

Students' electoral behaviour in small Russian towns as the main criterion of patriotic upbringing

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Abstract

This study is aimed at estimating the existed students' patriotic level in a small town of Rostov region. The main components of patriotism are selected among important personal, social and professional characteristics that can be stimulated in electoral campaign and improved in education process. The authors' model of evaluating students' patriotism is based on the comparative analyses of students' electoral behaviour during different electoral campaigns as integrity of sociological survey and pedagogic theory. The correlation data between electoral behaviour and levels of patriotic upbringing are pointed out. Scientific novelty of the paper consists in a methodological unity of psychological and pedagogic principles expanded by the synergy approach explaining the development of students' patriotism. The article presents theoretical justification and experimental analyses proving the necessity to develop electoral culture as the methodological principle of improving patriotic upbringing. The article is of practical use for teachers, scientists elaborating methodology of improving patriotism based on election culture in educational environment of technical university.

Keywords: Electoral behaviour, synergy, models of electoral behaviour, youth, the average Russian town.

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1. Introduction

The article touches upon the most relevant component of personal and professional development students' patriotism expressed as estimated cut of students' electoral culture in an average Russian town. The relevance of the article is determined by increasing the requirements to young people, their educational and cultural consciousness and the existed contradictions between low level of patriotic upbringing and high social demands and aims, between the level of patriotism and students' readiness to participate in political and social life of this country. They constitute the problem of paper, the ways of estimating the existed levels of students' patriotism in real life conditions. The hypothesis of the paper is based on the correlation of patriotic features with electoral culture, the students demonstrate during electoral campaigns. As students' patriotism is closely connected with the future of the country, sociological models of young people's electoral behaviour in Russia are supposed to be the main criterion of estimating levels of patriotic upbringing in small towns. The subject of the paper is the analyses of students' electoral behaviour in small Russian towns. The research is based on the quantitative and qualitative scientific methods of applied sociological researches: sociological survey, system approach, logical, comparative and statistical scientific methods. Comparative analyses of sociological survey were based on the pedagogic observation, questionnaires conducted among the students of technical university in small town Shakhty. The experiment results demonstrate the electoral preferences describing young people's electoral models as components of patriotic culture. The object of the research is students' electoral behaviour in Rostov region. The sample included 200 students being representatives of various age (18–23). The experimental group consisted of students from the Institute of Business and Service (branch) of Don State Technical University and students of vocational schools. The reliability of the obtained results is ensured by small representativeness of the sample group, but the experimental duration, repeatability of the research data proved the research hypothesis that patriotism can be evaluated during electoral campaign as students' individual involvement of in social and political processes. The criterion of patriotism was selected among the students' personal characteristics composing electoral models determining peculiarities of young people's electoral culture.

Patriotic upbringing among young people is the foundation of the society and the state to determine spiritual and moral basis of people's life as the way of students' effective functioning in social reality. Any country and society must form patriotic citizens to fulfil complicated social aims and human goals to preserve peace and love on the planet. From the very beginning of people's existence, the problem of patriotic upbringing was one of the main to ensure human survival. With the development of social sciences, this phenomenon is the object of interest of philosophers, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists. Therefore, patriotic upbringing and national consciousness are interrelated personal features known to be one of the main social characteristics to consolidate society and forecast the future development of the society and humanity. Therefore, patriotic upbringing is aimed at forming national consciousness and is supposed to be formed by students' early involvement in political life of the society.

Patriotism is known to be the inner implementation of love for the nation and the main condition for peaceful coexistence of people in the world. The love to the people, country is formed on respect and responsibility to all citizens, nations and races. Therefore, it is important to consider the problem of students' electoral culture as the prism of patriotic upbringing and national consciousness. As a result of democratic processes, early involvement in political life and integration processes between countries the patriotic upbringing is often connected with the processes of forming citizenship based on the integration of personal qualities to contribute to their socialisation in the modern world, culture and professional development. These characteristics are significant and have much in common. At the same time, students' electoral behaviour is inner expression of personal patriotic feelings (love, devotion, patriotic views, etc.) based on the students' harmonic development, personal characteristics, inner cultural positions, value systems, tolerance, humanity, self-esteem, inner freedom, discipline and respect for the government. It is possible to form students' electoral culture as the highest

