

DIGITAL INFORMATION-IDEOLOGICAL THREATS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF YOUTH POLITICAL CULTURE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT: This thesis examines the influence of digital information and ideological threats on the formation of political culture among young people in Central Asian states. The rapid expansion of social networks, online media, messaging platforms, and digital communication has fundamentally changed the sources and mechanisms of political socialization. Alongside opportunities for political awareness, civic participation, and access to diverse viewpoints, the digital environment creates conditions for misinformation, disinformation, manipulative narratives, polarization, hate speech, and other forms of ideological influence. The study focuses on three interconnected dimensions of youth political culture: political knowledge and attitudes, institutional trust, and civic engagement. Particular attention is paid to the role of digital media as an agent of political socialization and to the ability of young people to critically evaluate political information. The study argues that strengthening media and information literacy, critical thinking, and civic education can increase young people's resilience to harmful information and support the development of a responsible, stable, and participatory political culture.

Keywords: political culture; youth; information security; ideological threats; digital media; Central Asia; institutional trust; civic engagement.

АННОТАЦИЯ: В тезисах рассматривается влияние цифровых информационно-идеологических угроз на формирование политической культуры молодежи государств Центральной Азии. Стремительное развитие социальных сетей, интернет-СМИ, мессенджеров и цифровых коммуникаций существенно изменило источники и механизмы политической социализации молодежи. Наряду с расширением возможностей для повышения политической информированности, гражданского участия и доступа к различным точкам зрения цифровая среда создает условия для распространения недостоверной информации, дезинформации, манипулятивных нарративов, политической поляризации, языка вражды и иных форм идеологического воздействия. В исследовании основное внимание уделяется трем взаимосвязанным компонентам политической культуры молодежи: политическим знаниям и установкам, доверию к общественно-политическим институтам и гражданской активности. Особое значение придается роли цифровых медиа как современного агента политической социализации и способности молодежи критически оценивать политическую информацию. Обосновывается, что развитие медийной и информационной грамотности, критического мышления и гражданского образования способствует повышению устойчивости молодежи к деструктивным информационным воздействиям и формированию ответственной, стабильной и активной политической культуры.

Ключевые слова: политическая культура; молодежь; информационная безопасность; идеологические угрозы; цифровые медиа; Центральная Азия; институциональное доверие; гражданская активность.

The accelerating digitalization of public life in Central Asia has turned the information environment into one of the principal arenas in which the political culture of young citizens is formed. Political culture, understood since the classical work of Almond and Verba as the set of orientations, values, and attitudes that citizens hold toward the political system, is no longer shaped primarily by family, school, or state media, but increasingly by decentralized, transnational information flows that reach youth through social networks and messaging platforms [2]. This shift raises a pressing question for the states of the region: how do information-ideological attacks — organized or diffuse efforts to distort political knowledge, discredit institutions, or implant destabilizing narratives — affect the political consciousness, trust, and civic behavior of young people, and what can be done to strengthen their resilience.

Digital exposure and vulnerability. Regional evidence confirms that the youth information diet has moved decisively online. A recent mixed-methods study of Generation Z in Almaty found that the overwhelming majority of student respondents obtain political information through websites, forums, and social networks rather than television, with Instagram and TikTok emerging as the dominant channels of political news consumption [7]. This transition matters because such platforms are largely unmediated by professional editorial standards, which makes them an efficient vector for information-ideological attacks — content engineered to manipulate emotion, distort historical memory, or promote extremist and separatist narratives among impressionable audiences. The United States Institute of Peace has similarly documented how the region's expanding internet penetration has been exploited by actors ranging from violent extremist groups to foreign state and non-state interests seeking to reshape public opinion, while governments simultaneously tighten digital controls, producing an information space defined by competing pressures rather than open deliberation [8].

Consequences for political culture. The effects of this contested information environment are visible in two interconnected dimensions of youth political culture: institutional trust and susceptibility to radical ideas. Comparative research on post-communist and transitional societies shows that declining institutional trust among young people is closely associated with democratic backsliding, as youth who are repeatedly exposed to delegitimizing narratives about state institutions become more likely to disengage from formal political participation altogether [4]. In Central Asia specifically, scholarship on youth radicalization identifies unemployment, marginalization, and exposure to digital propaganda as mutually reinforcing drivers that lower the threshold at which young people accept extremist or destabilizing ideological content [3]. Analyses of religious extremist networks originating in the region likewise stress that online recruitment and ideological messaging now substitute for the physical recruitment grounds that dominated in earlier decades, meaning that information-ideological attacks are not a peripheral security concern but a direct input into the political socialization of youth [1].

The Uzbek policy response. Uzbekistan has approached this challenge primarily through the framework of information and ideological security embedded in national legislation and doctrine. Domestic scholarship characterizes information-ideological aggression as the deliberate attempt to alter the worldview of particular social strata, especially youth, through the promotion of extremist, immoral, or nationalistically divisive ideas, and situates resistance to such aggression within the broader concept of national security, understood as the

harmonization of the interests of the individual, society, and the state [5]. This literature further emphasizes that the sources of threat to the national information space may be both internal and external, and that a state's information security strategy must therefore combine legal regulation, institutional oversight, and public awareness-building rather than relying on any single instrument [6]. Such a framework positions media and information literacy — the capacity of young citizens to critically evaluate the origin, intent, and reliability of the content they consume — as a foundational element of political culture rather than a purely technical skill.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the resilience of youth political culture in Central Asia depends less on restricting access to information than on cultivating the analytical and civic competencies that allow young people to process contested content critically. On this basis, the following measures are proposed: first, integrating structured media and political literacy modules into secondary and higher education curricula, calibrated to the digital platforms youth actually use rather than legacy media; second, strengthening the transparency and responsiveness of state institutions, since perceived institutional legitimacy has been shown to buffer the effect of delegitimizing narratives; third, supporting independent, fact-based youth-oriented digital content as a counterweight to ideologically engineered material; and fourth, developing regional cooperation mechanisms among Central Asian states for monitoring and jointly responding to cross-border information-ideological campaigns, given the transnational character of the platforms involved.

Information-ideological attacks constitute a structural, rather than incidental, factor in the formation of youth political culture across Central Asia. The region's young citizens are simultaneously more digitally connected and more exposed to unmediated ideological content than any previous generation, and their patterns of institutional trust, civic participation, and susceptibility to radical narratives are being reshaped accordingly. A durable response requires treating information-ideological security not as a matter of restriction alone, but as an integral component of civic education, institutional legitimacy, and regional cooperation.

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