

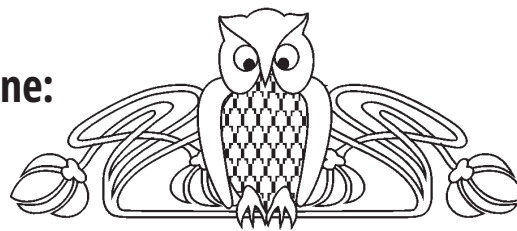


Известия Саратовского университета. Новая серия. Серия: Социология. Политология. 2023. Т. 23, вып. 3. С. 313–324  
*Izvestiya of Saratov University. Sociology. Politology*, 2023, vol. 23, iss. 3, pp. 313–324  
<https://soziopolit.sgu.ru>

<https://doi.org/10.18500/1818-9601-2023-23-3-313-324>, EDN: GVT0GV

Article

## Attitude of Russian youth to the special military operation in Ukraine: Impact of media practices



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**Abstract.** According to social surveys, the majority of Russian society as a whole supported the President's decision to hold the special military operation (in what follows, the SMO). However, the level of this support appeared to be different for different social groups. It turned out, for example, that, compared with society in general, young people perceived the outbreak of hostilities more skeptical and critical. In this regard, this article is devoted to the analysis of the features and factors of formation of such an attitude of young people towards the SMO. Among other things, the views of young people about the causes of the outbreak of the conflict, its perpetrators and possible solutions are considered; the reaction of young citizens of the country to the entry into Russia of four new subjects, partial mobilization, as well as those who evade it is presented. Patterns are indicated according to which people's media preferences affect the nature of their assessments of events within the framework of SMO. Probable reasons for the more skeptical attitude of the younger generation to what is happening are identified, and possible options for its further transformation in the short and long terms are indicated.

**Keywords:** special military operation, youth, media practices, echo-chambers, partial mobilization, Russia, Ukraine

**Acknowledgments:** The article was prepared as part of the research project "Value motivation of young people's attitude to the main directions of state policy in modern Russia", supported by the Expert Institute for Social Research (EISR) together with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation and the Russian Academy of Sciences.

**For citation:** Kazakov A. A., Vilkov A. A., Shestov N. I. Attitude of Russian youth to the special military operation in Ukraine: Impact of media practices. *Izvestiya of Saratov University. Sociology. Politology*, 2023, vol. 23, iss. 3, pp. 313–324. <https://doi.org/10.18500/1818-9601-2023-23-3-313-324>, EDN: GVT0GV

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Научная статья

УДК 32.019.3

Отношение российской молодежи к СВО: влияние медийных практик

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**Аннотация.** По данным социологических опросов, большая часть российского общества в целом поддержала решение президента о проведении специальной военной операции (далее – СВО). Однако для разных социальных групп уровень этой поддержки оказался различным. Выяснилось, например, что, по сравнению с обществом в целом, молодежь восприняла начало боевых действий более сдержанно и критично. В этой связи данная статья посвящена анализу особенностей и факторов формирования такого отношения молодых людей к СВО. Среди прочего, рассмотрены представления молодежи о причинах разразившегося конфликта, его виновниках и возможных вариантах разрешения; представлена реакция молодых граждан страны на вхождение в состав России четырех новых субъектов, частичную мобилизацию, а также тех, кто от нее уклоняется. Обозначены закономерности, согласно которым медийные



предпочтения людей влияют на характер их оценок событий в рамках СВО. Выявлены вероятные причины более скептического отношения представителей молодого поколения к происходящему, обозначены возможные варианты его дальнейшей трансформации.  
**Ключевые слова:** специальная военная операция, молодежь, медийные практики, эхо-камеры, частичная мобилизация, Россия, Украина

**Благодарности.** Статья подготовлена в рамках исследовательского проекта «Ценностная мотивация отношения молодежи к основным направлениям государственной политики в современной России», поддержанного Экспертным институтом социальных исследований (ЭИСИ) совместно с Министерством науки и высшего образования РФ и Российской академией наук.

**Для цитирования:** Kazakov A. A., Vilkov A. A., Shestov N. I. Attitude of Russian youth to the special military operation in Ukraine: Impact of media practices [Казиков А. А., Вилков А. А., Шестов Н. И. Отношение российской молодежи к СВО: влияние медийных практик] // Известия Саратовского университета. Новая серия. Серия: Социология. Политология. 2023. Т. 23, вып. 3. С. 313–324. <https://doi.org/10.18500/1818-9601-2023-23-3-313-324>, EDN: GVTOGV

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For Russia, the beginning of the SMO in Ukraine has certainly become a key event of 2022. It entailed a whole set of processes and changes that will definitely affect the social life for quite a long time. Despite the fact that in its mass, Russian society as a whole appeared to be rather understanding about the decision of the country's leadership, many perceived the SMO extremely negatively. The attitude to what was happening quite quickly turned out to be one of the main criteria, according to which people began to divide compatriots into "us" and "them".

Among all age categories, for the youth it has become the most difficult dilemma. Not only because hostilities affected it first of all, but also due to the lack of rich life experience, it was difficult for young people to take in the situation and determine their attitude towards it. More than twenty years have passed since the end of the previous military campaign (i.e. on the territory of the Chechen Republic) – from then a whole generation has grown up, which simply did not have the remotest idea of military operations and daily reports from the fronts.