implementation of students' patriotism. It is possible as integrative part of education realised in education environment of technical university. Moreover, there are many different ways of conducting them: to organise thematic games-elections, referendums, clubs organising parties and movements. The relevance of the research theme is explained by the state and social purposes determining social and political course of the country and aimed at one of the most important tasks to bring up electoral behaviour of young people to involve young people into political processes of law forming and elections. Electoral behaviour of young people is supposed one of the main criteria of political upbringing. The education and upbringing process is known to be one of the stages of socialisation providing students with new social roles identical to educational, professional, demographic and other status (Almond & Verba, 1963). The importance of researching the students' electoral behaviour is also explained by human principles of political future of this country. In 10–15 years, they will determine that not only the image of the country as a whole but also (in a narrower sense) the status of elections in the society. The young people's attitudes and behaviour, their electoral activities determine the success of the forthcoming reforms and the level of the power legitimacy in the eyes of modern world.

The interest in the research of young people's electoral behaviour is caused by the fact that there are a lot of potential voters in them and the way of young people's involvement in an average Russian town. The term average town is usually understood in the frames of sociology as a town with a total number of residents from 200,000 to 300,000 residents, according to the official data there are more than 200 such towns in Russia. More than 60 million young people live there, which is more than 60% of the country's population. Shakhty belongs to Russian average towns, in accordance to the State Statistics Committee (2017) as it has 2,358 residents (2017). Taken into account all above said, the study of the young people's electoral behaviour of the average town is supposed to be a political 'mirror' of young people's political preferences of future generation in Russia.

2. Methods and materials

The study used a set of general scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, systematisation to determine the theoretical foundations of young people's electoral behaviour; the principle of determinism identifying the electoral behaviour of young people; modelling prediction of the young people's electoral behaviour as Russian electoral potential.

The inductive method is supposed to be the basic one. All the patterns of youth's electoral behaviour are revealed on the basis of generalisation of empirical material (as electoral statistics). The authors based their conceptual analysis of the youth's electoral behaviour on the socio-cultural approach considering the electoral process as a social system with a certain structure. The process of gathering empirical data is based on sociological methods, such as questionnaires and expert surveys. The need of analysis and interpretation of the obtained empirical material led to the reference to statistical data and their corresponding interpretation.

3. Discussion

Electoral behaviour is known to be a kind of political culture of the population during elections. The young people are supposed to be the main resource of stability and consistent institutional development of the state in Russia. In different historical communities, the period of being youth is marked by different age limits, but generally accepted age limits defining young people are the age of 15–29 years with separate stages: youth (over to 18 years), youth (18–24 years old) and young adults (25–29 years) (Fiorina, 1981). Since the time passes, young people occupy leading economic and political positions in the society. As a socio-demographic group, it is characterised by age features, social roles (functions) in the society, specific interests, values and lifestyle (Afanasyev, 1995). They constitute students' electoral culture.

One of the non-economic factors of sustainable social and economic development of modern Russia is the civil activity of young people based on their political and electoral positions. For contemporary Russia, the electoral behaviour of young people and their political position is especially significant. And the problem is not only in its quantitative characteristics (at the beginning of 2018, youth made up more than a third of the population of the Russian Federation) but also in qualitative ones—the young people are the social group susceptible to changes in the existed socio-political system, as various changes in personal culture values and principles (2017). The nature and political system of Russia, the quality of civil society, and the prospects of political development largely depend on the electoral behaviour of the younger generation (Anohina, 2000).

The study of electoral behaviour models began in the early twentieth century. Scientists (A. Siegfried, P. Lazerfeld & B. Berelson, 1944) have developed a sociological model based on the voters belonging to a particular social group—in accordance to the explanation of their political choice and identification mechanisms (gender, class, status characteristics, etc.).

The development of behaviourism in the beginning of the last century gave a fine opportunity to study the way of individual behaviour during the elections more thoroughly. The representatives of Michigan School (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1976) singled out some social and psychological models of electoral behaviour among young people. These models are associated with a stable party identification of the voter and their social awareness.

The researcher (Downs, 1957) reveals the that each voter is a representative of a certain political party where the participation in elections is the greatest chance and benefit to make their contribution, later on scientists (Becker & Fiorina, 1981) characterised rational model of electoral behaviour.

