HOW YOUNG PEOPLE USE NEW MEDIA IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN RUSSIA AND KAZAKHSTAN

Yerkebulan Sairambay

Yerkebulan Sairambay, Department of Social Sciences, Suleyman Demirel University (Kaskelen, Kazakhstan). Address for correspondence: SDU, Abylaikhan Street, 1/1, Kaskelen, 040900, Kazakhstan. yerkebulan.sairambay@sdu.edu.kz.

In the study of political participation, the question arises of whether young people use new media as a "political spectacle," "virtual agora," or "political coliseum." This article examines how young citizens use new media in political participation in Russia and Kazakhstan. Drawing on surveys conducted using Qualtrics (*N* = 2,400) and semistructured interviews (*N* = 90) carried out in 54 cities, towns, and villages in 2019–2020, I demonstrate that both Russian and Kazakhstani young people use new media as a mixture of political spectacle, virtual agora, and political coliseum. Results revealed that online activists and observers are increasing in numbers in both countries. However, based on the experiences (actions) and views (opinions) of respondents, the most numerous new-media users are apolitical people in Kazakhstan and observers (spectators) in Russia. I also found that for some young people intentional political disengagement and disenchantment might signify political contestation. Online and offline political participation in the forms of contestation is more frequently observed in urban than rural areas in both countries, and participation in "alternative" forms of protests such as *monstrations* seems to be becoming popular among young Russians and Kazakhstanis. My study sheds light on how new media are used in political participation in the postcommunist context, contributing to cross-national comparative studies of non-Western political systems.

The early classic works on (political) participation are exemplified by *Social Mobilization and Political Development* (Deutsch 1961), *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Almond and Verba 1963), and *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Pateman 1970). Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) identify three types of political culture and populations' modes of political orientation: (1) parochial—political "sleepwalkers," (2) subject—people who are aware of politics, but who do not act to influence the political process, and (3) participant—active citi-

zens who are aware of politics and attempt to affect it. Political participation by mobilized populations can be observed in "people taking part in crowds and riots, in meetings and demonstrations, in strikes and uprisings, or, less dramatically, as members of a growing audience for political communications, written or by radio, or finally as members of a growing host of organizations" (Deutsch 1961:499). As a result, this brings "an expansion of the politically relevant strata of the population" (e.g., city dwellers, workers); it changes the quality of politics and generates pressures for political reforms, challenging the government and elites (497–502).

Today political participation of citizens is overwhelmingly performed through new media such as social media and the internet. Research to date has shown that traditional institutionalized political actions such as voting, becoming a party member, and participating in election campaigns have declined in advanced democracies in the last few decades (Demetriou 2013; Amnå and Ekman 2014; Hooghe and Kern 2017), particularly among young people (Oser 2017; Henn, Oldfield, and Hart 2018). However, some scholars (e.g., Dalton 2016; Henn et al. 2018; Theocharis and Van Deth 2018) argue that noninstitutionalized political actions such as riots, protests, and demonstrations have been growing as a new style of political participation. These trends have been found, for example, in the United Kingdom (Henn et al. 2018), the United States (Weber, Loumakis, and Bergman 2003), France, and southern European countries (García-Albacete 2014) such as Italy (Campante, Durante, and Sobbrio 2018). Reasons put forward for both these developments relate to globalization, democratization, the growing level of education worldwide, and significant economic changes (Yigit and Tarman 2013) as well as new cost-effective forms of political mobilization.

Various authors have examined the internet's impacts on this shift, and the results have been mixed (Weber et al. 2003; Wolfsfeld, Yarchi, and Samuel-Azran 2016). Some (e.g., Putnam 2000; Baumgartner and Morris 2010) argue that the internet does not positively affect political participation but rather distracts people from it. Other, more recent studies (e.g., Boulianne 2009, 2015; Dimitrova et al. 2014) have found a positive relationship between internet use and political participation, particularly among young people (e.g., Yamamoto, Kushin, and Dalisay 2015; Moeller, Kühne, and De Vreese 2018). For instance, Shelley Boulianne (2009) examined 38 empirical studies and confirmed a more positive relationship. More recently, Boulianne (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 36 recent studies of social-media use and political participation and found a positive relationship again with approximately 82% of positive coefficients. Similarly, another meta-analysis done by Marko Skoric et al. (2016) found a positive (82.46%) and statistically significant relationship between social-media use and political participation in 22 studies. Many of the studies that have found a positive relationship relate to the web 2.0 era, the era of interactive online platforms such as social media and blogs, rather than to "the static websites which characterized the so-called web 1.0" (Flew 2008 quoted in Wolfsfeld et al. 2016:2097).

New media, such as social media, have changed the political participation modes that we observe today. Signing e-petitions, blogging on political topics, and engag-

ing in online political mobilization and coordination are some examples of this change. Therefore, it would be better to ask not *whether* but *how* new-media use translates into political participation (Kim and Chen 2015). This issue remains an understudied area, particularly in postcommunist states. Some scholars, such as Navid Hassanpour (2014) and Sarah Oates (2013), note that there are some exceptions to a positive correlation between social-media use and political participation in authoritarian countries (Valenzuela, Correa, and de Zúñiga 2018). Nevertheless, Daniela Dimitrova et al. (2014) contend that there is actually very little comparative research into this relationship, as a large proportion of research has been conducted in the United States, which undermines generalizability of these research findings. We also need to recognize that in addition to the United States, a lot of research has been conducted in Europe in recent years. Furthermore, scholars of Central Asia have noted "the need for an increased formal-informal mixed approach" to examine Kazakhstani political participation, because studies about political participation of Kazakhstani people "do not sufficiently acknowledge" informal political participation (Isaacs 2011, 2015, and Polese 2015 quoted in Kilybayeva, Nassimova, and Massalimova 2017:54).

One way to answer the "how" question is to examine the civic culture of citizens to characterize how new media are used in political participation. I argue that Almond and Verba's (1963) types of civic culture can be characterized differently in the digital age: "parochial" as "apolitical," "subject" as "political spectator," and "participant" as an actor in "virtual agora" and "political coliseum." Besides bringing together data from Russia and Kazakhstan, my article contributes to the knowledge building of these civic (political) cultures from the postcommunist perspective. This, in turn, provides us with a better understanding of how new media are used by young citizens in political participation.

Pippa Norris (2008:124) has argued that "claims for the potential of the knowledge society to revitalize mass participation or strong democracies find little support from the available empirical studies." She described the internet as a virtual agora and "analogous to the segmented magazine market." The significance of these descriptions is that although the internet provides online venues to discuss political events, it is still fragmented by users, groups, and platforms. However, since 2008 there have been huge developments in the internet and information and communication technologies that have led to various forms of mass participation through social media and the internet in many parts of the world. Moreover, mass participation has taken online forms, making virtual agora work in favor of democratization, particularly among younger generations. For instance, new-media users can vote or sign petitions online, write political posts on social media, and contact officials through websites. Social media can also be described as a new, virtual coliseum (Castro 2015; Salama 2017), having the potential to trigger online and offline political activism among competing political interests. Both ordinary people and political institutions and actors might use new media in politics either online followed by offline actions or as a mixture of both. New-media users have also utilized these developments in the postcommunist world. The data in this article, based on fieldwork in Russia and

Kazakhstan, confirm these arguments, examining whether young people use new media in their political participation as a political spectacle, virtual agora, or political coliseum.

Considering distinct advantages of a paired country comparative approach, I chose Russia and Kazakhstan among postcommunist countries for their similarities and differences. Firstly, both states are countries of the former Soviet Union with similar historical pasts and started their democratic transitions in December 1991. Secondly, both Russia and Kazakhstan are multiethnic and multiconfessional: there are over 170 ethnic groups in Russia and 130 ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. Thirdly, Russian is an official language in both countries, although Kazakh is also a state language in Kazakhstan. The fact that I speak both Kazakh and Russian helped me to overcome language barriers at any stage of this study. Furthermore, Russian also plays an important role in media environments of both countries.