By the fact that most of the information about the SMO Russian youth receives from the mass media and, in particular, from the Internet sources, the question arises of the role of media education in the formation of an adequate attitude of young people to what is happening. Under current conditions, the importance of media literacy promotion arguably becomes even more obvious than ever. The need for consolidation of Russian society in the context of ongoing global confrontation has become a significant factor in actualization of the idea of the mass incorporation of elements of media education into the system of domestic secondary and higher education.

It should be noted that national surveys regarding the reaction of the population to the SMO are conducted regularly, but the results broken down by age groups are not always made available to the public. For example, the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center carries out relevant re-

search every month, but publishes only generalized (i.e. for all respondents, regardless of their age) data on its official website [1]. In addition, at the end of 2022, the Center's specialists administered a survey in which they asked respondents to evaluate the significance and formulate their attitude not to the SMO as a whole, but only to certain events within its framework [2].

The Public Opinion Foundation measured the attitude of Russians towards the SMO four times, but did so only until March 20 [3]; since then, results of the relevant surveys have not been presented on its website. And only Yuri Levada Analytical Center (from this point onward Levada-Center, recognized as a foreign agent in Russia) conducts surveys into this issue every month and publishes detailed results, structured, among other criteria, by age. That is why the results of measurements carried out by Levada-Center in April, 2023 [4] will be presented below (at the time of writing this article, these were the most recent data).

Apart from this, the empirical basis of the current research was also the results of our own online questionnaires and focus group interviews. From November 1 to November 15, 2022, 2055 people aged 14 to 35 and residing in 63 regions of Russia were interviewed.

The online questionnaire consisted of 27 questions, including 8 closed, 1 open and 16 semi-closed; 2 more questions implied the need to evaluate on a six-point scale (from 0 to 5) the level of respondents' trust in various sources of information and the correctness of the development of various spheres of public and state life in modern Russia. The final sample consisted of 2021 questionnaires: 34 questionnaires were not selected for analysis due to the fact that respondents did not answer all questions or gave answers to open-ended questions that were not relevant to the essence of the survey.

Statistical error in our sample (with a confidence interval of 0.95) does not exceed: 3.4% for numbers close to 50%; 2.9% for numbers close to 25% / 75%; 2% for numbers close to 10% / 90%; and 1.5% for numbers close to 5% / 95%.



When forming the sample, quotas were used by gender, age, and place of residence of respondents. As a result, 61.9% of women and 38.1% of men were surveyed. 75.7% of them live in administrative centers of the Russian Federation subjects, 18.3% reside in regional centers, 6% – in rural areas. According to the age criterion, respondents were distributed as follows: from 14 to 17 years old – 5.4%; from 18 to 25 years old – 83.7%; from 26 to 30 years old – 4.6%; from 31 to 35 years old – 6.3%. At the time of the survey, 1% of respondents studied at comprehensive schools; 1.9% attended specialized secondary schools; 83.9% studied at the university; 9.8% were employees; 2.4% were engaged in entrepreneurship; and remaining 1% chose the ‘Other’ option.

Realizing that there were a disproportionately large number of students among the respondents interviewed, we nevertheless believe that the sample formed in this way did make it possible to identify the main features of assessment of SMO by young people. Additionally, it is important to take into account that students are usually considered the most active, organized, and knowledgeable part of the youth, which in many aspects accumulates meanings and ideas that are typical for most people of their age.

After results of the online survey were quantitatively processed in the SPSS program, there was a need to clarify and specify certain points. To this end, from November 20 to November 30, 2022, three focus group interviews were carried out, with a total of 36 young people having participated in them. While selecting the focus group interview participants, we also focused on the gender and age characteristics of Russian youth. During the focus groups, young people were asked questions about the reasons and motives for their use of certain information sources, how they feel about the SMO, partial mobilization and those who evade it, as well as respondents’ attitude to the entry of new subjects into Russia.

We are convinced that combination of results of the surveys conducted by Levada-Center and our online survey, coupled with three focus group interviews, made it possible to obtain sufficiently reliable and valid results, on the basis of which one can make generalizations and formulate specific recommendations for media support of events related to the SMO.

Within the scholarly community, the influence of the SMO on the political worldview and the consciousness of youth has not yet obtained proper consideration. Of course, Russian scholars investigate specifics of the political culture and behavior of young people – in particular, their spiritual and moral values [5, 6], political and ideological prefer-

ences [7, 8], and social identity [9, 10]. Quite often, the focus of scholar’s attention includes formats and motivation of the electoral and protest participation of youth [11–14], as well as models of the desired image of the future of Russia preferred by young people [15, 16].

Different aspects of youth media consumption are being actively studied by Russian and foreign researchers. Taking into account specifics of political culture of citizens of our country and peculiarities of Russia’s political regime, while reviewing research available on the issue we deem it necessary to focus on analysis of domestic scholarships. No doubt foreign scientists make a valuable contribution to the development of theoretical and applied aspects of examination of media practices inherent in young people. Naturally, they are primarily interested in exploration of their compatriots’ media consumption. However, Russian youth, to our minds, exists in quite specific social, political, and informational conditions that must be taken into account, which, in fact, is what native scholars try to do.

It should be noted that most often the primary focus of researchers is either schoolchildren [17, 18], or university students [19, 20]. The rest of the youth (in its generally accepted sense – i.e. up to 35 years old) either becomes an object of study more rarely or is mentioned in the context of the entire population [21, 22].