According to the research (Pushkareva, 2003), the voters' actions and motives in the cognitive model of electoral behaviour are caused by the environment influence and by the person's cognitive abilities and competences. According to the researcher, this model is focused on the person's inner source as a result of personal consciousness activity with the political information affecting the political choice at the elections.

The environment influence on the voter's behaviour was also studied (Afanasyev, 1995). The author singled out a manipulative model of a voter. It is based on the voters' views depending on the political and ideological positions, attitudes and orientations of persuasive mass media impacting person's unstable decision.

Significant Russian papers concerning the essence of the youth's electoral culture and electoral behaviour are explained by a lot of scientists (Golosov, 1997; Gelman, 2000; Grishin, 2008) and others.

The next stage was aimed at stating the main factors influencing the voter's will. There are long-term and short-term factors. Long-term factors include regional features of voters, the existed political culture in the society, historical and political traditions, the degree of person's political socialisation, their educational level and so on. In its turn, short-term factors include: the culture of electoral campaign, advertising, mass media influence, the image of the candidate and so on. Short-term factors have the maximum impact on the youth's electoral behavior potential.

Having compared the behaviour of Western and domestic young voters, the authors pointed out the existence of fundamental differences in their electoral behaviour and electoral potential. For Russia, it is typically so called phenomenon of forced voting. It can be explained by national culture characteristic and it means that young people are forced to participate in elections. This phenomenon is also explained by immature political culture. The results of socio-political and other studies indicate that young people are relatively apolitical. Less than 50% of young people take part in federal elections. Only one-third of the citizens under the age of 35 are interested in politics. The only two-thirds of young people consider that their civic duty is to participate in elections, a little more than one-third of young people willingly take part in voting. Thus, the electoral activity of young people is in the range from 33% to 50% (Akayevich, 2014).

In other countries, the voters tend to ignore their voting rights under similar conditions. It shows the greater suitability of modern reality described the concept of an irrational voter based on certain irrational properties of the Slavic mentality and uses the concept of 'ambivalent consciousness' usually known as a combination of extremely opposite sympathies - to describe the paradoxes of voting typical for the young Russian electorate.

4. Results

Our research is based on the results of a survey conducted among young people in Shakhty, to meet the criteria of representativeness and longitude (studies were conducted in November–December 2011 (before the presidential election on 4 March, 2012), in March–April 2015 (before the elections of Rostov Region Governor, on 13 September, 2015) and in November–December 2017 (before the election of the President of the Russian Federation, on 18 March, 2018).

The total number of voters in Shakhty on 1 January, 2018 is 170,908 (in 1 January, 2012 there were 170,923 voters, while in 1 January, 2015 there were 170,857 voters). The young residents of the town reached electoral age were selected for questionnaires and interviews. The total number was about 53,000 young people. The experimental group was comprised of 200 young people. Research hypothesis is that the young people's electoral behaviour is impossible to describe by an unambiguous model: sociological, socio-psychological, rational, cognitive or manipulative ones. The electoral behaviour contains the elements of all known models and is based on electoral culture.

The reliability of the obtained results is ensured by the representativeness of the sample frame, scheme and the longitudinal study, the correlation analysis of the questionnaire array. Questionnaires of 2011 and 2017 were almost identical due to the main objective of the survey. They included 40 questions while the questionnaires used in 2015 had 43 issues. Empirical research of electoral behaviour is a long and time-consuming process. When making the questionnaire, the authors based on the person's political activity, culture, political interests, expressed as cognitive, verbal-communicative and behavioural peculiarities.

Being the sign of the political system, the first question of the questionnaire was about the participation in elections (Table 1), and the second question was about the rights and obligations of voters (Table 2).

Table 1. The answers to the question 'do you willingly participate in elections?'

Do you participate in elections?	2011 r.		2015 r.		2017 r.		Average, in%
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	
No	106	53.0	108	54.0	111	55.5	54.2
Yes	67	33.5	62	31	71	35.5	33.3
Don't want to answer	27	13.5	30	15	18	9	12.5
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0	200	100	100

Based on the data expressed in the table, it is possible to point out the reasons of young people's passive political position and low level of patriotism. A high percentage of respondents do not answer as they do not take part in the elections. It can be explained by two circumstances. First, there are some irrational (or pseudo-rational) factors that have the greatest impact on the formation of young people electoral behaviour—they did not participate, but were afraid to confess, so they did not answer. Second, it can be explained by socio-psychological characteristics of the individual. Young people actively and constantly combine their relationships with the external micro- and macro-environment distinguished by 'youthful maximalist opinion' with the additional effect expressed in the desire to avoid 'inconvenient' questions. These are the elements of the socio-psychological model of electoral behaviour.

