

**POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS OF  
THE YOUTH IN TAJIKISTAN,  
UZBEKISTAN AND KAZAKHSTAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

**T**he political systems of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are complicated and heterogeneous public structures, undergoing difficult and contradictory processes of transformation of all basic institutions, norms and principles of relationships between themselves and society. Students play a crucial role in this process, which explains why the states want to offer the best possible conditions for the younger generation to help realize its potential in the interests of the state. This dictates changing the system designed to work with young people at all levels of power, as well as the mechanisms of governance. It was not by chance that the youth of these republics has been selected for the studies of political processes unfolding in these republics: young people are normally very critical of political education and training. Young people, due to the high educational level and sociopolitical activity and dynamic social behavior, will

replace, in the near future, the main productive and intellectual public force.

However, today there are no inadequately developed methodological approaches to the conceptualization of students as a social group and objects of social and political analysis, which means that we should carefully study the experience, problems and developmental issues in the process of transformation of contemporary post-Soviet society in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. All aspects of the content and manifestations of political orientations in the youth milieu are being actively discussed in academic writings. Yet, the phenomenon of political orientation—the problem of inner belonging to any specific social and political group, a correct understanding of its role in the life of the entire society, the means of forming ideas about oneself as a member of a definite social and political force—was and remains a challenge.

**KEYWORDS:** *contemporary youth, political orientation, identity, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan.*

***Introduction***

Political culture of youth can influence various aspects of a political process: its subjective and objective sides, the momentum of its development, the degree of conflict sentiments, etc. Tajikistan,

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, as contemporary post-Soviet states, demonstrate the transitory nature of their political systems and political processes. The ethnic and demographic structure of youth suggests that nation-states can be built on an ethnic foundation. Today, Islam is perceived as an inalienable indicator of ethnic self-determination in the age group of 15 to 31. The politicization of ethnicity in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is proceeding ahead of the creation of a political nation.

Scholarly interest in the subject is explained by the following:

- first, the problems of youth in the context of transformation of the Central Asian societies remain inadequately studied;
- second, contemporary political science pays little or no attention to the studies of youth at the micro-political level in the context of integration of young people into the social and political life of their countries.

Here we have studied youth as a specific group, which is characterized, on the one hand, by certain identities and self-determination and, on the other, demonstrates a pronounced protest behavior.<sup>1</sup> The political culture of youth, as a specific range of phenomena, strongly affects the political process, the dynamics of change in the context of state power and the state of the entities involved. It can be defined as a sum-total of political knowledge, ideas, concepts, convictions, traditions, values, collective ideas, patterns of political behavior, as well as models of political action that add order and meaning to the political process. In fact, the youth political culture can be represented as part of the common culture, on the one hand, and a certain synthesis of important political characteristics of youth, on the other. This highly complicated problem has not yet been studied in detail, while the problem of youth in the political structure of the Central Asian countries requires more attention. The above describes the subject of our studies as highly topical and important from the theoretical and practical points of view.

Indeed, today there are 38 higher education institutions in Tajikistan: 14 universities, 14 institutes, 1 conservatory, 4 higher education institutions at the ministries and power structures, 3 branches of educational institutions, operating in other countries, and 2 branches located inside the country, with the total student body of approximately 157,000, including 49,000 girls.<sup>2</sup> In Kazakhstan, there are 134 higher education institutions: 9 national universities, 31 state universities, 1 international education institution (jointly with Turkey), 17 corporate, 13 non-civil and 63 private higher education institutions.<sup>3</sup> In Uzbekistan, professionally educated specialists are trained at 24 universities and 40 institutes. Thirty-three higher educational institutions are functioning at the Ministry of Higher and Specialized Secondary Education; others are run by corresponding ministries. There are regional branches of higher educational institutions.<sup>4</sup>

## Methods and Materials

The theoretical and methodological approaches to the studies of the place and role of young people in the social and political structure demand a continuous practical enhancement. The method-

<sup>1</sup> See: I. Karabulatova, I. Mkrumova, Z. Polivara, B. Akhmetova, S. Galiullina, E. Loskutova, E. Abylkasymov, "Protest Behavior of Present-Day Russian Youth as Ethnosocial Deviation in an Ethnopolitical Conflict-Prone Situation," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 94-103; I. Mkrumova, I. Karabulatova, A. Zinchenko, "Political Extremism of the Youth as an Ethnosocial Deviation in the Post-Soviet Electronic Information Society," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 79-87.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Statistichesky sbornik sfery obrazovaniya Respubliki Tadjikistan*, Dushanbe, 2014, pp. 235-238.

