EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' OPINION ON THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN KOSOVO

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Abstract: The study explores the possibilities of increasing the involvement of young voters in the electoral process. It assesses the involvement of youth in the electoral process based on the responses of students majoring in Political Science and Jurisprudence in Kosovo. In-depth interviews were conducted as it is believed that the students in these areas are novice experts in the field of political science and jurisprudence. The research was conducted at UBT College is based in Prishtina, where students from different municipalities attain their higher education. It helps in identifying general trends in the country. The total number of students in each course is 80, every second student took part in the in-depth interview. As a part of the study, it is required to confirm whether the demographic characteristics of respondents influence their participation in elections. The results of the study showed that majority of the respondents were females, in the age group of 18-24 years, currently living in Pristina and are studying at the university. In Kosovo there is a high involvement of youth in the elections (57.5%), students participating in elections strive to change the future of their country (34.8%). However, it is possible to increase voters' turnout among youth by increasing their interest in elections (23.6%), aligning party programs and candidates with the political interests of the voters (17.5%), and by considering the reasons why the voter cannot come to the polling station on the election day (11.8%). Conclusions: The results indicate high electoral activity among youth. In view of the findings, there is an opportunity to increase the involvement of young voters in the electoral process, and to increase voters' turnout rate among young people in Kosovo. The results of the study in Kosovo are compared with the results of a similar research in Russia. It is believed that in Kosovo youth participation in elections is seen as an opportunity to influence political decisions, bring changes in the political course of the country. The study also concludes that participation in elections is influenced by demographic characteristics of the respondents. It is identified that in future, no successful party can afford to neglect the category of young and female voters.

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Introduction

The study focuses on the electoral activity of young people, disinterest, and lack of involvement in the political process. Before the pandemic period under the auspices of the European Union, from September 18 to 20, 2019, Strasbourg (France) hosted a Symposium dedicated to the political community of youth "The future of youth political participation: issues, challenges, and opportunities".

The present study analyses the reasons for the low electoral activity of youth in Kosovo and ways to overcome it. Reforms in a country depend on the outcome of the elections. Since 2001, elections in Kosovo have not had a high turnout. However, in February 2021 parliamentary elections, the Self-Determination party won 49.95% of the total votes.

The study aims to identify: 1) the percentage of respondents who always participate in the elections, sometimes, rarely, do not participate, 2) the percentage of respondents who answer that they always participate in elections, 3) the reasons for active and inactive participation in elections, 4) to check whether the demographic characteristics of the respondents influence their participation in the elections; 5) to compare the results of the survey in Kosovo and in Russia; 6) the features of participation / non-participation of youth in the elections in Kosovo.

Literature review

Currently, many researchers highlighted the problem of political absenteeism. Bersh and Yakimova (2020) discussed the tendency of citizens to refuse to participate in elections at various levels. The legitimacy of power is directly related to the participation of the population in elections. In case of low voter turnout, power is considered illegitimate.

Kandel (2020) stated that "in Kosovo, the public demand for a renewal of the political scene, for new political forces and for leaders outside the traditionally dominated establishment parties has become of great importance" . Kudryashova and Meleshkina (2021) specified the growth of electoral competition, the strengthening of parties as "Self-Determination" and "Social Democratic Initiative". In 2019, the "Self-Determination" Party won the parliamentary elections under the slogans of fighting corruption and bad governance. Entina (2021) recognised the elections in Kosovo on October 6, 2019, as the "turning point" in the political life of the "Albanian world". A coalition government was formed and

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this victory was associated, among other things, with factor like the consistent involvement of the party "Self-Determination" with the younger generation. A. Kurti's program at some point, was supposed to ensure the scale of voting. The political stability of modern society is ensured by the conviction of citizens that their opinions are considered when making political decisions and that the ruling political elites feel supported by the majority of the population (Perevyshin, 2022). The present concentrated form of public participation in the state in terms of the formation of public authorities, including parliament, is the stage of voting, within which the right of the voter turns into a real managerial decision to endow a certain subject - a public authority with public power (Lavrikov, 2022).

Young people in the age group of 15 to 24 years constitute one fifth (1/5) of the general population in Kosovo. Gaining youth support is a deciding factor in winning an election. Reaching out to young voters is an electoral advantage that cannot be ignored. Therefore, political parties should consider the preferences of this age group when designing and promoting policies to appeal to their interests.