Substantial portion of research is devoted to the analysis of motivational factors of media consumption [23, 24]. Scholars actively compare various factors that encourage young people to use information sources [25]. At the same time, the idea that young men and women turn to media (primarily the Internet) more for socialization and self-actualization rather than for entertainment or information is becoming more precise [23].

Of note, the Internet is no longer considered exclusively as a set of technologies. Rather, it has become the natural environment and an organic part of the daily lives of younger generation [25]. As a result, needs that were previously met only offline can now be satisfied directly – through online communication [26].

The interplay between media and political practices is not actively examined. In this context, special mention must be made of attempts to investigate the association between social networking and political participation [27, 28] and polarization [29, 30], to identify the impact of social media use on political attitudes [31, 32], to analyze anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine within the framework of various



student groups' media literacy education [33], and to assess contribution of media criticism to the development of media competence of citizens, their rational and critical attitude to political discourses formed by the media [34].

Unfortunately, there are not many attempts to develop an effective model of promoting among young people the audience's skills to reasonably confront the false information [33] or articulate the importance of media literacy for political communication in Russia in general [35]. Exacerbating the situation is the fact that, according to scholars, the level of media literacy of most young people is actually not very high [36, 37]. Besides, they often tend to overestimate the quality of their own media competence [37]. Altogether, it makes youth vulnerable to the spread of fakes and disinformation.

At the same time, despite rather wide range of issues covered by researchers, it is obvious that the SMO's impact on the political consciousness of young people has yet to be studied. In this regard, the purpose of this article was to demonstrate the peculiarities of the attitude of young people to the SMO, partial mobilization, and entry into Russia of new subjects, using the materials of social surveys and focus group interviews. That being said, a connection was also revealed between the preferred sources of information and how exactly respondents assess specific events and aspects of the SMO.

For a start, let's turn to the results of surveys conducted monthly by Levada-Center. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the level of attention to what is happening within the framework of the SMO, recorded in April, 2023.

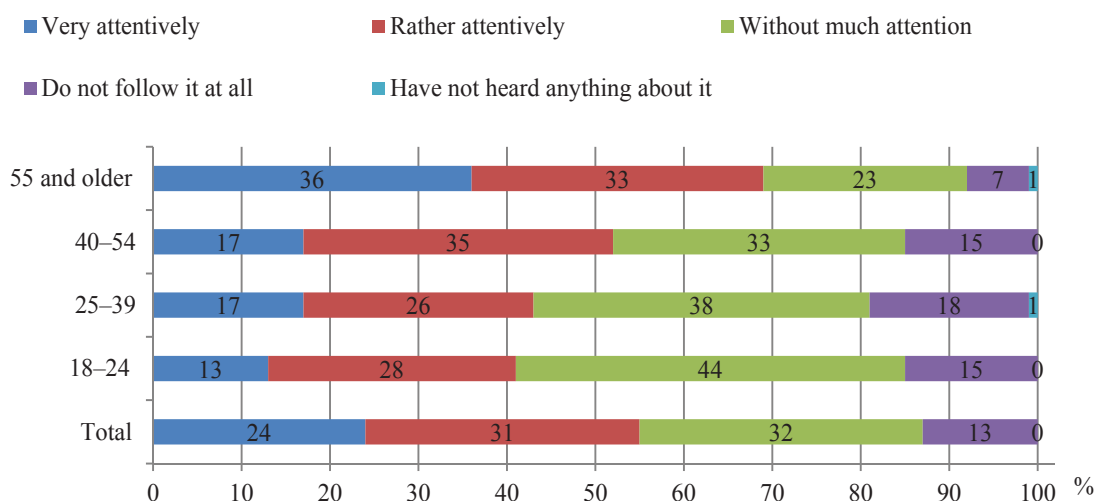


Fig. 1. How attentively do you follow the situation around Ukraine? (% of respondents) (color online)

Obviously, as respondents 'mature', the proportion of those who are very or rather attentively following what is happening is steadily growing. Young people are the least interested in this regard. On the one hand, it is quite understandable: at this age people are usually more concerned about problems and issues of a different nature, most often not directly related to politics. On the other hand, it is a little strange, because the youth is the category that is primarily at risk of being involved in processes related to the SMO. It seems that this circumstance is due to the fact that the vast majority of young people prefer to receive information from the Internet, are used to forming their own media 'diet', and therefore are less (compared with the main part of the country's population) influenced by SMO narratives propelled by traditional media. Additionally, as our online survey revealed, young people's per-

ception of the SMO is significantly dependent on the level of opposition of various age groups to the current government and to the main directions of Russia's home and foreign policy.

Compared to March, 2022, when Levada-Center first conducted a similar survey, respondents' interest in what is happening around Ukraine has slightly decreased. However, it is clear that, firstly, this is due to the effect of people getting used to this issue and, secondly, much in this case depends on specific events taking place in a given period of time (for example, in September, 2022, which was rich in resonant events at the military fronts, attention span increased dramatically to 32% and 34%, respectively).

The above-mentioned dependence on the respondents' age can also be traced in relation to the level of support for Russia's actions (Figure 2).