Despite these similarities, there are significant differences between these two countries. Catherine Owen and Eleonor Bindman (2019) consider the political system of Russia as a hybrid regime, containing both authoritarian and competitive electoral features, whereas Nurseit Niyazbekov (2018) defines Kazakhstan's political system as a consolidated authoritarian regime. These two political systems might result in two different political cultures. Moreover, since 2014 Russia has been experiencing economic instability because of Western sanctions,[1] while in 2016 the Kazakh economy recovered from the global financial crisis and has been growing gradually with some financial fluctuations due to the influences of the Russian crisis and oil prices.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

New media encompasses the internet, social media, digital technologies, and interactivity (Vesnic-Alujevic 2012) and is differentiated from traditional media, such as radio, television, and newspapers, which dominated at the onset of the information age. In this research, political participation is conceptualized as "any [online or offline] action by citizens that is intended to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures, and is fostered by civic engagement" (Sairambay 2020b:124). This definition was chosen for several reasons. First, it is a reworking of Henry Brady's influential definition, which is by now outdated. Brady defined political participation as "action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes" (1999:737). Yet, this definition has two shortcomings: (1) it does not differentiate between political participation and civic engagement; and (2) it is lacking in specificity regarding the targets of political activities because "some political outcomes" is a vague formulation. A commonly accepted definition of political participation is the one by Verba and colleagues (1995:9), according to which political participation is an "activity that is intended to or has the consequence of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action." This definition is also insuffi-

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[1] This article was written before February 24, 2022.

cient, because "government action" is not the only target of contemporary political participation, and it is also not clear who is the main actor of political participation. Political institutions and their structures can also be described as targets of political participation.

Second, the definition used in this article distinguishes political participation from civic engagement. Otherwise, counting nonpolitical civic engagement as political participation leads to confusing research outcomes. For example, if one mobilizes people using new media, then this action should be considered political participation, while "liking" online political posts should be regarded as civic engagement (Sairambay 2020b:124–125). In the former case the intention is to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures, whereas in the latter case there is no explicit intention to do so. Unless there is an intention to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures in the actions of citizens, various "latent" online actions such as "liking," "re/posting," or "hash/tagging" should be considered as civic engagement rather than political participation.

Finally, my conceptualization of political participation has six components (Sairambay 2020b), which must be present for various actions to count as political participation. First, both *online* and *offline actions* are considered as political participation. Second, there must be an *action* or *activity* that citizens take part in. We cannot consider physical *inactivity* such as thinking about politics, having attitudes toward political affairs, or people's political knowledge as political participation, unless there is intentional disengagement to convey political contestation. Third, the actions need to be done by *ordinary citizens*, not elites or people in power. Fourth, there need to be an *intention to influence the outcomes* of political institutions or their structures in the actions of citizens. Fifth, the target of political actions are *political institutions or their structures*, not only the government. Sixth, political participation is fostered by *civic engagement*, which needs to be properly differentiated in order to consider real political actions separately from social engagement.

In the study of political participation, the question arises of whether new-media users utilize new media in their political participation as a political spectacle, virtual agora, or political coliseum. This question applies only to those who use new media in politics; however, in my analysis I also included young people who use new media for other, nonpolitical purposes. I define such study participants as "apolitical people." By apoliticism I mean citizens' conscious disinterest in politics and/or nonuse of new media in politics. This is done in order to locate the politically active people among the youth of Russia and Kazakhstan. Otherwise, it would seem as if all young people fall in one of the three identified categories of political participation. In this study, *political spectatorship* refers to a form of using new media to consume (e.g., read/watch/listen to) ongoing political affairs. While *virtual agora* denotes using new media only for online political participation and contestation, *political coliseum* signifies using new media for online and offline political participation and contestation.

METHODS

In this study[2] I employed a sequential explanatory design of mixed research methods: online surveys and semistructured interviews. Properly constructed mixed research methods provide a robust study to corroborate the research findings and avoid the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative research methods when they are used separately. I conducted online surveys between July 2019 and January 2020, using Qualtrics survey tool to obtain descriptive statistics on the frequencies and different modes of new-media use by young people in their online and offline political participation. I conducted online surveys in three different types of localities in each country: (1) all big cities with over 1 million residents: 15 in Russia and 3 in Kazakhstan; (2) towns with fewer than 1 million residents; (3) villages (poselki). Based on the complete list of all 85 federal subjects of Russia and 14 regions of Kazakhstan, I randomly selected 15 Russian and 3 Kazakhstani towns using a website for random number generation. I followed the same procedure above in choosing 15 Russian and 3 Kazakhstani villages. Therefore, I obtained samples by focusing on young people aged 18–29 who use new media and live in 45 places in Russia and 9 in Kazakhstan (table 1). I excluded visitors and foreigners from the samples.

Table 1. Research localities

RU localities	cities	Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Kazan', Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Samara, Rostov-on-Don, Ufa, Krasnoyarsk, Perm', Voronezh, Volgograd
	towns	Barnaul, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Khabarovsk, Krasnodar, Murmansk, Orenburg, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Pskov, Sochi, Tyumen', Ulan-Ude, Vladivostok, Vologda, Yakutsk
	villages	Aykhal, Chishmy, Inozemtsevo, Kaa-Khem, Magdagachi, Nakhabino, Navlya, Pangody, Poykovsky, Privolzhskii, Razumnoye, Roshchino, Shilovo, Vychegodsky, Ust'-Abakan
KZ localities	cities	Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Shymkent
	towns	Aqtobe, Oskemen, Zhezkazgan
	villages	Aiteke Bi, Maqat, Zatobolsk

Thus, rural and small city populations were not underrepresented, which is important because their political culture might differ significantly from those who live in big urban areas. To apply a probability sampling method and therefore to reduce

[2] This study had been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge on June 4, 2019, before I obtained endorsements for my research from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and South Kazakhstan State University in Shymkent. These endorsements from local universities helped me to build trust not only among local authorities but also research participants. This research complies with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, May 25, 2018). All data collected during the research were securely stored, anonymized, and used for the purposes for which consent was originally obtained.

bias and sampling error, 400 online survey responses were aimed at each locality, which requires an equal number of primary sampling units (PSUs) (table 2). I deleted all survey records that were not complete (over 2,000) in October 2019 after the first analysis of data from big cities, further changing the settings of Qualtrics so that only complete responses could be recorded for both towns and villages. That is, Qualtrics saved only complete responses for each survey. I closed the surveys when their number of responses reached 400.

Table 2. Multistage sampling

Sampling	Russian PSUs	Kazakhstani PSUs
Full representative simple random sampling	400 responses	400 responses
	15 big cities	3 big cities
Random representative cluster sampling	400 responses	400 responses
	15 towns	3 towns
Random representative cluster sampling	400 responses	400 responses
	15 villages	3 villages
Overall	1,200 responses	1,200 responses
	45 places	9 places

I identified the following categories of respondents depending on their age, new-media use, and residency: (1) the underage, the target population (18–29), and older people (over 29); (2) young people, aged 18–29, who do and do not use new media; (3) locals and visitors/foreigners of PSUs. Only locals aged 18–29 who use new media were eligible to participate in my online surveys. Through an online calculator (www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html) I calculated that the sample sizes would need to be 1,200 per country to reach a confidence level of 95% and 2.83% margin of error. VKontakte, Instagram,[3] and Facebook[4] (as well as, now, Telegram) are the most commonly used social media platforms in Russia and Kazakhstan through which one can post invitations to participate in research studies (see Altayeva and Altayev 2018; Prins n.d.). Considering this, I distributed my online surveys in 518 VKontakte, 270 Instagram,[5] and 259 Facebook[6] groups/pages, to 164 Telegram channels, and a few mailing lists of local youth NGOs and universities. These new media are popular among young individuals, who use them for purposes ranging from education, employment, entertainment, and news consumption to leisure and socializing.

Offline participation. In my online surveys, I asked respondents whether they had done any of the following actions in the past 12 months and, if so, how

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[3] Instagram is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[4] Facebook is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[5] Instagram is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[6] Facebook is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

many times: voted in an election, joined a political party, joined an NGO / youth organization, worked for a political campaign, worked for a political organization, contacted a public official and/or politician, contacted a mass media outlet, participated in a rally or protest, participated in a strike, participated in a demonstration, occupied a building/road, participated in a boycott for a political cause, donated money to a political cause,[7] or done something else that was not mentioned in the survey question.

Online participation. With regards to online actions, I asked respondents whether they had done any of the following actions online through various online media tools (e.g., VKontakte, Facebook,[8] YouTube, WhatsApp,[9] news websites, etc.) in the past 12 months and, if so, how many times: contacted a public official and/or politician online, contacted a mass media through social media, organized a rally or protest, coordinated a rally or protest, organized a strike, coordinated a strike, organized a demonstration, coordinated a demonstration, written a political post on social media, written a political post on a website, blogged, boycotted online, signed an online petition, donated money online, organized a political event, coordinated a political event, or done something that was not mentioned above. I considered contemporary challenges of gauging political participation when measuring both offline and online survey items (Sairambay 2020a).

