



# YOUTH IN POLITICS: METHODS OF STUDYING МОЛОДЕЖЬ В ПОЛИТИКЕ: МЕТОДЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ

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## The Politization of the Mass Consciousness of the Russian Youth in 2022: Possibilities of Evaluation on the Basis of Statistical Analysis

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**Abstract.** The politicization of the mass consciousness of young people is revealed in this study by such parameters as the level of interest in politics, readiness for certain actions to protect interests, priority sources of political information, assessment of the correctness of the direction of development of the situation in the country, as well as the relations of some of these characteristics with the level political trust. The empirical basis of the study is the results of a massive online survey of Russian youth conducted in November 2022. The method of conducting the survey was an online survey. The data were processed using traditional methods of statistical analysis: simple and combined grouping of data, analysis of standardized residuals, correlation analysis, calculation of new variables, multiple regression analysis, multivariate scaling. By modeling a new variable, it was possible to identify high rates of youth interest in politics. It has been established that the level of youth interest in politics is associated with the availability and size of material and social resources of representatives of this group. Positive and negative factors influencing the level of youth interest in politics have been identified. Since, according to the results of the analysis, the levels of political trust and interest in youth politics turned out to be unrelated, it can be argued that the rational component in the formation of political trust among young people is rather weak. The relationship between the level of political trust of young people and the willingness to take certain potential actions to protect their interests has been revealed. Two sets of related potential action strategies have been identified that young people can use to protect their interests.

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**Keywords:** political consciousness, political preferences, political attitudes, political trust, political behavior, online survey, statistical methods of analysis, data grouping, analysis of standardized residuals, modeling variables, correlation analysis, regression analysis, multivariate scaling

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## Политизация массового сознания российской молодежи в 2022 г.: возможности оценки на основе статистического анализа

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**Аннотация.** Политизация массового сознания молодежи выявляется в данном исследовании по таким параметрам, как уровень интереса к политике, готовность к определенным действиям с целью защиты своих интересов, приоритетные источники политической информации, оценка правильности направления развития ситуации в стране, а также связь некоторых из этих характеристик с уровнем политического доверия. Эмпирической основой исследования являются результаты массового онлайн-опроса российской молодежи, проведенного в ноябре 2022 г. Методом проведения опроса стало онлайн-анкетирование. При обработке данных использованы традиционные методы статистического анализа: простая и комбинированная группировка данных, анализ стандартизованных остатков, корреляционный анализ, вычисление новых переменных, множественный регрессионный анализ, многомерное шкалирование. При помощи моделирования новой переменной удалось выявить высокие показатели интереса молодежи политике. Установлено, что уровень интереса молодежи к политике сопряжен с наличием и размером материальных и социальных ресурсов представителей этой группы. Проанализированы позитивные и негативные факторы, влияющие на уровень интереса молодежи к политике. Поскольку по результатам анализа уровни политического доверия и интереса к политике молодежи оказались не связаны, можно утверждать, что рациональный компонент в формировании политического доверия у молодежи достаточно слаб. Определена взаимосвязь между уровнем политического доверия молодежи и готовностью к совершению определенных потенциальных

действий для защиты своих интересов. Выявлены два набора связанных потенциальных стратегий действий, к которым может прибегать молодежь для защиты своих интересов.

**Ключевые слова:** политическое сознание, политические предпочтения, политические установки, политическое доверие, политическое поведение, онлайн-опрос, статистические методы анализа, группировка данных, анализ стандартизованных остатков, моделирование переменных, корреляционный анализ, регрессионный анализ, многомерное шкалирование

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## Introduction

In the last decade, Russian researchers have often referred to the fragmentation of the political consciousness of the Russian youth [Aseeva, Shashkova 2017; Komarovsky 2021], low interest in politics [Borisova 2019; Kozyreva, Smirnov 2015], relatively high willingness of the youth in metropolises to protest political mobilization [Isaeva 2021; Popova 2020], the orientation of this socio-demographic group on entertainment content online [Warren, Sulaiman, Jaafar 2014; Lu, Qi, Yu 2019] or, at best, popular bloggers offering “recipes for all occasions” in an accessible visualized, often game form [Kuznetsov 2021; Rovinskaya 2020; Grigoryan 2021]. These characteristics of the mass consciousness of youth are derived from the conditions of primary and secondary political socialization and reflect the specifics of the process of political re-socialization [Hooghe, Marien 2013; Chang 2022], which occurs inevitably during the shift of younger generations to adulthood [Shokri 2016; Moamenla 2017; Echeverría, Mani 2020].