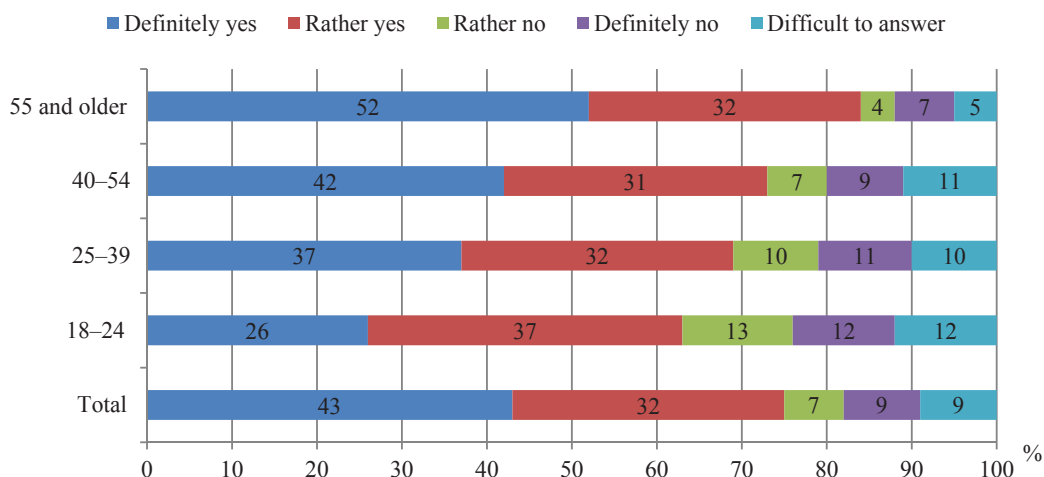


Fig. 2. Do you personally support the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine? (% of respondents) (color online)

It is noticeable that the younger people are, the more skeptical they remain about what is happening. But even so, slightly more than half of the youngest age group of respondents definitely or rather support Russia’s actions on this issue. Moreover, in the older cohort of the youth (25–39 years old), the level of support reaches 69%.

Assessing the overall dynamics of change in this indicator, we can state a slight decrease in the share of people who definitely support Russia’s actions (in March, 2022, there were 52% of them) and almost unchanged number of those who rather support them (28% in March, 2022, and 29% in Febru-

ary, 2023). Fluctuations in the number of non-supporters during this time did not exceed 3–4%. We attribute this to the fact that since the beginning of the SMO, many have lost some illusions they had before: the hopes for a quick military victory did not come true; some defeats and retreats were perceived by society very painfully; the number of casualties turned out to be unexpectedly large; taken together, all these factors have led to a decrease in the degree of support for Russia’s policy in Ukraine.

Respondents’ ideas about how the conflict between Russia and Ukraine should be developed further are also very indicative.

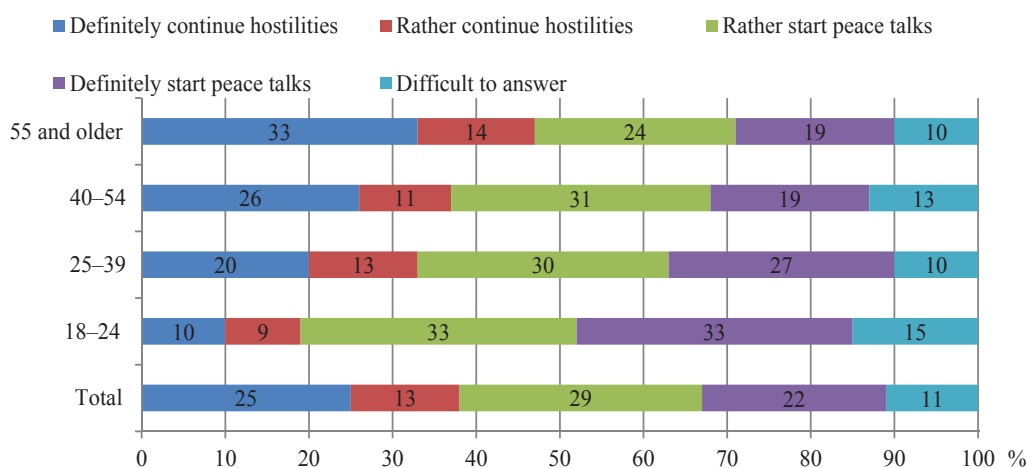


Fig. 3. Do you think hostilities should continue now or it is better to start peace negotiations? (% of respondents) (color online)

Again, as data on Figure 3 show, there is a clear correlation between respondents’ opinions and their age. Younger citizens tend to be more peaceful. And vice versa: the older the person, the more often he

or she is a supporter of the continuation of hostilities. What can it be connected with? Perhaps with a richer life experience of people of middle and older age, who understand that not every conflict



can be resolved through negotiations. Also, we cannot discount the fact that, opting for negotiations, some young people may simply be unwilling to find themselves in the SMO zone.

A similar question (but with only three options for an answer available) was first asked by Levada-Center specialists in August, 2022. Then, the option ‘continue hostilities’ was chosen by 48%, ‘start peace talks’ – 44%, and ‘difficult to answer’ – 8% of respondents. As one can see, since then the militant mood of Russian citizens has slightly decreased.

Most likely, this was due to roughly the same reasons mentioned in relation to evaluating the actions of the leadership of our country.

Let’s turn to the results of our survey. As previously noted, its purpose was to identify views of young people on more specific issues within the SMO that were not touched on by federal survey centers.

