

How to involve the youth in the electoral process? Kazan Federal University

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Abstract

These notes are devoted to the state of the modern electoral education of young students. On examples of such projects as electoral contests, business and role games, debates we presented ways to involve young people in the electoral process.

The issues of increasing political, legal, electoral culture of young citizens of Russia and their better involvement in the country's political life remain actual. How to involve them today in the management of state and social affairs using various forms of youth self-government? How to inculcate them with legal knowledge and elements of political and electoral culture? These are the issues which politicians and public figures, scientists and teachers are deeply concerned with[1].

Educational institutions of the Republic of Tatarstan have accumulated rich experience in working with young voters. The author, for many years being a member of the Scientific and Methodological Council of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Tatarstan (CEC RT) on enhancement of legal awareness of election officials and voters of the Republic, carried out various events in this line of work.

The calls for active participation in the elections, not backed by a hard work to improve the electoral culture of population, will not bring desired results. It is necessary to systematically "arm" voters with electoral knowledge, to produce electoral style of thinking, to increase their activity and interest in the outcome of the elections and to engage in political activity.

Keywords: the election, the electoral process, electoral culture, electoral education, electoral projects.

INTRODUCTION

The historical essence of the events taking place in Russia is in transition from state socialism to modern forms of capitalism. It's hard to find a person in the country who would remain indifferent to these changes. Everyone wants to know: where from and where to the country is moving, what kind of society we will live in. Unfortunately, today millions of Russians face a lot of hardships of the transition period. Naturally, they ask difficult and sometimes painful questions: will these hardships and sacrifices of new society goods pay off, or will they become the factors of the prosperity of a few[2]. The future of Russia is a matter of major concern among young people, since they will live in it. In student classrooms the most creatively active part of youth not only defines its mission in life, but also thinks about the prospects of its country[3].

Competition of student's works

The universities of the region pay considerable attention to electoral culture of the youth, to organization of electoral law and the electoral process training. The largest form is contests of student essays. The first contest on the theme: "Youth chooses the President" organized by the Central Election Commission of Republic of Tatarstan [4] was held in 1998. The competition involved more than 500 students from 22 universities of the Republic. It was carried out in two stages: inside high schools and between high schools. In order to write a competitive essay the participants had to examine a large number of sources to study both federal and regional laws concerning elections, analyze electoral statistics and reflect on their own capabilities as a voter. Award-winning works were published in a special issue of "Tatarstan Voter" magazine.

It is worth to highlight the contest for the best presentation-work "Political Atlas: features of foreign electoral systems", which caused a major stir among the youth that prompted them to turn to foreign sources. Currently, the competition "20 years of elections in Russia" is announced. Student-teachers are the ones showing the most activity. And it does makes sense, since this is where huge electoral, talent pool resources are on the one hand, and young voter, on the other hand is a potential member of the precinct electoral commission. Education officers take part in the work of these commissions more often than other professionals. Commissions themselves are mainly located in school buildings. And rural educational institutions are the most important social institutions that help to awaken the interest of the villagers in the election.

Such competitions contribute not only to activation of the youth electorate, but they also help to form educational, informational infrastructures, contribute to coordination and control of youth electoral politics. Contestants are unanimous in stating that it is necessary to arrange such inspections of political maturity of the young people which help to orient youth in political life, including in the elections, more often.

Parliamentary lessons

In recent years in October in many schools parliamentary lessons are being organized, they were once (2010) initiated by the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan. During these lessons the younger generation meets with politicians, members of Tatarstan parliament, RT CEC members, as well as takes fascinating excursions to RT State Council and CEC RT[5].