The year 2022 has brought significant changes that have equally had a deep impact on the mass consciousness of different age cohorts of our country’s population. In this regard, youth is a group whose political values, attitudes and preferences are most susceptible to transformation [Golovin 2020; Schraff 2020]. It seems methodically correct to pay close attention to the most labile characteristics of political consciousness, since they are especially susceptible to change. In this sense, in our opinion, modern versions of behavioral methodology yield the most valuable results when conducting empirical studies [Noordzij, Koster, Waal 2021]. Extreme political processes inevitably cause a certain response in the political perceptions of young people [Norris 2011].

This article will assess the state of the parameters of the mass political consciousness of Russian youth such as the level of interest in politics, readiness for certain actions in order to protect their interests, primary sources of political information, evaluate the

direction in which the situation in the country is developing, as well as the relationship of some of these characteristics with the level of political trust.

Another important task of the article is to assess the possibility of using traditional methods of statistical analysis to address this issue: from simple and combined grouping of data with the analysis of standardized residuals and correlation analysis to the calculation of new variables, multiple regression analysis and multidimensional scaling. Unfortunately, sometimes, the obviously constructive trend towards combining quantitative and qualitative methods in one study [Brosius, van Elsas, de Vreese 2019; Grishin 2022] noticeable limits the use of the arsenal of tools for statistical analysis and leads to their simplification [Chevalier 2019; Schoon, Cheng 2011].

The data used in the article were obtained during a mass online survey of Russian youth in November 2022 within the framework of the research project “Political trust of Russian youth: mechanisms of formation, state, trends and risks”. The sample included 1500 respondents aged between 14 and 35 years, quota-based, not related to quota control based on gender, age, federal district of residence. The sample was calculated based on the most recent Rosstat data.<sup>1</sup>

### **Modeling New Variables: Levels of Interest in Politics and Political Trust of the Russian Youth**

The level of interest in politics was calculated by modeling a new variable based on the respondents' self-assessment. The validity of self-assessment was verified additionally by correlating the answers to the question on interest in politics and the question menu regarding the sources of political information (the logical rectangle procedure).

As a result, we revealed that 8.6 % of Russian youth have a low level of interest in politics, 36.2 % have an average level, and 52.0 % have a high level of interest. As for the remaining 3.2 % of respondents, it was impossible to identify their level of interest in politics.

We are fully aware that such high rates of interest in politics are largely due to the effect of the partial mobilization that ended two weeks before the start of the survey. Although, according to the law, this procedure could not be and was not carried out with respect to significant groups of young people, however, such a campaign, which had not been carried out on the territory of our country for several generations, could not help but affect the more sensitive and attentive attitude of the population to the problems of domestic and foreign policy. At the same time, since the root cause itself, the special military operation (SMO), which has significantly changed the indicators of youth interest in politics, continues, there is no reason to believe that this parameter of mass consciousness will decrease over the next few months or even years (Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> The population of the Russian Federation by gender and age as of January 1, 2022 (Statistical Bulletin). Moscow, 2022.

**Self-assessment of the level of interest in politics among Russian youth,  
November 2022, % by column**

Number of points awarded	Group size	Level of interest in politics	Group size
1	0.0	Low interest in politics	8.6
2	2.4		
3	1.7		
4	4.5		
5	4.2	Medium level of interest in politics	36.2
6	16.2		
7	15.8		
8	20.1	High level of interest	52.0
9	10.3		
10	21.6		
Difficult to answer	3.2	Difficult to answer	3.2
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the study.

The analysis of the data from combined tables of the calculated variable “level of interest in politics” with socio-demographic and status characteristics of respondents, taking into account the statistically significant standardized balances of values in cells, allowed us to identify the most typical “profiles” of the respondents in each group.