Quite interesting results were obtained after processing the respondents’ answers to the question about the root causes of SMO (Table 1).

Table 1

**What do you think are the main reasons for launching the SMO? Choose no more than three answers (% of respondents)**

Protection of the Russian Federation borders from the spread of NATO influence and deployment of new foreign military bases near the territory of Russia	52.6
Protecting the population of Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, ending the war and forcing peace	45.2
Ukraine posed a real threat to the security of the Russian Federation, it wanted to attack Russia and get nuclear weapons	19.8
Changing political course of Ukraine, denazification	19.0
Russia’s desire to annex some Ukrainian territories or total accession of Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation	16.6
Establishment of a puppet (dependent) government on the territory of Ukraine	14.2
Raising ratings of state power, specifically the President of the Russian Federation, as a result of a small victorious war	13.6
Other selfish political and economic motives of the government of the Russian Federation	12.8
Difficult to answer	20.1

The first two answer options appeared to be by far the most popular. Despite the fact that young people are much less likely to use traditional media, in which the position of the state is promoted systematically and consistently, in this case it can be stated that respondents chose those very reasons that are most actively articulated at the official level as prerequisites for the start of the SMO.

Conspicuous is the fact that the third most frequent option was ‘Difficult to answer’. Results of the focus group interviews showed that, among other reasons, this was due to relatively low level of interest in what is happening, which has been already noted above. Not paying much attention to the Ukraine-related events, many respondents quite naturally found it difficult to name the prerequisites and causes of the outbreak of hostilities.

The ideas of young people about the causes of the conflict quite clearly correlate with their vision of its perpetrators (Table 2).

Data presented on Table 2 show, that more than 60% of respondents blame the Western countries

and, in particular, the United States for what happened. It is rather surprising that of all the rest, Russia is considered the culprit of the conflict by almost twice as many young people as Ukraine. In other words, the majority of the youth in general agrees with interpretation of the causes and perpetrators of the conflict propelled by the authorities, but at the same time, one in five considers Russia responsible for it. Answers to other questions in the questionnaire and focus group interviews showed that this position is most often taken by liberal-oriented respondents who blame the country’s current leadership for Russia’s confrontation with the West and Ukraine.

As far as differences in the opinions of respondents who prefer different sources of information are concerned, several revealing points are catching the eye. Predictably, TV viewers blame the United States and the West in general for what is happening more than others. They also became the only cohort in which Ukraine is considered the culprit more often than Russia (opinions of respondents in terms of



Table 2

**In your opinion, who is responsible for starting the conflict in Ukraine? (% of respondents)**

Preferred sources of information*	Option of an answer						
	The USA	Western countries together with the USA (NATO)	Ukraine	Russia	Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics	All that was mentioned	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>0.9</b>
The Internet (93.0)	15.0	46.1	11.6	21.2	0.6	4.6	0.9
TV-programs (31.9)	19.5	56.6	12.6	7.1	0.7	3.0	0.5
The print press (4.8)	15.1	46.6	13.7	17.8	1.4	2.7	2.7
Radio (4.6)	20.0	46.7	9.3	20.0	1.3	2.7	0
Family members, relatives, friends (52.8)	15.9	47.4	14.1	17.9	0.4	3.5	0.7
Teachers, higher-ups (12.2)	14.2	52.3	14.2	14.8	0.6	2.6	1.3

\*There are percentages of respondents who chose such an answer to the question "Where do you most often learn about the events taking place in the country? (Choose up to three answers)" in parentheses.

'Ukraine or Russia' culpability among those who learn the news from teachers and higher-ups are within the measurement accuracy). Among the Internet-users, the setup is quite the opposite: the United States and NATO are blamed a little less often while Russia – more often. Those who are accustomed to learning about events from teachers, lecturers, and superiors, by and large, think about the same way as those watching TV. Most likely, the reason is that

people from whom they learn about events within the framework of the SMO, in their turn, more often receive information from TV-programs.

Worthy of separate attention is the attitude of young people to the partial mobilization announced in Russia. Figures 4 and 5 show the general ratio of answers to the question asked and the breakdown based on the sources of information preferred by respondents respectively.

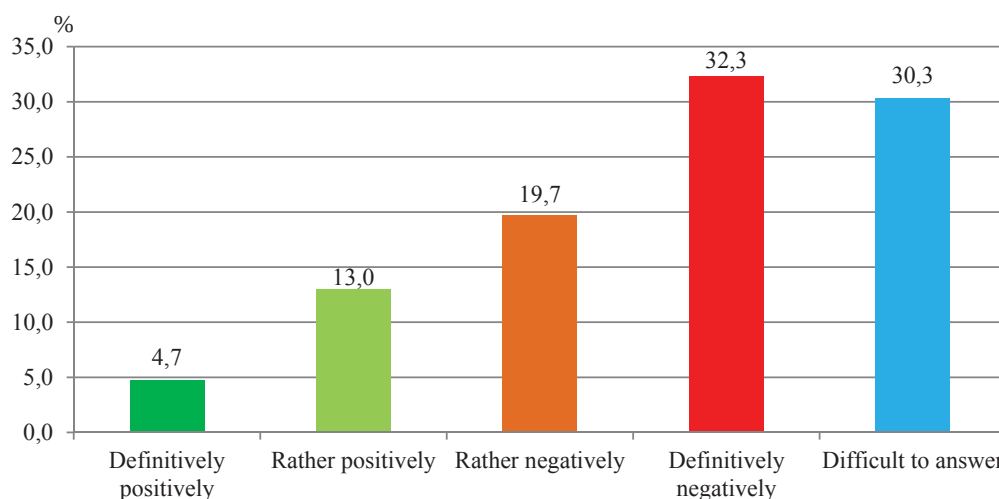


Fig. 4. How do you feel about the partial mobilization announced in Russia? (% of respondents) (color online)