Table 2. The answers to the question 'do you think that the participation in elections is the right or duty of a citizen?'

	2011 r.		2015 r.		2017 r.		average, in %
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	
No	35	17,5	37	18.5	26	13	16.3
Yes	163	81.5	161	80.5	171	85.5	82.5
Cannot answer	2	1.0	2	1	3	1.5	1.2
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0	200	100	100

The desire to participate in elections is the element of rational behaviour model; as it can be seen from the results of the survey, it begins to be transforming slightly increasing the level of the person's rationalisation of choice. However, in the results presented in Tables 1 and 2, there is a discrepancy. Modern personality is full of contradictions and paradoxes. Highly recognising the value of elections, only one out of every three respondents actually participates in them. Quite possibly, that the answers to question 2 are expressed due to the fact that the survey was conducted in the educational institutions of the town, thus proving the 'Philippe Converse paradox' when the respondents, answer questions pay attention to the public discourse of the location. This paradox indicates the existence of socio-psychological model elements.

Voter's behaviour is known to be influenced by various factors, in particular by the influence of mass media, the prominent role of leaders, their popularity and images, the specificity of the election campaign, the activities of the government, specific political and economic conditions. The important elements of the political choice are based on the parties and candidates coalition policy or lack of clear ideological identification between parties and candidates, the ability to mobilise real and potential supporters. But the leading factor is subjective as it is based on personal understanding significance of elections, importance of participating in political life, inner confidence in leaders' political competences.

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question 'can you say that you are aware of all political events?'

	2011 r.		2015 r.		2017 r.		Average in %
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	
No	16	8.0	21	10.5	12	6	8.2
Yes	184	92.0	179	89.5	187	93.5	91.7
Can hardly answer	0	0.0	0	0	1	0.5	0.2
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0	200	100	100

The data in Table 3 reflected the respondents' assessment, their subjective factors in assessing all political events. They are approximately at the same level. A slightly higher level of young people's assessing the political events in 2017 seems to be due to the fact that the survey was made for the President's election campaign in Russian Federation.

What is the reason of confidence in candidates' political competences? The answer to this question can be explained by the socio-psychological model as the process of solidarity with the party or confidence in the political situation being formed as secondary socialisation (which is observed in electoral preferences of young people). These preferences remain unchanged for the generation as the value of stabile socio-political and socio-economic situation. Changes are observed only if there are strong short-term factors affecting the voter (a sharp change in the current political, economic situation, the emergence of problems during the election campaign).

The question about the possible motives of participating in elections often makes people escape participating in elections to illustrate situational nature of participants' decision (Table 4), demonstrating the elements of a manipulative model of young person's electoral behaviour.

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question 'what conditions are supposed to be favourable for you to go to the polling station?' (Questionnaire 2017)

	%
If there are worthy candidates to deserve support,	12.2
If I'm sure that the elections will be fair,	10.0
If there is a real threat of appearing political forces whose ideology is unacceptable to me,	16.7
If my financial problems are solved,	3.5
If I have free time to go to the station,	4.4
If I have mood,	6.5
If the overall situation in the country worsens,	7.6
If the situation in the country improves,	5.6
If I'm called by friends or acquaintances,	6.5
If my financial situation worsens,	3.3
If the weather is fine,	5,6
If the President personally calls on everyone to vote, under no circumstances,	11.1
It is difficult to answer,	3.5

The data can be correlated (Kotlyarova, 2005). The half of the motives is based on the random factors (good mood, weather, availability of free time, etc.). One of the questions of the questionnaire in 2017 and 2011 was devoted to the desire of young people to take part in the presidential elections, a similar question was included in the questionnaire of 2015 (in the elections of the Governor of Rostov region) (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of answers to the question 'Will you take part in elections?'