In the last question of my online surveys, I invited survey participants to take part in semistructured interviews and asked to leave their contacts, email addresses, phone numbers, or social media usernames. As a result, just over 30% (368) of respondents from Russia and 24% (288) from Kazakhstan left their contacts. For the sampling of interviews, I utilized purposive sampling, selecting interviewees, where possible, by age, internet usage, gender, location, education, nationality, marital status, main and current occupation, and political interest (see appendix A). These semistructured interviews took place from October 2019 through November 2020 in Russia and Kazakhstan. Overall, I conducted 20 interviews in 6 Russian cities, 12 interviews in 11 Russian towns, 13 interviews in 10 Russian villages, while in Kazakhstan I organized 17 interviews in 3 cities, 15 interviews in 3 towns, and 13 interviews in 3 villages.

I employed semistructured interviews to explore why participants had chosen certain answers among all offered in my online surveys and to understand their individual feelings, perceptions, practices, and opinions about the research questions. All interviews in Kazakhstan and in Russian big cities were held face-to-face in public venues such as cafes, university campuses, public NGO buildings, and squares. However, the interviews with young people from Russian towns and villages were mixed—both online and in person—because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[7] For example, campaign/election finance and political fundraising on the streets or in-person cash fundraising.

[8] Facebook is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[9] WhatsApp is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

OMNIBUS SURVEY RESULTS

In order to understand whether research conducted among new-media users in Russia and Kazakhstan is representative for generalizable conclusions, especially in political participation studies, I ordered four questions to be included in omnibus surveys conducted by national public opinion poll companies in each country in 2021 (Levada Center[10] and Central Asian Barometer).[11] The results of these omnibus surveys reveal that over 99% of all young people aged 18–29 use the internet and social media in Russia and Kazakhstan (table 3).

Table 3. Internet and social-media use by young people for information about (inter)national news and politics

Internet use		
Frequencies	**Russia (*n* = 322), %**	**Kazakhstan (*n* = 536), %**
Daily	95.6	85.1
Several times a week	2.5	8.0
Several times a month	0.4	2.3
Rarely	0.9	3.9
Never	0.6	0.3
Don't know / refused	0	0.4
Social-media use		
Frequencies	**Russia (*n* = 320), %**	**Kazakhstan (*n* = 533), %**
Daily	92.4	81.6
Once-twice a week	6.2	12.4
About once a month or more	0.3	2.7
Less than once a month	0.7	2.7
Never	0.4	0.5
Don't know / refused	0	0.1
Social-media use for information about national and international news		
Frequencies	**Russia (*n* = 318), %**	**Kazakhstan (*n* = 530), %**
Yes	76.3	71.1
No	15.6	25.8
I do not read or watch news at all	7.1	2.7
Don't know / refused	1.0	0.4
Social-media use for information about politics		
Frequencies	**Russia (*n* = 318), %**	**Kazakhstan (*n* = 530), %**
Daily	35.1	31.9
Once-twice a week	23.0	23.5
About once a month or more	8.4	7.4
Less than once a month	8.3	21.5
Never	23.4	15.4
Don't know / refused	1.8	0.3

Source: Omnibus surveys.

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[10] Levada Center has been labeled a nonprofit organization performing functions of a foreign agent.

[11] This was possible thanks to extra funding provided by the Bolashaq international scholarship program.

It should be noted that omnibus surveys were conducted among the voting-age (18+) population of Russia ($N = 1,601$) and Kazakhstan ($N = 2,000$). Table 3 presents data derived from young people aged 18–29. Nearly three out of four young individuals use social media for information about national and international news and politics. The frequencies of the usage of social media for news and politics, however, considerably vary in Russia and Kazakhstan (Sairambay 2022b). These findings from omnibus surveys are similar to my own findings and strengthen the generalizable conclusions drawn in this article.

MIXTURE OF POLITICAL SPECTATORSHIP, VIRTUAL AGORA, AND POLITICAL COLISEUM

My data from online surveys show that over 83% of Russian and 78% of Kazakhstani respondents consume political news through new media. The results of omnibus surveys also confirm these high indicators (around 75% and approximately 84%, respectively[12]). However, there were clearly some young people who not only consumed information but also participated in online and offline political actions. An average of 14% of Russian and about 5% of Kazakhstani respondents participated in online political actions (table 4), while on average approximately 16% of Russian and around 10% of Kazakhstani respondents took part in offline political activities (table 5).

Table 4. Online political actions performed by respondents in 2018–2019

Online actions / Answers	Russia ($n = 1,200$), %			Kazakhstan ($n = 1,200$), %		
	No	Prefer not to say	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Yes
Contacted a public official and/or politician online	78.59	4.92	16.49	84.25	4.33	11.42
Contacted mass media through social media	76.16	8.42	15.42	86.83	6.00	7.17
Organized a rally or protest	84.75	6.92	8.33	92.92	6.25	0.83
Coordinated a rally or protest	84.00	6.75	9.25	92.91	6.67	0.42
Organized a strike	91.92	6.33	1.75	95.00	5.00	0
Coordinated a strike	92.00	5.92	2.08	95.83	4.17	0
Organized a demonstration	86.34	5.83	7.83	94.17	4.84	0.99
Coordinated a demonstration	85.42	6.33	8.25	94.09	5.25	0.66
Wrote a political post on social media	67.59	6.33	26.08	80.58	4.08	15.34
Wrote a political post on a website	78.00	5.25	16.75	87.09	5.00	7.91
Blogged on a political theme	78.33	4.83	16.84	89.83	4.41	5.76

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[12] Table 3: 35.1% + 23.0% + 8.4% + 8.3% = 74.8% in Russia, and 31.9% + 23.5% + 7.4% + 21.5% = 84.3% in Kazakhstan.

Answers Online actions	Russia (n = 1,200), %			Kazakhstan (n = 1,200), %		
	No	Prefer not to say	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Yes
Boycotted online for a political cause	75.67	5.42	18.91	87.34	5.00	7.66
Signed an online petition	57.00	4.25	38.75	76.84	3.50	19.66
Donated money online to a political cause	85.59	5.09	9.32	93.58	4.42	2.00
Organized a political event	84.75	4.42	10.83	93.75	4.68	1.57
Coordinated a political event	85.42	4.67	9.91	94.17	4.34	1.49
Did something that is not mentioned above (please indicate below): _____	94.42	3.42	2.16	93.75	4.00	2.25

Source: Author's surveys.

Table 5. Offline political actions performed by respondents in 2018–2019

Answers Offline actions	Russia (n = 1,200), %			Kazakhstan (n = 1,200), %		
	No	Prefer not to say	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Yes
Voted in an election	67.84	4.58	27.58	47.17	2.92	49.91
Joined a political party	88.08	5.92	6.00	90.58	6.92	2.50
Joined an NGO/youth organization	78.75	7.16	14.09	84.42	4.58	11.00
Worked for a political campaign	80.67	5.17	14.16	85.33	4.42	10.25
Worked for a political organization	81.25	5.00	13.75	87.00	4.50	8.50
Contacted a public official and/or politician	71.00	5.67	23.33	81.00	5.16	13.84
Contacted mass media	79.17	6.17	14.66	87.33	6.08	6.59
Participated in a rally or protest	70.92	6.25	22.83	89.33	5.75	4.92
Participated in a strike	88.25	6.92	4.83	93.59	5.00	1.41
Participated in a demonstration	78.50	5.42	16.08	92.17	4.84	2.99
Occupied a building/road	90.92	5.58	3.50	94.25	5.16	0.59
Boycotted for a political cause	77.59	5.58	16.83	89.09	4.92	5.99
Signed a petition	58.67	3.25	38.08	79.00	5.00	16.00
Donated money to a political cause	88.34	5.08	6.58	94.00	4.09	1.91
Did something that is not mentioned above (please indicate below): _____	94.00	3.34	2.66	93.33	3.75	2.92

Source: Author's surveys.

Many politically active respondents indicated in my surveys that they participated in both online and offline political actions and provided various examples of such actions during the semistructured interviews: for instance, one might consume political posts and at the same time participate in online or offline political actions (table 6).