Thus, the greatest interest in politics tends to be shown by men aged 30 to 35 years with higher education, officially employed, relatively financially secure and with high incomes (with an employment record), residents of metropolises and large regional industrial centers, residents of the Central and Northwestern Federal Districts (statistically significant standardized remainders (hereinafter — s.s.s.r.) are equal to +1,7, +4,8, +3,1, +2,5, +2,4, +1,7, +3,1, +2,3, +2,4 respectively). Thus, we can assume that young people belonging to the middle class, with high indicators of social and cultural capital, are currently following the development of the political situation in the country and in the world more closely.

The average level of interest to assessing political events is more likely to be present among the group of young people aged 14 to 20 years, high school students, college and lyceum students, junior university students, residents of small towns and villages, residents of the Volga Federal District (s.s.s.r. are equal to +2,4, +1,9, +1,8, +1,8, +2,3, +1,7, +2,3, +1,9 respectively).

The least interest in politics tends to be shown by girls, young people aged 14 to 20 years, holders of primary, incomplete and full secondary education, school students, low-income residents of small towns, as well as villages and rural areas, the youth

in the North Caucasus Federal District (s.s.s.r. are equal to +1,6, +4,1, +1,6, +3,8, +3,0, +3,6, +1,9, +2,0, +2,0, +2,8 respectively).

In general, we can conclude that the level of political interest of young people is associated with the availability and size of material and social resources of the representatives of the group.

The conducted multiple regression analysis, with the level of interest in politics as the dependent variable and various socio-demographic factors as independent variables, identified the age and type of settlement where the young people live as the most significant factors (with the value of the determination coefficient +0.3, the standardized Beta regression coefficients for the two variables were equal to +0.22 and -0.15, respectively).

The attempt to build regression models linking the level of interest in politics to political attitudes (Tables 2 and 3) identified the significant positive factors as beliefs in the priority of the state’s interests, the necessity and inevitability of reforms, willingness to work in political parties, and the presence of politicians, journalists or bloggers whose views and opinions on acute political problems of youth are of importance. A factor that negatively affects the interest of youth in politics is the lack of any self-reflection among young people regarding their own political views.

Table 2

**Model 1 multiple regression analysis of the assessment of the level of interest in policies based on attitudes**

Model summary b					
Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Standard error	Durbin-Watson
1	.371 <sup>a</sup>	.137	.136	.606	1.759

a. Predictors: (constant), I have no political opinions, The interests of the state are a priority, Reforms in society are necessary

b. Dependent variable: level of interest in politics

Coefficients a					
Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant))	2.456	.023		108.217	.000
1					
State interests are priority	.284	.038	.179	7.489	.000
Reforms in society are needed	.221	.039	.136	5.589	.000
I have no political opinion	-.390	.035	-.271	-11.178	.000

a. Dependent variable: level of interest in politics

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the study.

**Multiple regression analysis model for estimating the level of interest in policies based on attitudes**

Model summary b					
Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Standard error	Durbin-Watson
1	.421 <sup>a</sup>	.178	.176	.591	1.785

a. Predictors: (constant), identification with politicians and bloggers (binary), Participation in the work of political parties — readiness, I have no political opinions

b. Dependent variable: level of interest in politics

Coefficients a					
Модель	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.378	.024		99.644	.000
Participation in the work of political parties — readiness	.295	.042	.168	7.058	.000
1 I have no political opinion	-.333	.034	-.231	-9.647	.000
Identification with politicians and bloggers (binary)	.305	.032	.229	9.547	.000

a. Dependent variable: level of interest in politics

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the study.

It can be assumed that the levels of political trust and interest in politics among youth are related, but data analysis has proved this assumption wrong (Table 4). At the level of statistically significant standardized balances, we only found the tendency of people with a low level of interest in politics to distrust political institutions and people in power, as well as the lack of trust in people who cannot assess the degree of their interest in politics: the corresponding values of s.s.s.r. are equal to +1.6, +2.9. Thus, it can be argued that the rational component in the formation of political trust among young people is quite weak.