In contrast to assessments of the SMO as a whole, young people are much more skeptical about mobilization: more than half of respondents do not support it. It is quite indicative that 30.3% found it difficult to answer this question. Apparently, some of them experienced a kind of cognitive dissonance between sup-

porting the SMO and internal rejection (or even fear) of the partial mobilization necessary for its successful implementation (this idea was voiced by several participants during our focus group interviews).

Those who receive information from their inner circle (relatives, friends, acquaintances) and from the

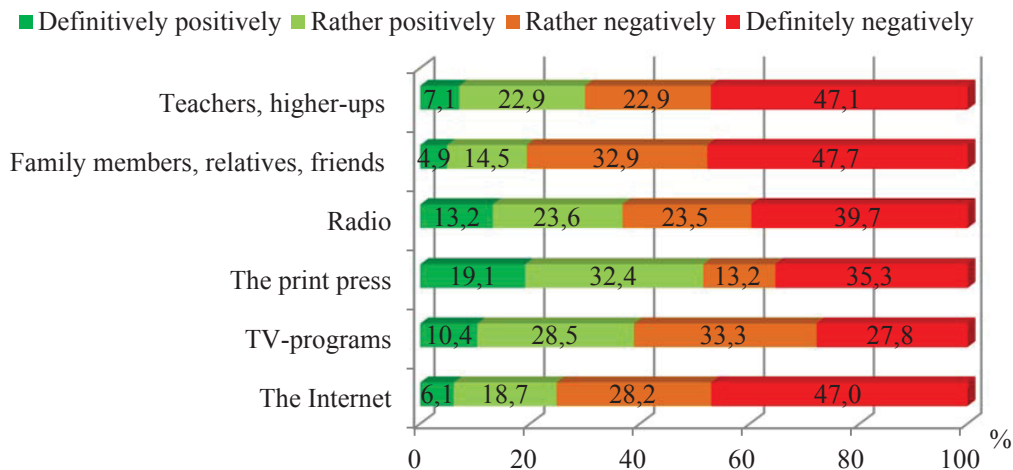


Fig. 5. How do you feel about the partial mobilization announced in Russia? (% of respondents in relation to their preferred source of information) (color online)

Internet are most suspicious about the partial mobilization, while the print press readers and TV viewers are comparatively more supportive of it (Figure 6). As it turned out later in the course of focus group interviews, those who prefer to read newspapers and

magazines were among the most loyal to the mobilization due to the fact that there are practically no oppositional print media left in Russia – therefore, that small part of respondents still reading press mainly uses sources which are loyal to the government.

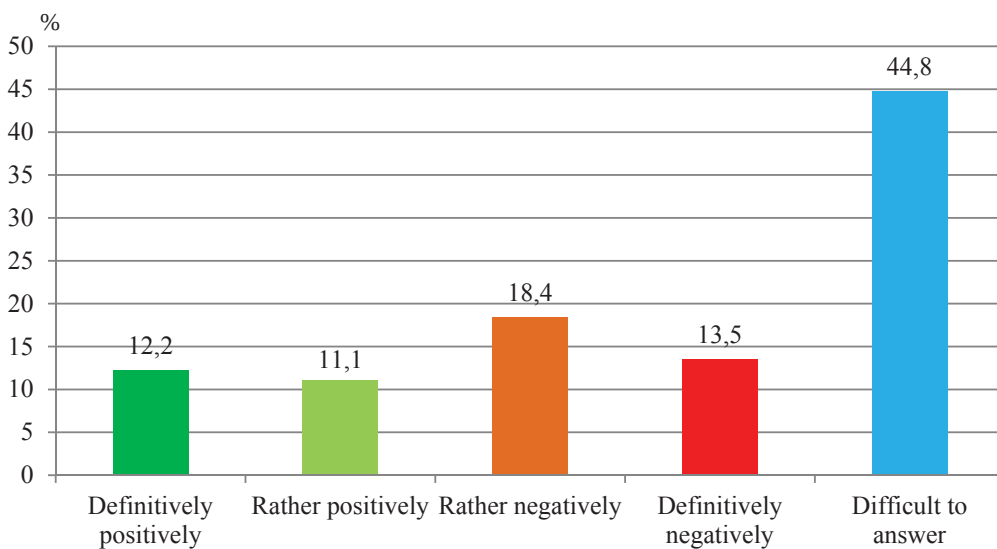


Fig. 6. How do you feel about those who evade partial mobilization? (% of respondents) (color online)

Whereas about a third of the respondents found it difficult to formulate their attitude to partial mobilization, in relation to those who evade it, a segment of the undecided youth accounted for almost 45.0%. In our opinion, there is a certain internal contradiction again. As some focus group participants told us, on the one hand, many support the SMO, but at the same time they fear that they themselves or their relatives may well be found among the mobilized. Therefore, projecting this dissonance onto other people (including those who preferred to leave

the country, hiding from possible mobilization), respondents deem it difficult to clearly define their attitude towards the ‘evaders’.