Table 6. Respondents who participated in both online and offline political actions in 2018–2019

| Actions / Answers	Russia (*n* = 1,200), %				Kazakhstan (*n* = 1,200), %			
	Cities	Towns	Villages	Overall	Cities	Towns	Villages	Overall
Contacted a public official and/or politician	7.9	2.1	1.3	11.3	3.8	3.2	1.3	7.3
Contacted mass media	4.1	1.3	2.6	8.0	2.0	1.1	0.1	3.2
Participated in/organized a rally or protest	5.1	2.0	0.5	7.6	0.7	0	0	0.7
Participated in/organized a strike	0.9	0.2	0	1.1	0	0	0	0
Participated in/organized a demonstration	4.0	1.3	0.9	6.2	0.4	0.1	0	0.5
Boycotted for a political cause	4.5	5.2	2.4	12.1	2.5	1.6	0.6	4.7
Signed a petition	14.6	7.7	3.6	25.9	6.91	4.5	2.4	13.8
Donated money to a political cause	3.2	0.9	0.3	4.4	0.6	0.2	0.05	0.8

Source: Author's surveys.

Table 6 shows what percentages of my respondents participated in online and offline political actions in 2018–2019. However, I should note that there were young people who participated in various types of both offline and online political activities in that period. For instance, some respondents voted in elections and also wrote political posts online between 2018 and 2019. Based on my findings, I contend that both Russian and Kazakhstani young people use new media as a mixture of political spectacle, virtual agora, and political coliseum. This argument is drawn from the data in which respondents showed what they had done in the year preceding their responses. In semistructured interviews I asked participants about their opinions toward the new-media use of their peers in politics. Asking this question is needed to understand what young people think about four types of new-media users in politics and which actions are becoming popular among their generation. In order to make the terms clearer and easier to understand, during the interviews I used "observers" instead of political spectators, "online activists" to indicate actors in virtual agora, and "full activists" to mean those who treat new media as political coliseum. Here apolitical people are considered to be similar to parochial political actors, observers to subjects, and full activists to participants, in the terminology of Almond and Verba (1963). However, I also differentiated online political participants as online activists. More precisely, I asked how respondents would rank these four types of new-media users, from 1 (*most prevalent*) to 4 (*least prevalent*), and which type is becoming more numerous among young people aged 18–29 in the respondents' localities. The results show quite a mixed variety of ideas toward this two-part question (see table 7 and figure 1).

Table 7. Rankings by type of new-media users

Localities	Apolitical people	Observers	Online activists	Full activists
RU cities	3	1	2	4
KZ cities	2	1	3	4
RU towns	2	1	3	4
KZ towns	1	2	3	4
RU villages	1	2	3	4
KZ villages	1	2	3	4
∑ RU	2	1	3	4
∑ KZ	1	2	3	4

Source: Author's design based on interviews.
Key: 1 = *most prevalent*; 2 = *more prevalent*; 3 = *less prevalent*; 4 = *least prevalent*
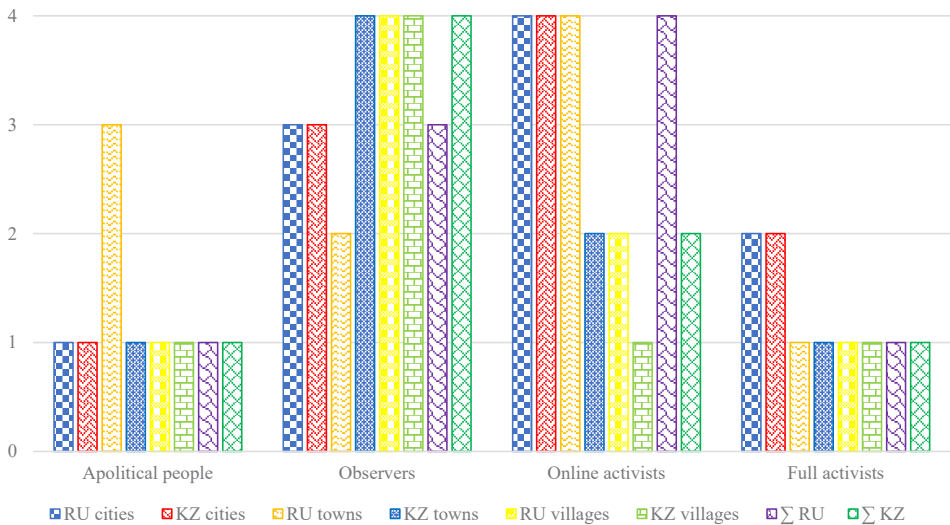
Figure 1. Perceived changes by types of ranked (1–4) new-media users
Key: 1 = *no increase in types of users*; 2 = *some increase in types of users*; 3 = *bigger increase in types of users*; 4 = *considerable increase in types of users*

Numbers 1 to 4 in table 7 indicate the opinions of respondents regarding the spread of the four types of users in their localities, while numbers 1 to 4 in figure 1 illustrate the perceived changes of this spread by types of new-media users by 2019 compared to previous year(s). For example, young people in Russia ranked observers as the most widespread type among their peers in cities and towns, while young Kazakhstanis regarded apolitical people as the most prevalent type in towns and villages. Nevertheless, online activists in Russia and observers in Kazakhstan are increasing in numbers in the abovementioned localities, according to the respondents' opinions. It is interesting to see that the numbers of apolitical people are increasing only in Russian towns—or at least this is the dominant perception among their

peers. Young Russians explained this ranking by saying that more and more young people in Russian towns give up on politics and/or have no time for politics due to economic hardships or other social conditions. We can also see that the respondents perceive that the number of "full activists" in both countries is growing. To reiterate, these are perceptions that represent young people's lived experiences and feelings toward their communities' young people. Yet, they can help us to understand the complex dynamics of usage of new media in political participation by young people aged 18–29 in cities, towns, and villages. This in turn would provide us with action- (online surveys) and opinion- (interviews) based analysis to better examine the "how" question. In the following sections I will discuss the four types of new-media users in more detail.

APOLITICISM, POLITICAL SPECTATORSHIP, DISENGAGEMENT, AND DISENCHANTMENT

Although apolitical young people sometimes encounter political posts/news/events on social media, they seem to ignore them and simply scroll through. Sometimes they try to avoid discussions by changing topic or making jokes. The reasons for apoliticism vary: some young people just do not have time for political participation, some feel that politics is not their business or is dangerous, whereas others have no understanding of political affairs surrounding them. Other, more frequent reasons are associated with threats in respondents' places of work and education as well as threats to their freedom. Misha and Aqbilek[13] echoed what many others reported during my interviews:

> I try to avoid discussions on political topics, especially if they are divisive. At work I do not talk about politics at all. Actually, I even have no time for politics, I'd say. (Misha, 22, analyst, Moscow)

> Politics is not for me. I don't think that I can decide or influence some important political issues. People in power don't listen to ordinary people. Besides, it can be very dangerous.... I simply ignore political posts or calls for protests on social media. (Aqbilek, 25, teacher, Aqtobe)

My data show similar levels of political spectatorship in rural and urban areas. This similarity is partially explained by young people's preference for and use of new media over "traditional" media. Consequently, new-media use allows my respondents to choose what content to consume, including content related to politics. During my interviews many young people, regardless of their attitudes toward politics, exhibited awareness of main political events. That is, even those who may be considered apolitical at least knew about the elections and had specific reasons to be apolitical. For instance, a number of respondents in Russia talked about various political affairs, revealing an oppositional mood toward the government. They remarked that injus-

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[13] All names are pseudonyms to maintain interviewees' anonymity.

tice and corruption schemes described in documentary films *Chaika* (Seagull) and *On vam ne Dimon* (Don't call him Dimon), produced by Aleksei Naval'yi's Anti-Corruption Foundation,[14] are typical for today's government.

Participants noted changes in access to online information in their localities and increasing opportunities for higher education that they connected to changes in their local civic and political actions. An ecologist from Khabarovsk with a college degree stated:

> Nowadays young people are more educated than ever before, including about politics. The internet also plays an important role in building political knowledge. As you might have seen, we have had mass protests in Khabarovsk, which clearly show the civic and political *pozitsii* [standpoints] of people here [in Khabarovsk] against Moscow. (Zarina, 20, shop assistant, Khabarovsk)

The 2020 protests in Khabarovsk Krai, for example, were already known by the vast majority of Russians in the month they began. According to Levada Center's[15] poll conducted on July 24–25, 2020, with a representative sample of 1,617 people, 83% of Russians knew about the protests, of which 45% felt "rather positive" about the protesters, 26% "neutral, indifferent," and 17% were "rather negative" (Levada Center[16] 2020). Despite the fact that federal TV channels did not properly cover mass protests in Khabarovsk, instead referring to them as gatherings of a few people, people throughout Russia knew about the protests thanks to the internet and social media, especially YouTube channels.