**Self-assessment of the level of interest in the politics of Russian youth  
with different levels of political trust, November 2022, %**

Self-assessment of the level of interest in politics	No political trust	Level of political trust is low	Level of political trust is medium	Level of political trust is high	Total
Low	2.4	3.5 +1.6	1.5 -1.8	1.1	8.5
Medium	8.6	13.2	9.2	5.3	36.2
High	13.9	15.7	13.5	8.9	52.0
Difficult to answer	1.5 +2.9	0.5 -2.1	0.8	0.4	3.2
Total	26.4	32.9	24.9	15.8	100.0

*Note.* The second digit in the cell of the table is a statistically significant standardized remainder, which, depending on the sign, fixes the inclination or lack of inclination of the group to think or act in a certain way.

*Source:* compiled by the authors based on the results of the study.

**Studying the Political Trust and Repertoire  
of Potential Actions of Youth  
to Protect Their Interests through Online Questionnaires**

During the online survey of Russian youth, a menu question was posed allowing the respondents to select all the answers that correspond to their views on what actions they are personally ready to take to protect their interests (Table 5). The purpose of this question was to obtain information about the repertoire of potential political and non-political actions young people in Russia consider effective and acceptable to take. It is important that not a single action, even a personal one, can be performed without communication with the authorities, civil society institutions, personalized or anonymized counterparts. It turned out that almost every fifth young Russian does not reflect on this at all (19.7 % of young respondents found it difficult to answer this question).

Contrary to the working hypothesis of the priority of political actions, the most popular action was appealing to state bodies (55.6 % of responses); participation in elections (36.3 %), appealing to civil society institutions (36.0 %), as well as political communication in the online space (33.7 %) came second. Third came participation in the work of public organizations (24.3 %) and the use of personal connections and rewards to solve their problems (22.3 %), and fourth came participation in public authorized rallies (19.8 %), which can have both constructive and destructive political orientation. The fifth most common position was the willingness to participate in the work of political parties (16.1 %),



the sixth was the willingness to participate in unauthorized protests (11.0 %) and material support for politicians and their projects (9.0 %). Finally, another 5.5 % of the respondents considered themselves as not fitting into the proposed options for public actions, however, during the analysis, it turned out that they all relate to political communication on the Internet (all these respondents also chose the option “Discussion and reposts on social media”).

Table 5

**Rating of young people’s readiness for various actions in order to protect their interests in case of their violation, November 2022, %**

Method of action	%	Position in the rating
Appeal to state bodies	55.6	1
Participation in elections	36.3	2
Appeal to NGOs	36.0	2
Discussion and reposts in social networks	33.7	2
Participation in the work of NGOs	24.3	3
Use of personal connections and rewards	22.3	3
Participation in allowed promotions	19.8	4
Participation in the work of political parties	16.1	5
Participation in unallowed protests	11.0	6
Material support for politicians and their projects	9.0	6
Other ways to act to protect interests	5.5	7
Difficult to answer	19.7	

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the study.

Among other ways to protect their interests in case of their violation, young people spoke about the need to independently solve their problems without contacting any structures (“*Help yourself*”, “*The task of helping the drowning people is in the hands of the drowning people themselves*”); the obligation to search for associates for collective actions (“*campaigning in order to find*”).

*allies*”, “*We resolve together*”); using the power of public opinion formed on the Internet (“*Creating various types of Internet resources that highlight the problem, the fight against it, giving others guidelines for taking actions and uniting*”) or resorting to the traditional form of protecting the interests of workers — trade unions (“*Participation in organizing a trade union*”); the impossibility of predetermining the correct strategy of action, since everything will depend on the specific problem (“*Well, anything that is required*”, “*Depends on the problem I ran into*”).

Some representatives of youth mentioned the need to apply to state bodies, but at the same time they put these answers in the “other” option (“*Government services*”, “*Appeal to the court*”, “*Police, prosecutor’s office*”): it is obvious that some young people are lacking the understanding that state bodies are not limited to the actual administrative structures of representative power, but that the entire system, including law enforcement and judicial structures, is part of the state apparatus. The lack of knowledge among young people of the state structures is also evidenced by the fact that this list included the option of “Petition”, i.e. the respondent mentioned the type of appeal, but did not indicate the object itself towards which the action is directed.