Business and role-playing games have gained positive recommendations. Role-playing game is a way to broaden the experience of students by bringing them to an unexpected situation, which lets participant to take the position (role) of any of the situation's characters, and then develop a method that will allow to get this situation to a worthy end. The games called "Elections to the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan" and "Political parties in the electoral process" arouse keen interest among young students. Members of these games gained first experience in law-making,

learned to identify true leaders, met with various stages of election campaign and with elements of electoral technologies. They acted as initiators of nominating candidates, actively conducted campaigning for their candidates, took part in presentations of the electoral programs of candidates and press conferences, artistically transformed into party leaders. Posters, leaflets, wall newspapers, information sheets, musical performances - this is only a part of agitation tools used to support party candidates. Among those who played a role of future candidates were also student-finalists of Open Debate Tournament among students of Kazan universities, organized by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Tatarstan along with the City Mayor's Office.

Debate and intellectual games

Debates are one of the most successful electoral projects which improves the electoral culture allowing young people to practice themselves as a leaders, speakers, able not only to competently present their vision on the issues discussed, but to attract an audience and get its support.

Intellectual games are among popular and not less effective forms. Referring to them is not accidental. Kazan is one of the largest centers of the International Association of "What? Where? When?" clubs. Considering the popularity of games among young people, in 2009 the Central Election Commission of Tatarstan together with the Federation of Intellectual Games of the Republic of Tatarstan realized the concept of carrying out big marathon on history of election, voting rights and process for the Cup of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Tatarstan. Every year over 80 school teams and 60 student teams in average take part in Cup games.

On the eve of 2011 - 2012 federal elections an intellectual online - competition called "Experts of the electoral law" was developed and organized. The first stage was carried out in the form of online-test, and the second one - in the format of business intellectual game. The contest covered 2,000 students and 21 high schools of the Republic.

The game is an important method of university education, putting the youth in an imaginary situation in which the crystallization of the main features of the future electoral behavior of young strata of society is being conducted.

In support of the games the instructional materials containing scripts of talk-shows, games, competitions [6] were released. The purpose of these publications is to enhance the participation of youth in the electoral process, to tell in an attractive manner about the elections as a necessary mechanism for legitimate change of power helping to protect the interests of people and thus the interests of youth.

Talk shows

Talk shows "Youth and Elections", "Is the youth apolitical?" prepared by students along with teachers are always interesting. Experts invite members of Central Election Commission of the Republic of Tatarstan. Talk show is a complete dramatic action, where participants are required not simply to read texts, but to oppose passionately, to defend their point of view. Before the discussion the children are introduced to the method of public debate, with examples of politicians' public debate speeches.

For the purposes of active propaganda of the elections as the most important institution of public authority organization and functioning and the development of information and exhibition activities, CEC RT developed the concept of the exhibition activity. On the eve of Duma elections (2007) a traveling exhibition dedicated to the 100th anniversary of parliamentarism in Russia was deployed in educational institutions of Kazan. A group of guides was prepared who were chosen from the number of students.

Young Voter Days

Holding Welcome days in CEC RT and Young Voter Days has become a good tradition. Young Voter Days is an all-Russian campaign, which takes place in all regions of Russia, every third Sunday of February. In Tatarstan, it has been carried out since 2007 and each year this action precedes law-explaining works among the young and future voters. Before the election in parliament of Tatarstan (2009) CEC Chairman Vladimir Churov visited the Republic. He met with students and teaching staff of Kazan higher education institutes, as well as with young voters - active participants of the political life of Republic districts and cities. Within the walls of the oldest university of Russia Vladimir Churov delivered a public lecture on the electoral system of Russia and told about opportunities it offers to the youth.

In February 2014 within a two-week rally in the municipal districts and cities more than 500 events for different categories of young people were planned. Among them were school-wide thematic lines, business games, law-information hours, lectures, book exhibitions and many other events. The project "Limited capacity - unlimited law" carried out by CEC RT together with "Izgelek" rehabilitation center and "Nika" disabled youth club stands out in a special way. Young "Nika" members organized their own agitation theater, which was engaged in informing voters undergoing rehabilitation at the center. Agitation theater is both a kind of school for voters with disabilities and a creative workshop as well. There are activities where they can teach and be taught about the basics of electoral rights through drama, by discussing these issues.