Apart from political flash points such as seen in Khabarovsk that induce active political participation, Gulsim from Shymkent emphasized human nature. She hinted at the intersection of psychological factors and political interest:

> In my opinion, online activists dominate among all four types. Apolitical people and observers are tied for the second place, and then [follow] offline activists. I give you only three ranks because people get tired of politics depending on their mood, and thus sometimes they are apolitical and sometimes just observers. (Gulsim, 22, cook, Shymkent)

This quote from Gulsim also supports the idea that young people are more inclined to participate online than offline for reasons such as fast, cost-effective, and far-reaching nature of actions and that people might change their political repertoires from being apolitical to observing political affairs and vice versa.

One interesting finding from the interviews was young people's political disengagement and disenchantment. Some online survey participants in Kazakhstani cit-

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[14] The Anti-Corruption Foundation has been labeled a nonprofit organization performing functions of a foreign agent and an extremist organization and banned in Russia.

[15] Levada Center has been labeled a nonprofit organization performing functions of a foreign agent.

[16] Levada Center has been labeled a nonprofit organization performing functions of a foreign agent.

ies reported that they had boycotted or ignored elections or politics in general. If a minority of these people thought that boycotting the elections is a kind of political participation, majority boycotted just to stay out of politics or because they believed that voting would bring them nothing. Nevertheless, many Russian participants told me about both boycotting the elections and intentionally spoiling ballots. Derek Hutcheson (2004:98) points out that voting "against all"[17] candidates and parties is one of the "two ways [along with abstention] of recording a protest within the constraints of the [Russian] electoral system." For example, in the 2018 Russian presidential election 791,217 invalid/blank ballots, out of 73.5 million overall votes, were registered by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (Vybory.izbirkom.ru 2018), although we cannot be certain whether all of these ballots were left blank or spoiled intentionally.

Analyzing Russian electoral, demographic, and survey data, Hutcheson (2004) finds that abstention causes disengagement and voting "against all" leads to engaged disenchantment. On the basis of my interview data, however, it appears that intentional disengagement also means contestation for some young people. One city dweller, for instance, reported that she did not vote for Russian constitutional amendments in 2020 because she wanted to show her disagreement with the referendum (Vera, 21, laboratory assistant, Yekaterinburg). Another such finding in my interviews was that some young Russians deliberately avoided shopping at Piaterochka, a Russian chain of convenience stores, because it is owned by a corrupt Duma deputy. Although this was an interesting finding, the interviewees could not name the deputy.

"VIRTUAL AGORA": "BORDERLESS" LOCALITIES, "BORDERLESS" PARTICIPATION

Although "the extensive and covert control of the online public sphere disempowers publics, making social media less capable of enabling a fully functioning society" (Klyueva 2016:4661), online political participation and contestation, which challenge the political order and are central to less open and more autocratic societies such as Russia and Kazakhstan, have strengthened in the emerging era of web 3.0[18] and globalization. According to my data from online surveys, the highest indicators of young people's online political participation in Russia and Kazakhstan were for (1) signing e-petitions (over 38% and around 20%, respectively); (2) writing political posts on social media (over 26% and over 15%, respectively); (3) participating in online boycotts for political causes (almost 19% and around 8%, respectively); (4) blogging (over 16% each) and writing po-

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[17] Between the early 1990s and 2006, Russian law allowed to vote "against all" parties and candidates (McAllister and White 2008).

[18] Web 3.0 is a *collaborative* and *internet of things* web (Kreps and Kimppa 2015:726) that includes the creation and sharing of "all types of data over all types of networks by all types of devices and machines" (Rudman and Bruwer 2016:136–137), while web 2.0 is a *participative* social media web (Murugesan 2007:34; McArthur, Lam-McArthur, and Fontaine 2018).

litical posts on websites (around 6% and 8% respectively); (5) contacting public officials and/or politicians online (around 16% each) and mass media through social media (7% and 12%, respectively) (table 4).

For many respondents political participation had not been a deliberately planned activity but had occurred gradually after gaining some political knowledge through civic engagement such as reading and watching news, taking part in online discussions, and searching the internet for specific political information. Through new media many young people, including those who were far from politics, at some point had become observers and then, during important turning points, developed into either online and/or offline participants/contestants. Many research participants from big cities, in contrast to their peers in towns and villages, assumed that today social life happens more online than offline and that, similarly, online activism prevails among young people. One respondent of Ukrainian origin, who indicated in my online surveys that he wrote one political post in 2019, also continued being active in 2020:

> I wrote two political posts about amendments to our [Russian] constitution this year [2020]. In the first one I urged my friends on Facebook[19] not to vote for the approval of the amendments to the constitution. I knew that it won't change anything, as you can probably guess, our government can cook up any results they want, but I wanted to show my friends what I think about the amendments and why it matters. And in the second post, I outlined my thoughts on the approved amendments. (Vlad, 19, history student, Irkutsk)

This example illustrates that flash points such as voting for constitutional amendments are likely to continue to affect young people's greater political participation. A further study could assess whether there is a surge in political participation concurrent with such political junctures.

The online surveys had two questions with an option where respondents could write their own suggestions/answers. The first question was about offline political actions and the second question was about online political actions during the preceding 12 months. These questions received quite a mixed variety of responses, ranging from contacting public officials and/or politicians, buy/boycotting, and flash mobs to taking pictures during protests, personal political investigations, and trolling[20] for money on the internet. One interesting finding was that some young people's donations to political causes were viewed as corruption of politics by some interviewees, while others saw them as an acceptable form of political participation. The results of my online surveys show that in Russia more young people donated money to political causes online (over 9%) than offline (over 6%), whereas in Ka-

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[19] Facebook is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[20] Trolling for money means leaving intentionally provocative messages online in order to provoke responses or manipulate readers' perceptions as well as to achieve a certain result such as disrupt some online activities.

zakhstan only around 2% of young people did so either online or offline. During the interviews, I noticed that some interviewees who had donated money for political causes preferred the term *donaty* (rather than the more conventional *pozhertvovaniia*), which is usually used for "donation" to bloggers who run channels on YouTube. This means that donating money for political causes has already become acceptable among some young people. For example, Anton, a 20-year-old student from Moscow, who identified as an LGBT man during our interview, told me that he donated 200 rubles to Mediazona[21] and 500 rubles to the Anti-Corruption Foundation[22] on a monthly basis.

One clear difference between Russian and Kazakhstani samples was that some young people from Kazakhstan were also engaged in clan politics,[23] which became evident when some interviewees mentioned various examples of online activism for clannism. In 2017 I conducted field research in Nur-Sultan, Aqtau, and Shymkent and found that young Kazakhs "perceive Zhuz and Ru clans mainly to affect them in terms of employment, marriage, and online media" (Sairambay 2019:39). At that time these results emerged from urban areas, and it was not clear whether clan effects were perceived in the same way in rural areas. But based on the interviews in my current study, I believe that there is no difference in online activism on clannism—clan issues on the internet and social media, derived from clan divisions, manifest in cities, towns, and villages in Kazakhstan.

Clan-based divisions and online activism seem to be more prevalent in the west (Maqat and Aqtobe) and south (Aiteke Bi, Shymkent, and Almaty) of Kazakhstan than in the east (Oskemen), north (Nur-Sultan and Zatobolsk), or central parts (Zheqazgan) of the country as well as among Kazakh-speaking Kazakhstanis rather than Russian-speaking Kazakhstanis. For example, one Kazakh-speaking villager from the south of Kazakhstan shared his experience of voting during the 2019 presidential election:

> Before voting in elections, we find out the *zhuzes* and *rus* [clans] of all candidates. Sometimes, especially when there are no alternatives, I cast my votes simply based on these clans. For example, in the 2019 presidential election, when it became known on the internet that [Amirjan] Qosanov [one of the presidential candidates] is from the Junior Zhuz, Alim Ru, and the Kete clan,[24] everyone I knew said that they would vote for him. Our village is dominated by people of the Junior *zhuz*. (Berik, 23, college teacher, Aiteke Bi)

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[21] Mediazona has been labeled a media outlet performing functions of a foreign agent.