Some young respondents wrote responses related to emigration (“*Moving*”, “*Leaving the country*”, “*Changing the country of residence*”), the use of force (“*AKM, the magazine is attached*”; another expression used mentioned the command to start simultaneous massive shots in military operations — “*Three hundred thirty-three*”).

Individual respondents stated that they would not attempt to protect their interests (“*No way, I’m a coward*”, “*I won’t do anything*”), which is due to the belief in the futility, inefficiency of any attempts to change anything in the country (“*The truth is with whoever has money and power*”).

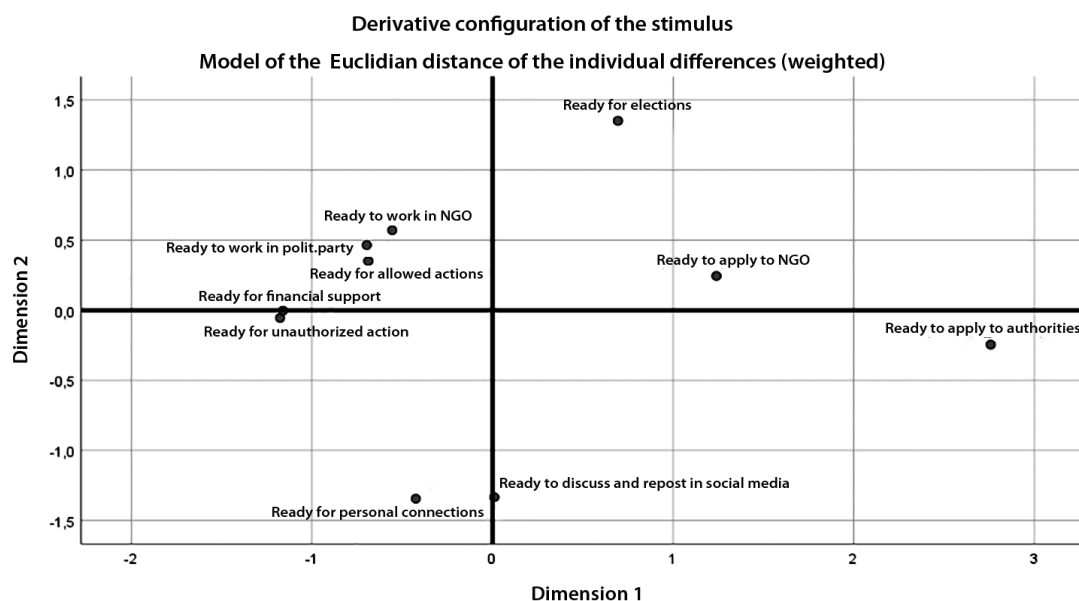
The conducted multidimensional scaling of the potential actions of young people in order to protect their interests (Figure) made it possible to draw three important conclusions.

First, there are two sets of related potential action strategies that young people can resort to: a) “working for civil society” through participating in the activities of public organizations and parties, in authorized and unauthorized public rallies, as well as material support to most probably opposition politicians and their projects (the probability of combining these actions is quite high); b) being “charged” with information of a certain orientation from social media, followed by an attempt to solve their personal problems through a system of informal personal connections and “gratitude”.

Secondly, the most probable ways of young people’s behavior — applying to authorities and public organizations, as well as voting — are rarely combined in the actions of one person.

Thirdly, young people’s ideas of the acceptable ways to protect their interests is formed by two latent factors: the first is formed by the axis of loyalty in relation to state authorities (the extreme points are “willingness to apply to authorities — willingness to participate in unauthorized protests”); the second is formed by the

axis of the nature of the personification of one’s position (the extreme points are “readiness to participate in elections — readiness to use personal connections and rewards”).



Multidimensional scaling of the readiness of Russian youth  
for various actions to protect their own interests

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the study. Data processed in SPSS (version 27).

There is a certain link between the level of political trust and the willingness or unwillingness of young people in Russia to take certain actions in order to protect their interests (Table 6). Thus, young people with a high level of political trust are more inclined than other groups to appeal to state authorities; however, they are not attracted much to participating in authorized public rallies, the work of public organizations, the use of personal connections and rewards, material support for politicians and their projects, as well as political communication online (s.s.s.r. are equal to +2.5, -3.6, -3.0, -4.7, -2.6, -2.8, -4.3 respectively).