<sup>3</sup> For the list of Kazakhstan's education institutions, see [[http://edurk.kz/ru/349-spisok\\_vuzov\\_kazahstana.html](http://edurk.kz/ru/349-spisok_vuzov_kazahstana.html)], 1 February, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> For the educational institutions of Uzbekistan, see [<http://univer.in/vuzy-respubliki-uzbekistan>], 1 February, 2017.

ology of the present research is based on the dialectical postulate of cooperation between social being and public consciousness, the interrelation of ideal, value-semantic aspects and motivation of the activity of a person; the recognition of an active and relatively independent role of ideas and public consciousness as a factor of social changes; an understanding that social and political orientations of an individual, as a representative of a definite social layer, and his attitude to society and the state at the macro-level are reflected in assessments of and positions on certain topical issues; the principles of dialectical logic and historicism, the unity of the historical and logical, the correlation of the general, particular and individual, the objectivity and concreteness of examination, as well as the notion of civilizational pluralism and multifold historical process.

Overall, our studies are based on the principle of ascendance from the abstract to the specific, viz. from the general theoretical and methodological foundation of the studies of political orientations to an analysis of empirical data of the political orientation of youth in Central Asia.

The empirical base consists of the materials of opinion polls carried out by the authors in 2014-2016 (opinion polls of young people in Astana, Kostanai, Tashkent, Taraz, and Dushanbe; over 3 thousand people polled), an analysis of documents of the bodies of state power and administration, statistical data, media publications, and an analysis of results of research studies by political scientists.

The scientific novelty of the work consists in introducing new empirical data and theoretical explanation of certain phenomena not yet discussed by those, who study social consciousness of youth, and forecasting probable ways and developmental trends of political preferences of young people and possible alternatives for social development in their current environment.

## Results

A political end, which can be considered an anticipation of the results of political actions for the sake of which these actions are performed, influences the character of a political process. Political end is inseparable from the axiological system, that is, it should be rooted in axiological orientations. Traditional values, cultivated in a society, are an important component of the political culture of youth that largely determines the essential nature of a political process. As the result of the so-called riot of “lace panties” that took place in Kazakhstan in 2014,<sup>5</sup> the protest behavior of the Kazakhstan youth escalated from a few and isolated acts to much more numerous protest actions in 2016 across the whole of the republic.

In the absence of axiological parameters, if the consensus, as the basis of democratic order, is not confirmed in the political system and the values (and, therefore, their diverse apologists) are antagonistic, we cannot expect a balanced behavior of our younger generations within a political process.<sup>6</sup>

Largely, political preferences of young people are formed by their socialization, which may be either state-controlled or given a free rein. In the post-Soviet period, political reforms destroyed many institutes of socialization, while the scope of the state’s informational rhetoric that has been influencing youth, was changed. For the youth of today in the Central Asian states, the system of reviving political values was destroyed. On the other hand, attempts were made to switch the system of values from the socialist state-controlled to the liberal capitalist-oriented one. The uncontrolled subjects of influence such as the street, television, Internet and other media moved into the place, previously

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<sup>5</sup> See: “Molodeiushchee litso kazakhstanskikh protestov,” available at [<http://rus.azattyq.org/a/almaty-week-and-protests-tenge-devaluation/25265768.html>], 22 February, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> See: V.F. Penkov, *Politicheskaya kultura kak faktor razvitiya politicheskogo protsesssa v sovremnoy Rossii*, Ph.D. thesis 23.00.02; defended on 21.06.2002; approved 14.02.2002, Moscow, 2002. 381 pp. Bibliography, pp. 355-381. p. 93.

reserved by the state. Uncontrolled development of information technologies, used mainly by young people, has made it practically impossible to shape political values of the younger generation.<sup>7</sup> No wonder the younger generation has become alienated; young people reject official policies and remain convinced that they cannot effect any changes by an active involvement in politics. At the same time, they become focused on individuality, initiative and entrepreneurship; learn to treat private interest as a priority, rely on their own abilities and regard wealth as an aim in life.<sup>8</sup>