[22] The Ant-Corruption Foundation has been labeled a nonprofit organization performing functions of a foreign agent and an extremist organization and banned in Russia.

[23] The politics of clan divisions—three *zhuz* umbrella clans, twenty main clans, and thousands of subclans called *rus*—that have existed since the Kazakh Khanate.

[24] Politicians (and ordinary people) prefer to conceal, rather than disclose, their clan origins/affiliations.

Some respondents explained that Kazakhs still divide themselves into clans because of the purity of blood and traditions of marriage that oblige couples to be from different *rus*. This division, according to my respondents, can manifest itself in how people discuss political issues online or in their support for certain political actors and their positions.

Nevertheless, despite taking part in various online political activities, no respondents indicated that they had participated in online protesting or online marching,[25] which have been recorded in the West. For instance, people in Belgium "virtually put up their tents in the Wetstraat 16" on Twitter after the federal elections and formation of the government in 2010 (Vissers and Stolle 2014:938). Another example is the "Big March," when people's avatars and online badges were displayed and repeated in 2010 and 2012 across the websites of participating partners (Vissers and Stolle 2014:938). Rather, such protests or marches all took place offline in both Russia and Kazakhstan, but were mostly associated with online participation (e.g., through online mobilization, organizing, and coordination).

Taken together, however, these findings suggest a role for "virtual agora" in promoting "borderless" online participation in "borderless" localities. As interviewees suggested, the number of spectators and online activists is increasing among young citizens in Russian and Kazakhstani political affairs, where new media are used in political participation in a "virtual agora." Moreover, "virtual agora" seems to cause a spillover effect among new-media users, first affecting their civic engagement and then political participation trajectories, sometimes even leading to offline participation.

"POLITICAL COLISEUM": "PARTICIPANT" RURAL AND "CONTESTANT" URBAN AREAS

Offline political participation separate from online political participation or interconnected online and offline political participation have emerged as a "political coliseum" in this research. My online surveys show that the most popular offline political activities of young people in Russia were signing petitions (over 38%), voting in elections (nearly 28%), contacting public officials and/or politicians (around 23%), and participating in protests or rallies (just over 22%) (table 5). In Kazakhstan, more young people participated in elections (almost half of respondents), signing petitions (16%), contacting public officials and/or politicians (nearly 14%), and joining NGOs / youth organizations and working for political campaigns (just over 10% each) than other activities (table 5).

Surprisingly, according to my online surveys, parliamentary activities such as voting in elections, party membership, working for a political campaign, and political organizing were observed slightly more frequently in rural rather than urban areas in both countries. One explanation for this might be that such events (e.g., elections)

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[25] Using avatars and/or badges on websites or social media to express support or opposition online.

are often the only ones where young people can participate. Another explanation can be that young people in rural areas hold more pro-government sentiments that require more active participation in parliamentary events. The bigger the locality in Kazakhstan, the lower the election turnouts among young people. Almost all participants from Kazakhstani villages suggested that less had changed when it came to offline political participation in local political events, except for elections and party membership. One young Kazakhstani villager aged 21, Savelii, from Tobyl stated: "Well, definitely, apolitical people prevail over other types. Most of the actions are online. Offline can be only elections and working for Nur Otan."[26] Similarly, a higher proportion of Russian villagers than residents of towns—but smaller than city dwellers—voted in elections. Moreover, party membership was more than three times higher in Russian villages than among young people in Russian towns and more than two times higher than in cities.

However, in both countries young people in urban areas participated in extra-parliamentary activities such as rallies and protests more than in rural areas. Interviewees referred to authoritarianism, threats to their employment, and political culture as significant obstacles to being full-fledged citizens. The difference between young people in urban and rural areas in each country was in their understanding of political affairs. This difference was especially evident in Kazakhstan. Although rural participants tended to sympathize with the respective governments and their policies (accentuating patriotism), urban respondents emphasized more oppositional viewpoints. Despite this difference, answering the open-ended questions in my online surveys some young people from Kazakhstani towns and Russian villages regretted that there were no protests in their places of residence and expressed that they would like to participate in protests. The common characteristics of these people were their unemployed status and older age (27–29). This commonality might signify that economic difficulties may cause people to be ready to take part in protests.

One respondent gave the following answer to an open-ended question: "I sent written appeals to the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the cases of Azat Miftakhov[27] and Ivan Golunov.[28]" This example shows that young people sometimes use offline and online actions simultaneously to affect political affairs important to them. In other words, young individuals not only write political posts or sign online petitions but also aim to influence political institutions offline through writing appeals or contacting public officials.

Scholars have also found that online and offline political participation are interconnected (e.g., Mercea 2012; Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero 2012). For example,

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[26] Nur Otan is the ruling and largest pro-presidential political party; it was renamed Amanat in March 2022.

[27] A criminal case on charges of hooliganism against the ruling United Russia Party.

[28] A fabricated criminal case against a journalist from the Russian-language online publication *Meduza* accused of attempting to sell drugs. *Meduza* has been labeled a media outlet performing functions of a foreign agent.

Yunhwan Kim, Silvia Russo, and Erik Amnå (2017:899) found that "online participation serves as a gateway to offline participation" among young people. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the entwinement of online and offline political participation in the Russian and Kazakhstani contexts with some examples from the interviews.

Interestingly, many interviewees from different backgrounds and localities in Kazakhstan showed concern about how online space had become a place for vehement discussions of the results of presidential elections throughout the country. Oraz, a programmer aged 25, told me how the 2019 presidential election results were perceived by people in Kazakhstan and what actually happened on the election day and in the following days:

> On the day of the election, it was somehow terrifying.... I remember Nur Otan's [party] cars were in the city [of Shymkent]. In front of the Nur Otan building there was a rally of 350–500 people. The electricity [and consequently the internet] was turned off. For example, in several districts of the city, I myself saw how they [the local government] turned off the electricity for about five hours.... After the results [were officially announced], I received a lot of notifications of real results [on my phone], even from groups that were not related to politics, that said that in fact Qosanov had more than 70%–80% of the votes in various polling stations. Such results with photos and videos were from all over the country. Instagram[29] and WhatsApp[30] raged with such posts. I still remember that people tore up and painted Tokayev's[31] posters with markers, especially on election day and the next day.... I believe that after that [Kazakhstani] people have no trust in the authorities. (Oraz, 25, programmer, Shymkent)

The quote above shows two aspects of how the government and pro-government party act during the election: The first one is disrupting the internet by cutting off electricity and thus leaving people with no connection to social media. To my question about how electricity affects internet access, Oraz told me that internet-access towers are powered by electricity in the city quarters, and without electricity internet does not work. He also mentioned that smartphones might quickly run out of battery. The second one is cooking up ("drawing," to use the local expression) the results of elections, despite any protests and evidence, such as photos and videos from polling stations, of unfair elections and fabricated election results. In fact, a number of pictures and videos showing the results of the election at many polling stations, including the one at Nazarbayev University, had been circulated on social media. According to young people, what they had seen in that

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[29] Instagram is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[30] WhatsApp is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[31] Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is a Kazakh politician and diplomat who since March 20, 2019, has been serving as the president of Kazakhstan.

evidence from the polling places was that most people voted for Qosanov, not for Tokayev. Another anti-government protest that took place in Russia was depicted by one interviewee:

> Social media helped us to publicize the [Khabarovsk] protests. We used YouTube, Instagram,[32] and Facebook[33] for live streams to show how we were protesting against unconstitutional actions from Moscow. There were daily videos [of protests] with various comments on YouTube. I'll tell you that protesters were not only locals [from the city of Khabarovsk], but also from the regions of Khabarovsk Krai, even from other cities such as Yekaterinburg, Saint Petersburg ... even *starushki* [old ladies] took part in protests, filming themselves. I can confirm that the internet and social media played a significant role in promoting, organizing, and recording the protests. The Instagram[34] [account] of [Mikhail] Degtiarev[35] became a place for heated discussions, "comments," "likes," and so on... Furthermore, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that various groups on social media, including YouTube channels, were broadcasting the protests from different parts of Russia. (Denis, 28, lecturer, Khabarovsk)

In these instances, Kazakhstani and Russian interviewees shared their individual and collective experiences in online and offline political actions that were interconnected by new media. As one interviewee from Almaty stated (Sultan, 19, student), it is impossible to imagine citizens' offline political actions without online activism; at the very least, new media are used for publicizing and organizing offline actions.