Young people with an average level of political trust are inclined to apply to authorities and participate in elections, but they are not very attracted to participating in public authorized and unauthorized rallies, as well as in other actions in order to protect their interests (s.s.s.r. are equal to +4.0, +2.0, -3.0, -4.1, -4.0, respectively).

Young people with a low level of political trust are more likely than other groups to participate in authorized public rallies, use personal connections and rewards, and other means, but are reluctant to apply to public authorities (s.s.s.r. are equal to +1.6, +2.1, +1.6, -1.7, respectively).

**Readiness of young people with different levels of political trust  
to take certain actions to protect their interests  
in case of their violation, November 2022, % by line**

Potential Mode of Action	Trust No	Trust Low	Trust Medium	Trust High	Total
Appeal to state bodies	19.2 -4.1	30.0 -1.7	31.7 +4.0	19.1 +2.5	100.0
Contacting NGOs	27.2	34.5	22.3	16.1	100.0
Participation in allowed public events	37.6 +3.8	38.3 +1.6	16.4 -3.0	7.7 -3.6	100.0
Participation in elections	22.1 -2.0	32.1	29.1 +2.0	16.7	100.0
Participation in the work of political parties	26.5	30.8	26.1	16.6	100.0
Participation in the work of NGOs	30.6 +1.6	37.2	22.5	9.7 -3.0	100.0
Participation in unauthorized protests	50.9 +6.3	38.2	9.2 -4.1	1.7 -4.7	100.0
Use of personal connections and rewards	23.9	39.3 +2.1	26.5	10.3 -2.6	100.0
Material support for politicians and their projects	39.0 +2.9	31.9	22.7	6.4 -2.8	100.0
Discussion and reposts in social networks	30.4 +1.8	36.6	24.7	8.3 -4.3	100.0
Other ways to act to protect interests	40.7 +2.6	43.0 +1.6	3.5 -4.0	12.8	100.0
Difficult to answer	32.0 +1.9	33.7	17.2 -2.7	17.2	100.0

\* The second digit in the cell of the table is a statistically significant standardized remainder, which, depending on the sign, fixes the inclination or lack of inclination of the group to think or act in a certain way.

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the study.

Young people who absolutely do not trust politicians and institutions of political power, to a greater extent than other groups, are inclined to participate in unauthorized and authorized public rallies, material support for politicians and their projects, discuss political problems on social media and other actions, but are not inclined to apply to government bodies or to participate in elections (s.s.s.r. are equal to +6.3, +3.8, +2.9, +1.8, +1.6, +2.6, — 4.1, -2.0, respectively).

The events of 2022 had a profound impact on the political consciousness of the Russian society and, in particular, the younger generation. The research conducted

contributed to identifying the features of the modern political consciousness of the Russian youth: in particular, it expanded the scientific understanding of the range of measurements of political consciousness, the factors and the relationship between the attitudes of political consciousness with potential models of behavior and collective actions.

The political trust of young people is associated with other indicators that are traditionally considered in the study of political consciousness. Since, according to the results of the analysis, the levels of political trust and interest in politics among youth turned out to be unrelated, it can be argued that the rational component in the formation of political trust among young people is rather weak.

The results of the study emphasize the importance of ensuring political trust in society: they confirmed the relationship between the level of political trust and the readiness of the Russian youth to take certain actions in order to protect their interests. The revealed relationship may be important for predicting political behavior. The collective actions of young people in modern Russia need constant reflection. Thus, identifying the main sets of potential strategies that young people can take to protect their interests seems promising.

One of the challenges of studying the political consciousness of Russians at the current stage is the question of choosing adequate methodology and methods. The results of the study allow us to conclude that expanding the use of traditional statistical methods is promising for the study of political consciousness. In particular, modeling new variables made it possible to focus the analysis on new and important dimensions of the state of political consciousness. The trends in the political consciousness of young people presented in this study require improvement of the tools and further study.

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