	2011 r.		2015 r.		2017 r.	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
More likely No than Yes	10	5	45	22.5	8	4
More likely Yes than No	112	56	85	42.5	77	38.5
Yes	72	36	27	13.5	105	52.5
No	5	2.5	15	7.5	10	5
Difficult to answer	1	0.5	28	14	0	0
Total	200	100	200	100	200	100

When analysing the answers about the participation in the presidential elections in Russia, the number of 'yes' answers is increased and they reach 16.5%, demonstrating the decreasing percent of 'no' is 17.5%. The authors believe that this fact can be explained by a number of factors. The first factor is known as retrospective electoral choice, which was well analysed by the scientist (Fiorina, 1981) in the context of developing a rational model of electoral behaviour. In this case, the criterion of electoral choice is a subjective assessment of one's own economic situation. Voting actually can be treated as punishment or reward of the current government and the President for the results in economic and social policy conducted during the previous 4–5 years. Such electoral position was called retrospective, in contrast to the long term (important expectations of how successful the government will be in the future).

Undoubtedly, the second important factor was the person's activity in ideological work at all levels of government structure. When answering the question 'What are you proud of?' many studies, including this one, had such answers as: the President's activities, the memory of the Great Patriotic War, the cosmos exploration, sports achievements. All traditional ideas are supposed to form patriotism of Russian mentality. Among the answers to the similar question included in questionnaire of 2017,

there were such: the return of Russia's leading positions in the world, the help to Novorossia, the opposition to sanctions, and so on. Undoubtedly, these answers are explained by the influence of state ideology, as well as the changing foreign political situation and geographical location of the town Shakhty (close to Ukraine).

Consequently, the ideological factor of electoral behaviour is important as it demonstrates the manipulative model of young people's electoral behaviour. The concept of young people's ideological orientation in Western societies is often identified with left-right continuum. The application of the category can explain the electoral behaviour in post-communist societies demonstrating voters' attitude voters to existed political situation which plays an important role. The coordinate system of explaining electoral behaviour must be multidimensional and take into account political, ideological and non-ideological (manipulative) factors. The dominant factor has binary context 'regime-opposition' or 'support-protest'. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to consider models of electoral youth behaviour without the context of the type of elections. A separate problem of electoral studies is the dynamics of voter's preferences, as 'separate voting' known as a 'double standard' of electoral behaviour expressed as radicalism in federal elections (that is, relatively high support for the opposition) and pragmatism at regional and local levels.

Electoral behaviour of young people confirms the regularities of 'separate voting'. Firstly, young people's intention to participate in elections depends on the type of elections. According to Table 5, predicted high turnout is known at the presidential elections in Russia, the smallest at regional elections. Secondly, the theory of 'double standard' of electoral behaviour is confirmed. The current government's support is highly expressed at presidential elections, and lower at the regional ones (Volkov et al., 2012).

A number of questions on the questionnaire were connected with the analysis of the perception of the prominent figures in Russia (Can you name famous political leaders? What are their best positive qualities? What are their negative characteristics?) The results of the research allow us to draw conclusions concerning the voters' cognitive electoral behaviour in Russia. According to the results of the survey done in 2017, the President of the Russian Federation, V. V. Putin is the most famous—99% of respondents noted him as a politician, whom I would like to be the President. He was assessed by all respondents. The wilful qualities were positively estimated by 36%, and negatively by 11%; purposefulness had positive estimation among 34% and 6% had negative; honesty and truthfulness had positive estimation among 13% of voters and negative estimation among 5% of respondents.

Young people were able to express their opinion about V. V. Zhirinovskiy—92% of the respondents. Among positive features were named purposefulness—19%, strong-willed qualities—18%, confidence 18%. Negative features were pointed out: imbalance—16%, conservatism—15%, self-confidence—11%, aggressiveness—10%. P. N. Grudinin was mentioned by 84% respondents. Respondents in 95% and 98% pointed out the material security and economic activity, confidence—72%, dedication—85%, strong-willed qualities—73%, equanimity—40%, determination—49%. Among negative features dominated a businessman from the Communist Party—39%.

At the time of the study, K. A. Sobchak was underlined by 87% of the respondents. Among the positive features was stressed commitment—28%, confidence—20%, determination—15%. And 83% of the respondents indicated such negative traits as inconsistency—79%.

Elements of the sociological model of young people's electoral behaviour are manifested in attempts to identify their interests with the candidates' intentions. One of the examples is 'our president is engaged in sports as a young man'. V. V. Putin had a meeting with young people so he shares views.

