



## INVESTIGACIÓN

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# MEXICAN YOUTH ARE FACING A NEW RECESSIONARY TREND IN DEMOCRACY

*La juventud mexicana frente a una nueva tendencia recesiva de la democracia*

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on analyzing the recessionary trend of democracy in young Mexicans; it is assumed that, when economic activity recedes, not only a perception of economic but democratic stagnation is generated in society that is expressed in the levels of abstinence of young people from participating in the democratic life of their country. This study seeks to determine, through a representative sample of 400 young people surveyed, corresponding to 12 thousand 884 18-23-year-old voters from the population capital, belonging to the 12th Electoral District in Mexico, whether they show a recessionary trend in their political participation. The relevance of this research is that the City of Puebla, capital of the State of Puebla located in the center of the Mexican Republic, is one of the cities with the highest concentration of higher education institutions - public and private - of Mexico, by 2020, according to the Federal Ministry of Public Education. In Puebla, 343 universities operate, placing this entity as the second one with more institutions of this level of education at a national level (SEP, 2020). In addition, the Poblana entity receives students from different federative entities of the country, so it is

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possible to affirm that the results presented here are representative of the observable behaviors in the Mexican youth in the face of democracy as a way of life.

**KEY WORDS:** Democracy - participation - youth and politics.

## **RESUMEN**

El presente trabajo de investigación se centra en analizar la tendencia recesiva de la democracia en jóvenes mexicanos; se parte del supuesto que, cuando la actividad económica retrocede, se genera en la sociedad no solo una percepción de estancamiento económico sino democrático que se expresa en los niveles de abstinencia de las y los jóvenes a participar en la vida democrática de su país. El presente estudio busca determinar, mediante una muestra representativa de 400 jóvenes encuestados, correspondiente a 12 mil 884 electores de 18 a 23 años de la capital poblana, pertenecientes al distrito 12 electoral en México, si presentan una tendencia recesiva de su participación política. La relevancia de la investigación radica en que la Ciudad de Puebla, capital del Estado de Puebla ubicado en el centro de la República Mexicana, es una de las ciudades con mayor concentración de instituciones de educación superior -públicas y privadas- de México, para el año 2020, de acuerdo con la Secretaría de Educación Pública Federal, en Puebla operan 343 universidades, colocando a la entidad como la segunda a nivel nacional con más instituciones de este nivel educativo (SEP, 2020). Además de lo anterior, la entidad poblana recibe estudiantes de diferentes entidades federativas del país, de modo que es posible afirmar que los resultados que aquí se presentan, son representativos de las conductas observables en las y los jóvenes mexicanos frente la democracia como forma de vida.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Democracia - participación - juventud y política.

## **A JUVENTUDE MEXICANA LIDERANDO UMA NOVA TENDÊNCIA RECESSIVA DA DEMOCRACIA**

### **RESUMO**

O presente trabalho de pesquisa está focado em analisar a tendência recessiva da democracia em jovens mexicanos; se parte da suposição que, quando a atividade econômica declina, gera-se na sociedade não somente uma percepção de estagnação econômica mas também da democracia que se expressa nos níveis de abstinência dos jovens que participam na vida econômica do país. O presente estudo procura determinar, através de uma mostra representativa de 400 jovens entrevistados, correspondentes a 12 mil 884 eleitores entre 18 e 23 anos da capital de Puebla, pertencentes ao distrito 12 eleitoral no México, se apresentam uma tendência recessiva da sua participação política. A relevância da pesquisa é que a Cidade de Puebla, capital do Estado de Puebla localizado no centro da República Mexicana, é uma das cidades com maior concentração de instituições de educação superior -

públicas e privadas- do México, para o ano 2020, de acordo com a Secretaria de Educação Pública Federal, em Puebla operam 343 universidades, colocando a entidade como a segunda a nível nacional com mais instituições deste nível educativo (SEP, 2020). Além do anterior, a entidade de Puebla recebe estudantes de diferentes entidades federativas do país, de modo que é possível afirmar que os resultados que aqui se apresentam, são representativos das condutas observáveis nos jovens mexicanos diante da democracia como forma de vida.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:** Democracia - participação - juventude e política.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every country in the postmodern world requires a healthy economy to be competitive with its peers. Thanks to educational development, the economic situation of every nation can be improved. The active participation of its citizens is essential for building a strong State that reflects a sustainable economy.

Here, economy has a fundamental role. For the purposes of this study, we will define economy as “the science that studies the options that human beings face, individually or collectively, and includes political options. The more options people have, the more liberties they have. In fact, each person’s set of options measures their liberty” Sanguinety, J. (n.d).

The democracy immersed in the lives of citizens who enjoy this type of government, helps people achieve a higher well-being level compared to those human beings who live without democracy, as Sanguinety mentions in his work “Interaction between Democracy and Economy”. [ES: *Interacción entre Democracia y Economía*]

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to identify the relation between a sluggish economic environment (or one in clear recession) and the recession of democracy as a socio-political phenomenon that affects young people who are studying at a higher education level in Mexico; this, with the purpose of analyzing and diagnosing the democratic viability of the country based on the political perceptions of its youth.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

An exploratory cross-disciplinary research was carried out by collecting primary information through a survey administered to 400 young people, ranging from 18 to 23 years old. We have chosen this age group because young people go through a transition process from adolescence to adulthood, which configures a space of interest since during this period political and ideological preferences are formed, according to different authors. These young people were chosen in the 12th Electoral District that comprises the following neighborhoods: *Centro Histórico* (south-eastern quadrant), *El Carmen*, *El Cerrito*, *Bugambilias*, *Granjas del Sur*, *Arboledas de Loma Bella*, *Unidad Habitacional San Jorge*, *San José el Aguacate*, *Santa María Guadalupe Tecola*, *San José El Rincón*, *Barrio de la Luz*, *La Providencia*, *Lomas de Chapultepec*, *Lomas del Mármol*, *Toltepec Álamos*, *Barrio de San Miguel*, *Barrio de Santa Catarina*, *Quetzalcóatl*, and *El Oasis Valsequillo*, as well as 281 thousand 762 citizens who have a valid voter card.