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense among politically active interviewees that "alternative" political participation can bring about changes that would affect political culture first and then politics overall. By alternative political participation young people meant various political actions such as hanging posters on building walls (e.g., during marathons or other races through cities), participating in the so-called *monstrations* (*monstratsii*) in Russia,[36] circulating political songs and jokes, discussing politics with humor, painting graffiti on political themes, flying paper planes during elections, and reviving *aitys* (a form of oral Kazakh folk song poetry performed on dombra). For instance, the Kazakh song called "Zhuie" (System) performed by the Kazakh singer Marhaba Sabi was mentioned as hitting the bull's-eye in terms of showing the current political atmosphere in Kazakhstan.

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[32] Instagram is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[33] Facebook is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[34] Instagram is owned by Meta, a company that has been deemed a terrorist organization and banned in Russia.

[35] Mikhail Degtiarev is a Russian politician who, since September 24, 2021, has been serving as the governor of Khabarovsk Krai.

[36] *Monstrations* are "mass demonstration[s] with art slogans and banners that participants use for expression and communication with their audience" (Sairambay 2022a:584).

A librarian from Barnaul who went to Khabarovsk to film the protests and then post videos on YouTube talked about *monstration*—a youth march with elements of carnival—as an example of such alternative political participation:

> Last year [in 2019] I took part in a *monstration* when [this form of protest] celebrated its 15 years of existence. We went out with the slogan "We are going down [*nam khana*]," and in the middle of the march we changed it to another one, "The city needs us, not this rag [*triapka,* referring to their banner]." ... Despite the fact that the *monstration* poses itself as an artistic action, one can observe political messages or people's problems expressed there. For example, I saw posters like "Through crises to success?," "Who burned the buttons in my social elevator?," and so on.... I do not think that such slogans are needed for absurdity; after all, if you think about these slogans, they are a voice of young people about growing problems that are not being solved. That is, this is not just an artistic and entertainment action, as the pro-state media warn; on the contrary, a *monstration* is used as an option to reach out to the authorities and Russian people with the current issues that Russia faces today. (Milana, 25, librarian, Barnaul)

If we search the internet for various images from the 2019 *monstrations*, which were held in 30 cities and towns across Russia, we will see that, in fact, participants' posters had political meanings such as "Enough tolerating this! Let's endure something else!," "Everything will change on February 30th" (Pikabu.ru n.d.), and "You will be a beauty with an apple [name of the Russian United Democratic Party Yabloko] in your mouth" (Fokin 2019). Therefore, it is possible to suggest that politically active young people use every opportunity, including new media, to influence political affairs. The usage of new media in manifest political activities can be described as part of a political coliseum, in which a wide variety of political actions can take place.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to understand the experiences (actions) and views (opinions) of young people in Russia and Kazakhstan regarding how they and their peers use new media in political participation. Consuming ongoing political affairs is the most common usage of new media in both Russia and Kazakhstan, followed by offline and online participation facilitated by new media. However, theses usages overlap, and therefore, as I have shown, young people utilize new media in their political participation as a mixture of political spectatorship, virtual agora, and political coliseum. I also found that some young people who do not participate in politics might still be interested in political affairs or, at least, know why they abstain from politics. My findings demonstrate that young citizens of both hybrid and consolidated authoritarian regimes use new media in similar ways in their political participation, despite some differences in specific forms of participation, such as offline *monstrations* in Russia and online clan politics in Kazakhstan. The research findings may mean that new-media users might morph from a political

spectator into an actor in the virtual agora or political coliseum and vice versa depending on political junctures (e.g., elections, votes on constitutional amendments, crises) and reactions of political institutions or their structures (e.g., the government).

The findings of the article contribute in several ways to our understanding of new-media use in political participation by Russian and Kazakhstani youths and provide an additional basis for the development of a political participation model facilitated by new media. First, online activists and observers are growing ever more in numbers in both countries, according to the respondents' perceptions, although apolitical people were the most numerous in Kazakhstan and the second largest group in Russia. Second, intentional disengagement from and disenchantment with politics might for some young people in fact mean contestation and taking a political position. The results of this investigation complement those of earlier studies (e.g., Hutcheson 2004). Third, civic engagement through new media fosters a gradual emergence of political participation, advancing young people from "political spectatorship" to "virtual agora" and "political coliseum." Yet, the usage of new media in political participation as "virtual agora" and "political coliseum" has not reached its peak observed in Western democracies, and some actions such as online protesting or online marching have not happened in Russia and Kazakhstan. This may be due to the nature of authoritarian political regimes that respond less positively to collective actions like protests and marches, as well as to different civic political cultures of these two countries as compared to democratic countries. Fourth, my data indicate that online and offline participation in the form of contestation is observed more frequently in urban than rural areas in both countries. However, in villages parliamentary offline participation such as voting is slightly more common than any other form of political participation. Finally, "alternative" political participation seems to be becoming popular among young people.

Future studies can investigate how online political participation promotes offline political participation. More broadly, further research is also needed to determine how authoritarian regimes influence citizens' online political participation. It could also examine why western-style online demonstrations/protests are not (yet) popular among Russian and Kazakhstani youth.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Composition of interviewees in Russia

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Marital status	Main occupation	Current occupation	Internet usage	Political interest
CITIES										
Moscow										
1	Sasha	27	male	Russian	completed MA	single	public sector	PhD student	high	high
2	Kolia	18	male	Russian	incomplete secondary	single	IT	college student	high	high
3	Misha	22	male	Karelian	completed BA	single	economist	analyst	moderate	low
4	Pasha	21	male	Russian	studying BA	single	bio ecologist	student	moderate	moderate
5	Dasha	18	female	Russian	full secondary	single	journalist	student	moderate	low
6	Ivan	21	male	Russian	studying BA	single	doctor	student	high	high
7	Anna	21	female	Tatar	studying BA	single	journalist	copywriter	high	low
8	Masha	20	female	Russian	completed college	single	Russian teacher	SMM manager	moderate	moderate
9	Anton	20	LGBT-man	Russian	studying BA	single	political scientist	student	high	high
Chelyabinsk										
1	Dima	19	male	Russian	studying BA	single	IT	student	high	moderate
Perm'										
1	Nina	26	female	Russian	full secondary	married	linguist	Russian teacher	high	low

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Marital status	Main occupation	Current occupation	Internet usage	Political interest
Yekaterinburg										
1	Bogdan	19	male	Russian	incomplete secondary	single	computer engineer	college student	moderate	moderate
2	Kostia	24	male	Russian	completed BA	single	electrical engineer	design engineer	high	moderate
3	Vera	21	female	Jew	studying BA	single	physical engineer	laboratory assistant	high	moderate
4	Vadim	18	male	Russian	full secondary	single	mining engineer	unemployed	high	low
5	Gleb	24	male	Russian	full secondary	single	lawyer	political activist	high	high
6	Al'bina	28	female	Russian	completed BA	married	journalist	journalist	high	high
Rostov-on-Don										
1	Maksim	25	male	Russian	completed BA	single	agronomist	family businessman	high	moderate
2	Zhanna	26	female	Russian	completed MA	single	programmer	unemployed	high	low
Ufa										
1	Aklima	22	female	Bashkir	completed BA	single	psychologist	unemployed	moderate	moderate
TOWNS										
Vologda										
1	Vova	21	male	Russian	full secondary	single	manual worker	manual worker	high	low
Barnaul										
1	Milana	25	female	Russian	completed BA	single	librarian	librarian	moderate	moderate
Irkutsk										
1	Vlad	19	male	Ukrainian	studying BA	single	historian	student	moderate	low

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Marital status	Main occupation	Current occupation	Internet usage	Political interest
Vladivostok										
1	Alina	23	female	Russian	completed BA	single	finance	cashier at Burger King	moderate	moderate
Khabarovsk										
1	Denis	28	male	Russian	completed BA	single	orientalist	lecturer	high	high
2	Zarina	20	female	Russian	completed college	single	ecologist	shop assistant	moderate	high
Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy										
1	Maria	22	female	Russian	studying BA	single	pharmacist	student	high	low
Ulan-Ude										
1	Eva	21	female	Buryat	completed college	single	manager	cashier	moderate	low
Tyumen'										
1	Polina	18	female	Russian	studying BA	single	oilman	student	high	moderate
Orenburg										
1	Zhenia	19	male	Russian	studying BA	single	musician	student	high	high
Pskov										
1	Timofei	22	male	Russian	completed BA	single	radio technologist	intern	high	low
Murmansk										
1	Dariia	20	female	Russian	full secondary	single	cook	unemployed	moderate	moderate
VILLAGES										
Kaa-Khem										
1	Osip	29	male	Russian	completed BA	single	lawyer	attorney	high	moderate