The open question: 'How do you feel about and evaluate the electoral campaigns of candidates in the previous elections?' The unanimous respondents answered that they were dissatisfied with the methods of conducted election campaigns, by the candidates' activity, aimed at correcting the state of affairs in Russia. Undoubtedly, these are elements of the cognitive model of electoral behaviour. The last question included in 2011 and 2017 questionnaires. 'Who will be the President of the Russian

Federation?'. The data of the survey were almost identical (Figure 1), and coincided with the studies of All-Russian Center of Public Opinion, proving, on the one hand, that the elements of cognitive model (young people seriously perceive the policy of the country), and on the other hand—elements of the manipulative model, so as young people do not see another candidate to become the President of the country. In the questionnaires answers are: 'who, if not he', 'he is the best', 'with him our country was again respected', 'our country regained its international prestige' and so on.

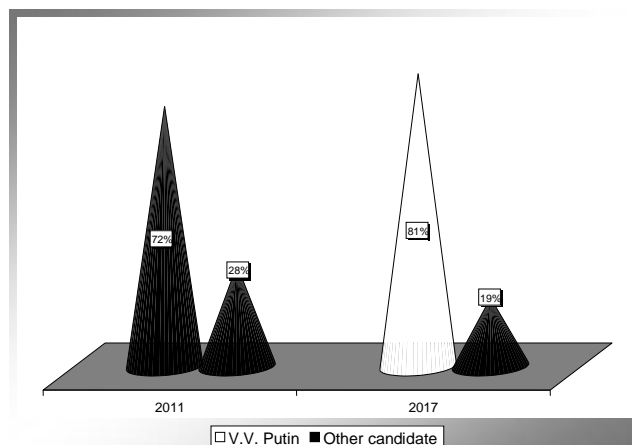


Figure 1. Distribution of answers to the question 'Who will be the President of the Russian Federation?'

Modern students are not apolitical as they express their patriotic mood and intentions to increase development rates of the country. The size limit of the article did not allow the authors to point out all questions of the survey, as the analysis of young people's political preferences depend on age, gender, occupation and answers to questions prove our suppositions. Here are some of them: Are you interested in politics? What do elections mean for you? What is your motive to participating (not participating) in elections?

5. Conclusion

The authors presented a comparative analysis of the results based on the extensive sociological survey of electoral preferences typical for the youth in average Russian town. The surveys were held in 2011, 2015 and 2017. The study revealed the following results: the empirical study of young people's electoral behaviour showed that the hypothesis of the study was confirmed. And the electoral behaviour of cannot be described by a complicated model including sociological, socio-psychological, rational, cognitive or manipulative elements. The electoral behaviour of young people contains the elements of all connected models. Characteristics of young people's electoral behaviour are largely determined by the levels of patriotic upbringing, individual psychological characteristics and political culture determining electoral behaviour. On the one hand, these components are based on the inner desire to personal independence, self-affirmation and self-realisation, and on the other hand, they stress emotional instability, impressionability and suggestibility.

Elements of the sociological model expressed in electoral behaviour are realised in attempts to identify the interests of young people with the intentions of candidates. Elements of the rational model of electoral behaviour are manifested in young people's desire to participate in elections, being the result of retrospective electoral behaviour as a 'separate voting'.

The presence of elements of the socio-psychological model is fixed by the 'Converse paradox'—the respondents admit public discourse. The elements of the manipulative model of young people's electoral behaviour are recorded in the answers to questions about possible reasons for their not participating in elections, as well as about impulsive choice of candidates or participation in elections.

Elements of the cognitive model are manifested in relation to political struggle, to the presence of agitation and in the answers to questions about possible winners in elections. The respondents showed good knowledge of both political organisations and political leaders. Variants of respondents' answers had a clear dependence on the popularity of the political leader or political organisation.

The results of conducted scientific experiment demonstrated the correlation between students' electoral behaviour, political culture and their patriotism. Being complicated these components can be developed and stimulated by synergetic approach enhancing students' self-organisation in education environment, where the subjects of education process determine their electoral behaviour based on inner development of personal structures of students' consciousness. The main pedagogic principles are: open character of information, dialogue orientation, variety choice and subjectivity.

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