Active members of youth movements have their own preferences related to their lifestyle, firm principles and certain personal qualities. This fully applies to the youth movement Kamolot and the New Youth Movement in Uzbekistan; the Alliance of the Students of Kazakhstan, Aybat movement and the Youth Branch of the Alga party in Kazakhstan, and the movement The Youth of Tajikistan for the Revival of Tajikistan in Tajikistan. Plans and values of the young activists are concentrated around three main concerns: profession, education and personal life. Activists want to work in the public and political spheres and structures of power; they are prepared to fill high posts as heads of organizations, deputies, ministers, etc. These aims are correlated with the desire to achieve a high status and enough money, to work for the country and help resolve urgent social problems. The members of the opposition movements are inclined to protests and struggle against the regime.<sup>9</sup>

The influence of the youth political culture on the objective side of the political process betrays itself in the creation of an array of problems, aims and trends of the political process. Young people inevitably bring their own ideas about a problem into the political sphere; formulate urgent issues for the politicians and insist on their solution.

Politicization of ethnicity among the young people stems from the following:

- (1) Increase in perceiving ethnicity as a political factor in the course of ethnic and national resurrection (national patriotism is construed as a political and ideological reference point, while the interrelation between ethnic identity and political priorities of the nation becomes stronger). Indeed, 52.3% of the Kazakh-speaking youth looks at themselves as national-patriots, while the share of national-patriots among the Russian-speaking Kazakh youth is 15.3%.
- (2) Social disappointment and growing radicalism as a form of seeking fairness, predicated on the still unregulated problems in the social sphere.
- (3) Ideological and religious expansion of religious extremism and terrorism from the countries with Islamic traditions.

In the minds of the young people, Islamic political education plants the philosophy and behavioral traits typical of people in a situation of irreconcilable differences between the Muslims and non-Muslims.

The student body of private educational institutions, located in the southern regions of the three countries, is composed mainly of young people who use native languages and rely on rural self-awareness. As a rule, they join all sorts of Islamic, non-traditional communities; one out of twelve is a Shi'ite.

Our studies revealed that the monikers "liberal" and "democrat" do not point to the real differences in the political bias of young people. This fully applies to the "socialists" and "communists" of the past, despite the fact that "communists" were in the minority and did not belong to the top ten of

<sup>7</sup> See: I. Mkrtumova, A. Dosanova, I. Karabulatova, V. Nifontov, "The Use of Communication Technologies to Oppose Political-Religious Terrorism as an Ethnosocial Deviation in the Contemporary Information-Digital Society," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 54-61.

<sup>8</sup> See: E.A. Samsonova, *Politicheskie tsennosti rossiyskoy molodezhi v usloviakh sotsialno-politicheskikh transformatsiy 1990-kh godov*; author's synopsis of Ph.D. thesis, 23.00.02. Saratov, 2008. 24 pp.

