refugees and Russians as positive: 27% of respondents consider their calm and friendly, and 32% of respondents say that they are quiet, but sometimes tensions occur. Thus, the vast majority (69%) expresses positive attitude. As for the negative assessments, they are as follows: 8% characterizes these relations as tense enough, and 2% - as conflict. Almost a third of respondents feel difficult to assess the nature of these relationships.

The survey-based **summary**.

1. The study has found neither apparent deterioration nor improvement of social feeling of students under the influence of economic and political factors. At the same time, the political positions of students reflect generally a satisfactory feeling of this group, which is formed mainly due to non-political factors of their being, such as conditions of study, living and way of life.

2. The immature political positions and a high level of indifference in relation to economic and political issues are characteristic of some students. A third of respondents either feel difficult to express their opinion on the issues related to the socio-political agenda, or give preference to the median variants that do not require a clear opinion ("To some extent", "Maybe").

3. At the same time, among the students there are quite many of those positively assessing the state policy and recent events (annexation of the Crimea to Russia, the attitude to Ukraine), with the obvious patriotic spirit.

4. High-school environment becomes a platform for the implementation of both the scientific and cultural and socio-political potential of young people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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