Those who were able to formulate their opinion on this issue were distributed approximately in equal proportions among the four variants of attitude. At the same time, the option ‘rather negative’ turned out to be slightly more popular. It is noteworthy that the proportion of people who feel generally negative about mobilization (52.0%) appeared to be noticeably larger than the part of those who have a positive attitude to-





wards ‘evaders’ (23.3%). In other words, some young people believe that evading mobilization is bad, even though mobilization itself is not good either.

At last, special question of our questionnaire was devoted to the attitude of young people to the entry of four new regions into Russia (Figure 7).

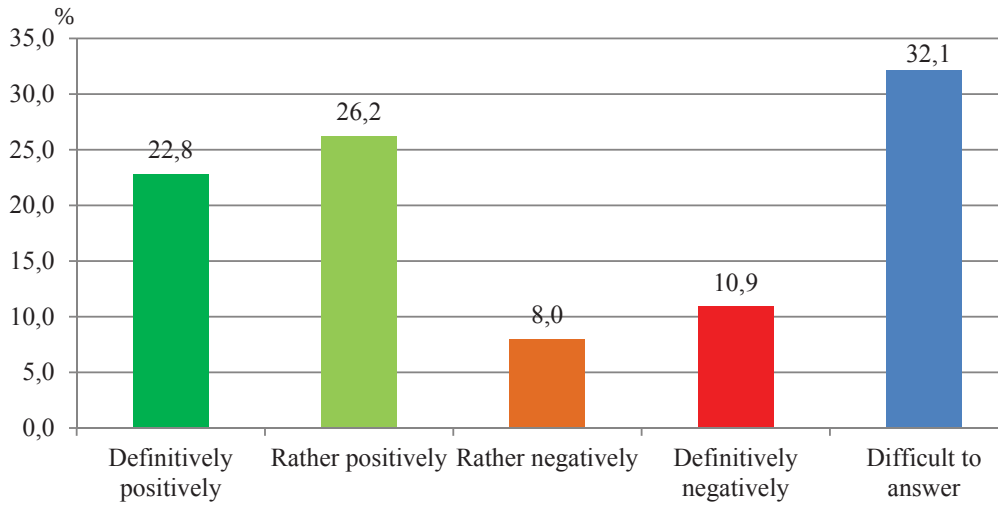


Fig. 7. How do you feel about the entry of new subjects into the Russian Federation (Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions)? (% of respondents) (color online)

Again, one can see a fairly large proportion of respondents who found it difficult to answer. In our view, this may indicate at least two things. First, the complexity of the processes in relation to which respondents were asked to form their opinion (there is still no consensus on this issue even among the expert community). Secondly, the aforementioned lack of attention paid by some young people to what is happening around Ukraine. Being up to speed, they would certainly have a more or less considered opinion on this matter.

The number of those who positively (to one degree or another) perceived the inclusion of

Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions into the Russian Federation (49.0%) is slightly less than the number of young people who support the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine (see Figure 2). What does it mean? Judging by the opinions expressed during the focus group interviews, some believe that the SMO should have been launched solely in order to demilitarize and denazify the neighboring state, but not in order to take part of its territories (Figure 8).

As for the differences depending on the sources of information preferred by young people, here

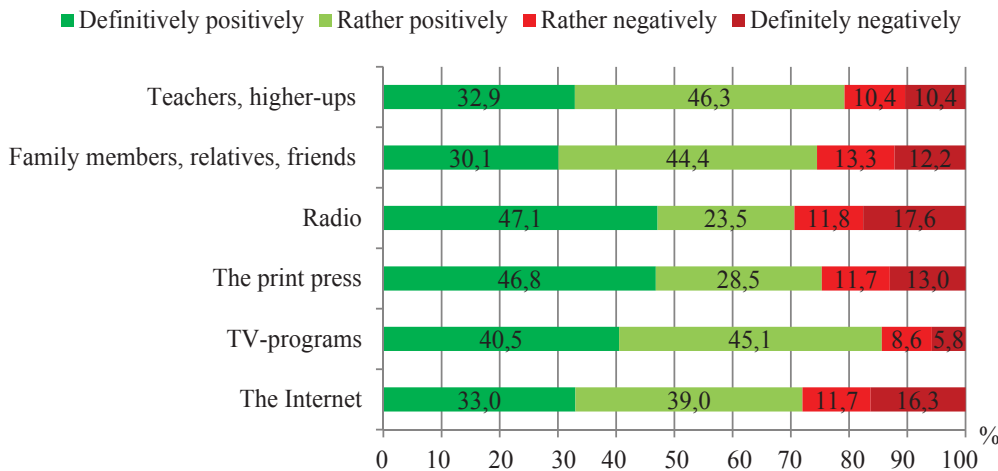


Fig. 8. How do you feel about the entry of new subjects into the Russian Federation (Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions)? (% of respondents in relation to their preferred source of information) (color online)



we can once again see a kind of ‘polarity’ between the opinions of TV viewers and Internet users: the former demonstrate the highest level of approval, the latter – the lowest. In terms of loyalty to the decisions made by the government, quite a bit behind the TV viewers are those who receive the bulk of the information about what is happening from teachers, lecturers, and superiors. This is not surprising, since in most cases they convey exactly those ideas and meanings that the official authorities produce.