After the parliamentary elections in Kosovo in February 2021, their analysis was carried out. Women and youth were found to have a key role in LVV's victory, according to the exit polls, 61 percent of women and 61 percent of young people aged between 18 to 24 years voted for LVV (NDI, 2021).

Data and Methodology

The research was conducted at UBT College, a higher education institution based in Prishtina. It is one of the leading universities in Kosovo, where students from different municipalities attain higher education. The study helps in identifying general trends in the country. An in-depth interview was conducted among three groups of students studying in the field of "Political Science" and "Jurisprudence". It is assumed that these students may have specific proposals to improve the political life of the country; therefore, active participation of young people in elections is a must.

The total number of students in each course is 80. Every second student participated in the in-depth interview. 40 questionnaires were collected.

The study aims to examine the influence of demographic characteristics of respondents on their participation in elections. An alternative hypothesis for the study is that the demographic characteristics of the respondents influence their participation in the elections. The null hypothesis, on the other hand, is that the demographic characteristics of respondents do not influence their participation in the elections. Data of the in-depth interview was collected with the help of Google Forms. Correlation coefficient is calculated to test the hypothesis. Indicator responses of the respondents are used in their original form and converted into dichotomous or rank scales if there are more than 2 options for an answer.

Based on the theory of rational choice of the neo-institutional approach (Wolman & Kulman, 2017). The study assumes that despite the measures taken by the state to stimulate voter turnout, citizens decide on their own about their participation in the elections.

Analysis

The purpose of the study is to conduct a survey among students from the field of "Political Science" and "Jurisprudence", to identify the degree of their involvement in the electoral process in Kosovo.

Most of the respondents (27), i.e., 67.5 % are from urban area while (13) i.e., 32.5% of the respondents are from rural areas. 23 respondents i.e., 57.5% (table 1).

75% of the respondents are women, and 25% are men.

Age wise, 67.5% of the respondents are in the age group of 18 to 24 years, 25 % in the age group of 25 to 34 and 7.5% in the age group of 35 to 44 years .

In terms of educational qualification 37 respondents (92.5%) have higher education and3 respondents (7.5%) have school education.

Regarding the professional status of the respondents, 21 respondents (52.5 %) study at the university, while 19 respondents (47.5%) study and work.

Among the survey participants, 23 respondents (57.5 %) always take part in elections, 7 (17,5%) respondents sometimes participate, 4 (10%) respondents rarely participate, while 6 (15%) respondents never participate in the elections. A significant potential for voter turnout among young people in Kosovo has been identified.

Respondents who always participated in the elections were further asked, “Why do you take an active part in elections?”

Table 1: Place of residence of respondents

Place of residence	Number of responses	Level of the percentage
Peje	2	5
Ferizaj	2	5
Fushe Kosove	2	5
Kamenicë	1	2.5
Lipjan	1	2.5
Malisheve	1	2.5
Mitrovicë	3	7.5
Prishtina	23	57.5
Prizren	3	7.5
Gjakove	2	5
Total	40	100%

Source: Authors

Table 2: Reasons for the participation of young people in the elections in Kosovo

Reasons for the participation	Number of responses	Level of the percentage
I love my country	1	4.3%
I want to influence on political decisions in the country	2	8.7%
It's my duty	4	17.4%
I see this as an opportunity for changes in the country, it affects our lives and our future	8	34.8%
This is an opportunity for me to express support for my candidate or party	2	8.7%
That's my right	2	8.7%
This is important to me	2	8.7%
My vote must be counted	2	8.7%
Total	23	100%

Source: Authors

The reasons why young people participate in the elections in Kosovo are presented in table 2.

Following are the reasons to participate in the elections: 1) “I love my country”, 2) I want to participate in political decision-making, “voting gives voters the opportunity to participate in decision-making”, 3) “I consider this one of my duties as a citizen”, “everyone is obliged to choose the leader of their country”, “we are obliged to contribute to our country", “this responsibility will bring the best for us: what we need, in culture, in civilization, in a developed economy, in quality education and in the health of society”, 4) “this is an opportunity for change in the country”, “for good change”, “for change (not only for politicians), for better governance, for better representation and for a better future”, “we must participate in elections, because they are for our good, they are useful to be able to change the government if we are not happy with it”, “for changes in the country”, 5) “it is a way to express our support for the party ideology”, “to elect our representatives”,6) “I have the right, I vote”, “this is my right”, 7) “this is important for me”, “I think it is important to participate in elections and vote”, 8) “it affects our lives”, “ for the best solution for my country", “this is important for our society", “our future is in our hands if we choose the right candidates”, 9) “I want to be part of a democratic state and I don't want someone to steal my vote”, “I am a conscientious citizen and I want my vote to be taken into account”.