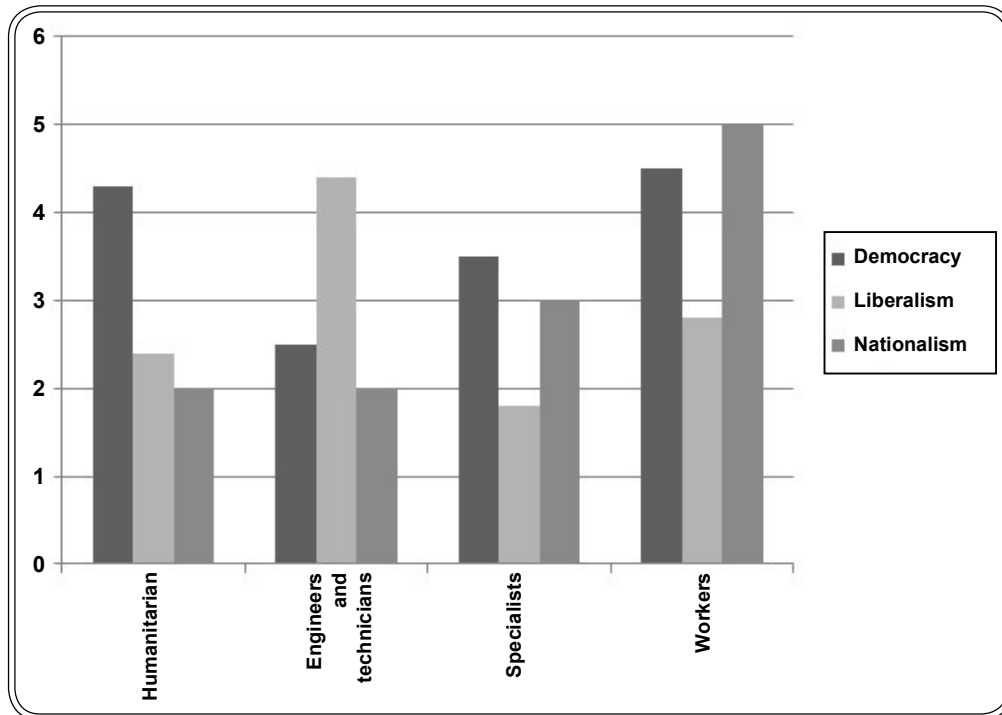
<sup>9</sup> See: I. Karabulatova, I. Mkrtumova, Z. Polivara, B. Akhmetova, S. Galiullina, E. Loskutova, E. Abylkasymov, op. cit.

the most frequently used ideological denominations; the same fully applies to “anarchists” and “anarcho-syndicalists”.

We have analyzed the gender preferences of young people and discovered that young men and women are predominantly attracted to liberal ideology. Nevertheless, there are significantly more men among socialists. “Male” ideologies also include nationalism and anarchism. Young women prefer communism and monarchism, and predominate among the “loyalists,” who support power.

Figure 1

Distribution of Political Orientations among Young People by Occupation



Interest in politics is directly related to age: older respondents are more inclined to discuss the political situation in the country. Students are less interested in politics than the working youth. Young specialists with higher education, engineers and technicians have the most pronounced interest in politics.

The ideologists of countercultures exaggerate the significance of unification and aimlessness of man’s life in contemporary society for their active protest. Being alienated from the world endows these people with an abiding sense of self-importance. Among the groups of youth countercultures, only the Hippies and Punks offered their own ideals of positive freedom and declared it to be of the highest value. They interpreted freedom as a permission to do anything one wants, go wherever and be open to new experiments. Freedom is not needed as such, but as a condition of personal growth, the external freedom as the path to internal freedom.

The subcultures of youth express, in a condensed form, the emancipatory demands of young people, who want to be free in their choices, self-determination and experimentation. Their slogans show that young people crave freedom, love and self-realization. Most of youth countercultures are

satisfied with displaying a challenging behavior and particular ways of spending their leisure. No matter how displeased, the adults tolerate this as a road, leading toward maturity.

## Discussion

Today, there is no agreement in humanitarian sciences on the role of political orientations and their content. A. Zaynalabidova, V. Kasyanov, T. Plotnikova, M. Nesmelova, V. Chernous, V. Utenkov, T. Alekseenko and others have covered, fairly fully, the common problems of young people in the context of changing paradigms of values and the plurality of ways and methods of self-identification.<sup>10</sup>

Tatyana Pavlova deemed it necessary to point out that today, the social and cultural aspects, collective identity in the present political and historical context, and the ability of new social actors to offer alternative projects of social organization and new social institutions, have moved forward in contemporary society, in which the processes of individualization (that have spilled over into the sphere of collective action), which can be described as the most typical phenomena, together with the changes in the nature of politics and power, and saturation of everyday life with politics, when the struggle for domination in society is gradually moving into the sphere of culture and new contexts, have already found their place.<sup>11</sup> According to certain authors, American institutions are directly involved in democratic developments in Central Asian countries (in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, in particular).<sup>12</sup>

As a rule, political culture of youth invigorates and speeds up political processes. Youth normally wants to change the realities, it is determined to fight inertia and stagnation and speed up social progress. The younger generation, its social functions and psychological specifics (rejection of compromises, lack of experience and psychological balance, keen awareness of social problems and unfairness) are responsible for much more vehement political conflicts. Certain social groups are prone to conflicts with society as a whole; their active opposition to society is labeled as “non-conformism” and “counterculture”.