These were the main results of surveys regarding the attitude of youth towards SMO. Obviously, young people assess what is happening less enthusiastic than society as a whole. However, it is important to emphasize that most of them still support the SMO, but the level of this support is significantly lower than that of representatives of older ages. As for the attitude towards partial mobilization and the inclusion of four new subjects in Russia, the approval level is even less than half here. Thinking of preferred options for continuing the conflict, among the young there are much more of those who are advocating the start of peace negotiations with Ukraine.

We believe that there are several reasons for such a specific (compared with the typical for the whole society) attitude of young people to what is happening.

Firstly, these are the age features of this social stratum. For the first time faced with a situation when a country is participating in hostilities, young people are involuntarily frightened of what is happening and experience serious difficulties in shaping their own attitude to it (this is indirectly evidenced by the number of respondents who chose the options “Difficult to answer”). Having no rich life experience, relatively little interest in politics and history (including the peculiarities of formation, development, and collapse of the USSR, the history of the Great Patriotic War and the fight against followers of Bandera as the most cruel accomplices of Nazi Germany), a significant part of the respondents believe that the territories where there are hostilities are primordially Ukrainian lands, and that any conflicts could be resolved at the negotiating table.

Secondly, political socialization of today’s young people largely took place within ideological vacuum. Therefore, it is quite difficult for them to understand the ideas about the common historical past of Russians and Ukrainians, their cultural, religious, and ethnic kinship. ‘Russian world’, ‘fraternal peoples’, ‘common historical past’ – these and similar concepts are understandable for not every person born in the 1990<sup>th</sup> and later. Moreover, at a certain stage of our recent past, this ideological vacuum began to be filled with Western values.

Ideas of priority of interests of the individual over society, human rights and freedoms, orientation towards ensuring, first of all, material well-being were absorbed by young people and came into clear dissonance with the obvious and inevitable results of the SMO (i.e. a large number of wounded and dead, destruction of infrastructure facilities, threats of terrorist attacks, etc.).

Thirdly, media practices that are widespread among the youth also play a rather important role. In a situation when 93% of young people prefer to learn the news from the Internet, possibilities for a person’s informational autonomy are objectively expanding. By and large, everyone builds their own echo chamber, which makes it extremely difficult for any information flows that are ‘alien’ to this chamber’s owner to break through. In many ways, this is why justifications and interpretations of what is happening within the framework of the SMO, produced by the government, simply do not reach the majority of the youth audience. This is confirmed by the fact that, according to our surveys, those who still watch TV (that is to say those who are easier for the state to ‘reach out to’) are noticeably more loyal to the SMO-related narratives.

In a sense, this conclusion echoes the thesis of S. Ushkin, who surveyed residents of Mordovia and demonstrated the influence of media practices common among them on attitudes towards federal and regional political institutions; in particular, he focused on the differences in assessments by so-called TV and the Internet ‘parties’ [38].

Another possible reason flows logically from the previous one – that is the nature and characteristics of the SVO coverage at the official level. An official point of views is not only presented mainly in traditional media and is thus practically not available in the space of new media that are much more in demand among young people. Besides, serious questions arise (and not only among young people, by the way) in relation to the quality, reliability, and efficiency of the information broadcast by the state on the progress of the SMO (this was especially often criticized in the first eight or nine months; by the end of 2022, according to our observations, there have been some changes for the better). Delays in information releases, extremely rare voicing of data on the losses of Russian military personnel, use of euphemisms (for example, “planned regrouping”, “relocation” or “alignment of the front line” instead of “retreat”) – to name but a few obvious problems in this area. Under such conditions, young people, who are already very skeptical about official news, in search of relevant and truthful information move even faster to social networks and instant messen-



gers, subscribing to a variety of (not always reliable and trustworthy) publics and thereby becoming practically unattainable for the media influence from the government.

Taking all the aforesaid into consideration, it can be assumed that in the future – as the SMO continues – an improvement in the attitude of young people towards it seems very unlikely. Rather, on the contrary: fatigue and psychological stress will accumulate from daily reports of tragedies, losses, and problems associated with hostilities. It is also hardly possible to radically and quickly change the format and scope of distribution of the official information about the SMO, since this is a very inertial process. Therefore, the only way in which the authorities could count on a noticeable improvement in the attitude of young people to the SMO in the short term is global (and not local) successes of Russia on the military fronts. In this case, even young people who live in their own informational cocoons would certainly begin to assess what is happening in Russia and abroad more realistically and constructively.

At the same time, our research also showed that, from a strategic point of view, a change in oppositional mood of a significant part of Russian youth is possible only as a result of systemic transformations in all spheres of public life in modern Russia and elimination of obvious dysfunctions and contradictions in the economy, social sphere, culture, education, health care, and the legal sphere, associated with corruption and social injustice, as well as with the lack of consistent focus on protecting national interests of the country.

Without solving these problems, growing attention of state structures to patriotic education of the younger generation in schools and universities will turn out to be a limited measure, unable, given the easy access to various sources of information, to change the dominance of critical attitude of young people to the existing political and economic structure of the Russian state and main directions of its home and foreign policies.

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Поступила в редакцию 25.04.2023; одобрена после рецензирования 10.05.2023; принята к публикации 15.05.2023  
The article was submitted 25.04.2023; approved after reviewing 10.05.2023; accepted for publication 15.05.2023