Table 3 presents the reasons why young people “sometimes”, “rarely”, and “never” participate in elections in Kosovo.

Respondents who answered that they take part in elections “sometimes”, “rarely”, “never”, were further asked to answer the reasons why they do not always participate in elections. The reasons for absenteeism in the elections are as follows: 1) “I rarely participate, because there are no suitable representatives to lead a municipality or country”, “I usually do not resonate with any of the candidates”, “because I do not believe in any political party”, 2) “I did not participate rarely for health reasons or because of work,

"when I am not in the city, I do not take part in elections", 3) "because I am not a citizen of Kosovo", 4) "I do not want to take part", "I do not like to participate in elections". Most of the respondents were female, in the age group of 18-24 years, presently living in Pristina, and studying at the university.

Table 3: Reasons for absenteeism of young people in the elections in Kosovo

Reasons for absenteeism	**Number of responses**	**Level of the percentage**
I don't usually resonate with any of the candidates	3	17.5%
I do not participate for objective reasons: health status, work, absence from the city	2	11.8%
I am not a citizen of Kosovo	1	5.9%
I don't like to participate in elections, I don't want to	2	11.8%
My vote does not affect the politics of the country	1	5.9%
It doesn't matter to me, no interest	2	11.8%
No answer	6	35.3%
Total	17	100%

Source: Authors

The data indicate high electoral activity (most often respondents noted that they "always" participate in elections). It is examined which indicators are associated with participation in elections.

	Education	Elections
Education	1.00000	0.04161
Elections	0.04161	1.00000
	Education	Elections
Education	1.00000	0.08503
Elections	0.08503	1.00000
	Status	Elections
Status	1.000000	0.131079
Elections	0.131079	1.000000
	Status	Elections
Status	1.000000	0.120955
Elections	0.120955	1.000000

A weak relationship was found between the indicators of gender (0.3) and age (0.26) of the respondents. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed.

Discussions

The study compared the results of the survey conducted in Kosovo and Russia. In Russia, 89 young respondents were surveyed in Astrakhan, Russia (Marmilova et al.,2021). The reasons for participating in elections among youth in Russia and Kosovo are largely the same. In Russia and Kosovo, youth participate in elections because they find it interesting, care about the future of their country, to express their political position, and to make their vote considered. The difference is that youth in Russia consider participation in elections their responsibility, while in Kosovo, participation in elections is seen as an opportunity to influence political decisions and to bring the possibility of change in the political course of the country after the elections. The reasons for non-participation in the elections in Russia and Kosovo are that they find it difficult to be present at the polling station on election day, they are foreign citizens and they do not have any interest in the elections. Furthermore, in Russia, there are some more reasons for non-participation in elections like some of the respondents do not participate in elections because these are not federal elections. Therefore, both in Kosovo and Russia more participation of youth in in the elections can be attained.

Results

Youth in Kosovo consider participation in elections as their duty or obligation (17.4%), as well as an opportunity bring changes and for the bright future of their country (34.8 %). The study perceives the potential for an increase in voters turnout among youth in Kosovo in the alignment of the interests of the voters and political parties and the candidates (17.5%), in increasing the involvement of youth in the electoral process (23.6 %), and considering the possibility that a voter may fall ill on election day, is at work, or another place (11.8%). The majority of the respondents in the study were females, in the age

group of 18-24 years, currently living in Pristina and studying at the university. Results indicate high involvement in the electoral process as 57.5 % of the respondents "always" participate in the elections.

Conclusions

Respondents for the most part adhere to pre-established patterns of behavior and speaking of electoral absenteeism, the reasons should be sought not only as legal material, but also in areas that go beyond electoral relations (Chimarov, 2022). It is evident from the study that in future, no successful party can afford to neglect youth and women voters.

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