The republic has done a lot for the integration of disabled people in public life. In Tatarstan a long-term target program "Accessible Environment" has been accepted and implemented. Public organizations of people with disabilities and specialized agencies of culture and rehabilitation of the disabled play a significant role in the political socialization of this category of citizens. In particular, on the basis of the Republican Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired republican intellectual tournaments on the electoral law and process are held. In addition, Braille-based information materials and memos for blind people are being published, Skype conferences with public organizations of disabled people of the republic are being held.

Open lessons "Citizen and the election"

Such forms as olympiades, quizzes, brain-rings, open classes, writing electoral essays, crosswords contests are also worth to be mentioned [7]. For example, in secondary schools of the republic open lessons "Citizen and the election" are held where members of CEC of the RT, the territorial election commissions take part. The invaluable help is provided to teachers of history and social science. Special methodical materials on election law, manuals, periodicals about the election are being donated. By now, the work on the preparation of electronic manual with "I am a voter" educational computer game for teachers of secondary schools has been completed.

The theme "Citizen and the elections" became the leitmotif of creative competitions among schoolchildren ("We will grow up a little bit and go to the polls!" drawing contest and "I am a future voter" contest of creative works), as well as among young teachers of universities and colleges of the Republic (the competition "Best public lecture on elections topic - responsibility for the future"). Recently a contest for 20 best questions of intellectual games for the Cup of CEC of the Republic of Tatarstan on the history of the electoral law, the electoral process has been carried out.

Each year during holidays at a youth camp "Baitik" in Vysokogorskiy district of the Republic of Tatarstan the summer shift of a young voter school is held. More than 100 activists of student self-governments and youth organizations of Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamsk, Almetyevsk, Zelenodolsk and some districts of the Republic become the participants of the shift[8]. Classes at the school are held in the forms of workshop-trainings where children are introduced to

the theoretical and practical bases of the electoral process, they master the technology of discussions, press conferences and political debates in various forms of the game. Creative workshops on the development of electoral projects are also organized for them.

CONCLUSION

Micro-sociological researches among students are also widely practiced. Opinion polls are an effective tool for determining electoral attitudes of the younger generation, their political views, likes, preferences, overall picture of electoral support of certain candidates or political parties, as well as tracking of dynamics of these indicators as the election day approaches. The results of the polls, on the one hand, inform young voters, on the other - can influence the formation of the citizen's opinion, on the mood on the day of voting[9].

The calls for active participation in the elections, not backed by a hard work to improve the electoral culture of population, will not bring desired results. It is necessary to systematically "arm" voters with electoral knowledge, to produce electoral style of thinking, to increase their activity and interest in the outcome of the elections and to engage in political activity[10]. It is crucial that the individual voting behavior of young people grew into a massive, stable one, that it was lost somewhere as they grow older. As it is known, the development of the political activity of large masses of people historically led to the emergence and consolidation of democratic institutions and values[11].

Today a huge problem of ensuring the electoral rights of young workers and involving them in the electoral process still remains. This category of young people is virtually not covered by electoral education and upbringing. And in fact it is a huge army of young voters[12]. The study of electoral programs, projects, plans, shows that working youth including those living in rural areas are behind all these projects. Blue-collar working youth can still be somehow activated. And what can possibly be done with those employed in the service sector, trade, private and commercial sectors? There is a great danger that it we can just lose it. It is necessary to develop special projects concerning electoral group of young people urgently.

With the development of information communicational networks in Russia[13] a number of electoral technologies has moved to "electronic space". All contestants of elections began to use modern electronic technology. Young voters need to learn how to work with Internet technology: blogs, sites, live journals, etc. [14]

The activities mentioned above help to prepare young people for participation in the political life of the country, to develop their political activity, increase interest in the expression of people's will, form active citizenship, create conditions for the emergence of a motivational environment and awareness of the possibility for application of acquired knowledge in practice. It is necessary to look for new forms of communication with young people, which without any doubt could be supplied by young people themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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