Youth countercultures are the most radical varieties of youth subcultures, embraced by some teenagers and young men in the process of their socialization, as alternative systems of social and cultural norms and values. They can be described as indicators of the existing or emerging social and cultural trends.

Normally, members of all youth subcultures offer fairly abstract assessments of the world; being convinced that the world is far from perfect, they practically never ask “why?”; they prefer to ask “who is to blame?” and look for social conditions and forces, guilty of the current conditions of unfairness and injustice.

<sup>10</sup> See: A.S. Zaynalabidova, V.V. Chernous, *Politicheskii ekstremizm i ego profilaktika u studencheskoy molodezhi Dona*, Rostov on Don, 2002; V.V. Kasyanov, *Politicheskaya sotsializatsiya molodezhi v sovremennoy Rossii*, author's synopsis of doctorate thesis, Rostov on Don, 1999; M.Yu. Nesmelova, *Politicheskoe povedenie molodezhi v sovremennoy Rossii*, author's synopsis of Ph.D. thesis, Kazan, 1995; V. Plotnikova, *Politicheskoe povedenie v Rossii*, Rostov on Don, 2004; V.M. Utenkov, A.S. Zakalin, “O politicheskom soznanii studencheskoy molodezhi,” *Region: ekonomika i sotsiologiya*, 2003, No. 2; T.F. Alekseenko, *Protsess smeny sotsialnoy identichnosti rossiiskogo studenchestva*, author's synopsis of Ph.D. thesis, Rostov on Don, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See: T.V. Pavlova, “Analiz sotsiokulturnogo i istoricheskogo konteksta sotsialnykh dvizheniy,” Abstract of the Report at the 3rd All-Russia Sociological Congress, available at [[http://www.isras.ru/abstract\\_bank/1210250425.pdf](http://www.isras.ru/abstract_bank/1210250425.pdf)], 7 February, 2016; Yu.V. Ivanova, V.A. Krikunova, “Tendentsii i mekhanizmy vozdeystviya molodezhnoy politicheskoy kultury na politicheskii protsess,” *Vestnik Zabaykalskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 4, 2012, pp. 48-55.

<sup>12</sup> See: Yu. Komlyakova, “Democratization in Post-Soviet Central Asia: American Impact,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 120-129.

### *Conclusion*

We have concluded, with a great degree of regret, that there is no agreement when it comes to interpretations of the hierarchy of axiological benchmarks of contemporary youth. This is regrettable, since the values (ideas, traditions and norms) underlie the attitudes of youth to political life and determine its internal preferences and priorities. As highly sustainable, they ensure homogeneity of ideas, cherished by an individual; conflicting values, on the other hand, shatter political attitudes and push an individual to a revision of his/her fundamental ideas. This explains why the subcultures of the younger generation are fragmented. This patchwork of ideas leads to corresponding behavior patterns, affecting the political picture of the world and political behavior of this social category.

The youth political culture affects the subjective side of the political process as well: it educates the present and future political figures, the future political cadres and future political elite. Political culture of youth supplies society with the most active, not to say passionate political figures for the simple reason that youth is the most energetic part of a country's population, brimming with creative designs and being strong enough to realize them. The young people have just approached the stage, at which they are expected to acquire orientations, interests and social roles. At this stage, it can be described as the most active group of a country's population.

This means that the liberal-democratic ideas are being gradually accepted as the most popular ideology among the young people. Our studies have revealed that the youth of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, irrespective of its social or regional description, demonstrates a bias toward the paternalist political culture and its own alienation from power. At the individual level, people expect that the state will give them all sorts of boons and help them; they fear ultimatums and suppression; they do not want to change the state of affairs. Therefore, the state should not move away from civil society, since there is no civil society without a state. The nature of their relationships is the main problem.

The year of the famous youth protests of 2015-2016 (in Almaty, Sary-Ozen, Khujand, the Jamoati Ansorullo actions, etc.) revealed that, despite fragmentation, a significant part of youth is ready to replenish the social base of opposition. In such a situation, the authorities ought to intensify the efforts, aimed at the creation of a culture of dialog, and not eschew relations with all of the participants in the political life of a state. It is only through dialog that the preservation of stability and progressive development of society may be attained.