#	Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Education	Marital				
Pangody										
1	Roman	27	male	Jew	vocational	single	electrician	unemployed	high	moderate
Razumnoe										
1	Fedor	22	male	Russian	completed college	single	veterinarian	veterinarian	high	moderate
2	Petr	21	male	Russian	vocational	single	lifeguard	unemployed	moderate	high
Chishmy										
1	Karina	26	female	Russian	vocational	married	cook	cook	moderate	low
2	Bargia	20	male	Bashkir	full secondary	single	plumber	unemployed	moderate	moderate
Privolzhskii										
1	Kira	24	female	Russian	full secondary	single	none	housekeeper	low	low
Nakhabino										
1	Iliia	22	female	Russian	completed BA	single	accountant	unemployed	high	high
2	Stepan	25	male	Russian	full secondary	single	none	sales manager	moderate	low
Shilovo										
1	Il'ia	28	male	Russian	vocational	single	driver	assistant	high	moderate
Roshchino										
1	Mikhail	27	male	Russian	completed BA	single	business administrator	entrepreneur	high	low
Ust'-Abakan										
1	Svetlana	20	female	Russian	full secondary	single	none	housekeeper	low	moderate
Inozemtsevo										
1	Kirill	27	male	Russian	vocational	single	welder	unemployed	high	high

Table A2. Composition of interviewees in Kazakhstan

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Marital status	Main occupation	Current occupation	Internet usage	Political interest
CITIES										
Nur-Sultan										
1	Dinara	20	female	Kazakh	studying BA	single	biologist	student	moderate	moderate
2	Daulet	24	male	Kazakh	completed BA	single	economist	internal auditor	moderate	high
3	Azat	19	male	Kazakh	studying BA	single	mathematician	student	high	low
4	Ulan	22	male	Kazakh	studying BA	single	programmer	programmer	moderate	moderate
5	Galina	21	female	Russian	full secondary	single	none	unemployed	high	low
Shymkent										
1	Oraz	25	male	Kazakh	completed BA	single	programmer	programmer	high	high
2	Maqsat	29	male	Kazakh	completed BA	married	culturologist	director general	high	high
3	Irina	19	female	Russian	full secondary	single	none	shop assistant	moderate	low
4	Tauekel	26	male	Kazakh	completed MA	single	linguist	postgraduate student	high	high
5	Gulsim	22	female	Kazakh	vocational	single	cook	cook	moderate	moderate
Almaty										
1	Sultan	19	male	Kazakh	studying BA	single	chemistry teacher	volunteer student	high	high
2	Madina	20	female	Kazakh	studying BA	single	zoologist	student	high	low
3	Qanat	24	male	Kazakh	completed BA	single	policy maker	MA student	moderate	moderate
4	Zhibek	21	female	Kazakh	completed BA	single	marketing manager	MA student	high	moderate
5	Birzhan	22	male	Chuvash	incomplete secondary	single	none	unemployed	moderate	high

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Marital status	Main occupation	Current occupation	Internet usage	Political interest
6	Marx	18	male	German	full secondary	single	none	unemployed	high	low
7	Tatiana	26	female	Russian	completed BA	married	economist	housekeeping	moderate	moderate
TOWNS										
Oskemen										
1	Dilda	26	female	Russian	completed BA	married	public manager	assistant	high	moderate
2	Zhaina	27	female	Russian	completed MA	single	dermatologist	dermatologist	high	moderate
3	Bektas	23	male	Kazakh	completed BA	single	manager	PR manager	high	high
4	Aman	18	male	Kazakh	full secondary	single	none	unemployed	moderate	low
Zhezqazgan										
1	Duman	29	male	Russian	completed BA	married	teacher	teacher	high	high
2	Yedige	19	male	Kazakh	full secondary	single	defectologist	student	high	moderate
3	Gulnaz	19	female	Kazakh	studying BA	single	art manager	volunteer	high	low
4	Samat	21	male	Kazakh	completed BA	single	mechanical engineer	mechanic specialist	high	low
5	Akmaral	23	female	Kazakh	completed college	single	lawyer	unemployed	moderate	moderate
Aqtobe										
1	Medet	21	male	Kazakh	studying BA	single	journalist	journalist	high	low
2	Qairat	28	male	Kazakh	completed BA	married	programmer	instagramman	high	moderate
3	Azhar	20	female	Kazakh	completed college	single	actor	unemployed	moderate	low
4	Quat	24	male	Kazakh	completed MA	single	philologist	lecturer in English	high	high

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Marital status	Main occupation	Current occupation	Internet usage	Political interest
5	Angela	19	female	Russian	full secondary	single	none	unemployed	high	low
6	Aqbilek	25	female	Russian	completed BA	married	teacher	teacher	moderate	low
VILLAGES										
Aiteke Bi										
1	Berik	23	male	Kazakh	completed BA	married	industrial training master	college teacher	high	moderate
2	Yermek	25	male	Kazakh	completed BA	married	journalist	journalist	high	high
3	Asqat	26	male	Kazakh	completed BA	single	dombra player	unemployed	high	high
4	Assem	28	female	Kazakh	completed college	divorced	train conductor	political activist	high	high
5	Balzhan	18	female	Kazakh	incomplete secondary	single	none	unemployed	moderate	low
Maqat										
1	Gulzhan	27	female	Kazakh	completed BA	married	teacher	teacher	moderate	moderate
2	Daryn	18	male	Kazakh	incomplete secondary	single	none	unemployed	high	low
3	Yeldar	27	male	Kazakh	vocational	married	barber	barber	low	low
4	Aqmaral	23	female	Kazakh	full secondary	single	none	unemployed	high	high
Tobyl										
1	Pavlina	25	female	Russian	completed college	married	nurse	housewife	high	low
2	Qarlygash	19	female	Kazakh	full secondary	single	none	unemployed	moderate	low
3	Savelii	21	male	Russian	studying BA	single	agronomist	student	high	moderate
4	Lazzat	23	female	Kazakh	completed BA	married	librarian	unemployed	high	low

Как молодежь использует новые медиа в политическом участии в России и Казахстане

Еркебулан Сайрамбай

Еркебулан Сайрамбай, кафедра социальных наук, факультет права и социальных наук, Университет Сулеймана Демиреля (Каскелен, Казахстан). Адрес для переписки: ул. Абылайхана, 1/1, Университет Сулеймана Демиреля, Каскелен, 040900, Казахстан. yerkebulan.sairambay@sdu.edu.kz.

При изучении политического участия возникает вопрос, используются ли новые медиа в качестве «политического зрелища», «виртуальной агоры» или «политического колизея». В статье рассматривается, как именно молодые граждане используют новые медиа для участия в политической жизни в России и Казахстане. Опираясь на опросы компании Qualtrics (всего опрошено 2400 человек) и полуструктурированные интервью (всего 90 интервью), проведенные в 54 российских и казахстанских городах и селах в 2019–2020 годах, автор демонстрирует, что молодые люди в Казахстане и России используют новые медиа как сочетание «политического зрелища», «виртуальной агоры» и «политического колизея». Результаты показали, что количество онлайн-активистов и наблюдателей растет в обеих странах. Однако самыми многочисленными пользователями новых медиа являются, по опыту (физическим действиям) и взглядам (мнениям) респондентов, аполитичные люди в Казахстане и наблюдатели в России. Изучая такого рода использование медиа, автор также обнаружил, что преднамеренное политическое отстранение и разочарование могут означать для некоторых молодых людей противостояние существующему политическому порядку. Онлайн- и офлайн-участие как противостояние чаще наблюдается в городах, чем в сельской местности, в обеих странах, а «альтернативное» участие (например, участие в демонстрациях), похоже, становится популярным среди молодых россиян и казахстанцев. Представленная работа, развивая сопоставительное направление межнациональных сравнительных исследований в незападных политических системах, показывает, как новые медиа используются в политическом участии в посткоммунистическом контексте.

Ключевые слова: новые медиа; политическое участие; политическое зрелище; виртуальная агора; политический колизей; Россия; Казахстан