For the elaboration of the instrument administered to the young people, the following analysis variables were considered: a) Political Participation, b) Democracy and, c) Recessionary Trend. This last item refers to moments when the economic activity recedes and generates not only a perception of economic but also democratic stagnation in society due to the abstinence of social groups from participating in the democratic life of their country.

This research is focused on studying citizens' participation in the political life of Mexico. This qualitative type research intends to analyze the opinions and criticisms about politics of young people ranging from 18 to 23 years old who live in the capital of Puebla within the 12th Electoral District.

Regarding this research, the objective is to analyze the variables and the relation between them, without intervening in the participation of men and women in the 18-to-23-year-old age group who live in the capital of Puebla, in the 12th Electoral District. This sample was chosen because we considered that the research subjects have the appropriate characteristics for this analysis, since the center of the city of Puebla provides cultural and educational values above other electoral districts or municipalities.

Similarly, it is important to mention that this research tilts towards a retrospective type of research since both citizen participation in politics and its impact on society have been subjects of study. The purpose is to determine if it promotes a recessionary trend of men and women in the 18-to-23-year-old age group who live in the capital of Puebla belonging to a specific territorial location due to the perception of economic stagnation.

When administering the survey, we took into account a specific space and time for an analysis that takes a photograph of that event, which is why it does not intend to give continuity to this influence process. Likewise, a cross-disciplinary research was considered for the implementation of the tool that would only be administered

during a specific period, before the 2019 gubernatorial elections in the state of Puebla and without the possibility of obtaining continuity of the results obtained.

The questionnaire was administered by conducting individual interviews, through a visit to open spaces where the young people who fulfilled the specific characteristics of the study (18 to 23 years old) were chosen. For the sample of this study, men and women ranging from 18 to 23 years old who currently live within the 12th Electoral District in the state of Puebla were chosen, from a universe of 12,884 people who are part of the nominal list in the National Electoral Institute. Therefore, the sample size was 400 surveyed people, with a 5 percent margin of error and a confidence interval of 95 percent, once those surveys that had errors during their collection were discarded, following the Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2} = \frac{12,884}{1 + 12,884 (0.05)^2} = \frac{12,884}{12,884 (0.0025)} = \frac{12,884}{32.213} = 399.96$$

*Figure 1: Sample size*

**Source:** Yamane (1967) *Statistics: an introductory analysis*, New York: Harper and Row, USA.

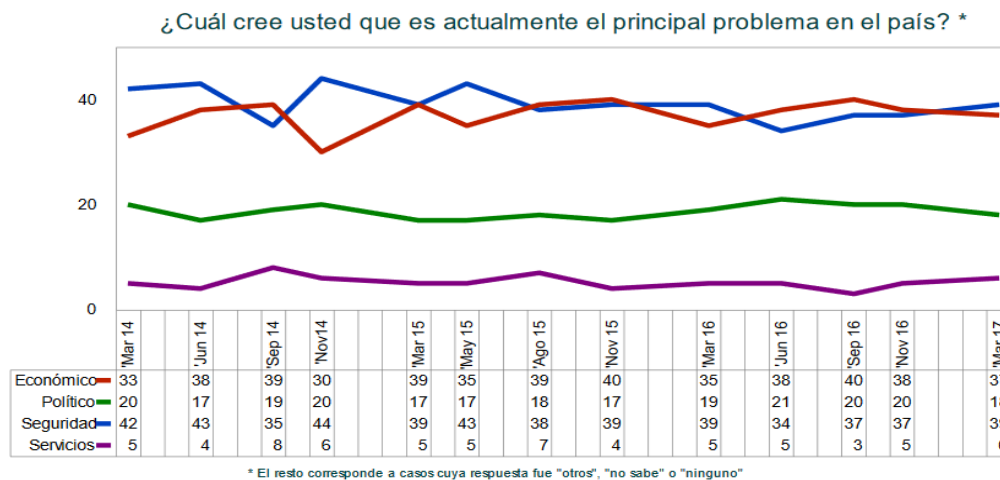
The information was collected by a group of 10 interviewers who administered the survey in-person, on Monday, February 11, 2019, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the physical space that corresponds to this Electoral District. Relevant information was obtained, as described in the following section.

Regarding data processing, it was carried out using the statistical package: IBM SPSS 23. The data was later exported to the EXCEL 2013 program, as a spreadsheet for its interpretation and analysis.

#### **4. RESULTS**

To have a better overview of the subject, it is important to conceive the importance and the relation between democracy, economic development, and the recessionary trend of democracy for young Mexicans; meaning, when the economic activity recedes and generates in society not only a perception of economic but democratic stagnation due to the abstinence of social groups from participating in the democratic life of their country.

In our country, one of the problems that the population points out to have the greatest impact is economy, as shown in the following graph:



**Graph 1:** According to you, which is currently the main problem in our country?  
**Source:** First Public Opinion National Survey, 2017.

The graph clearly shows the negative perception about the Mexican economy; therefore, it is not surprising that the recessionary trend of democracy in young Mexicans increases.

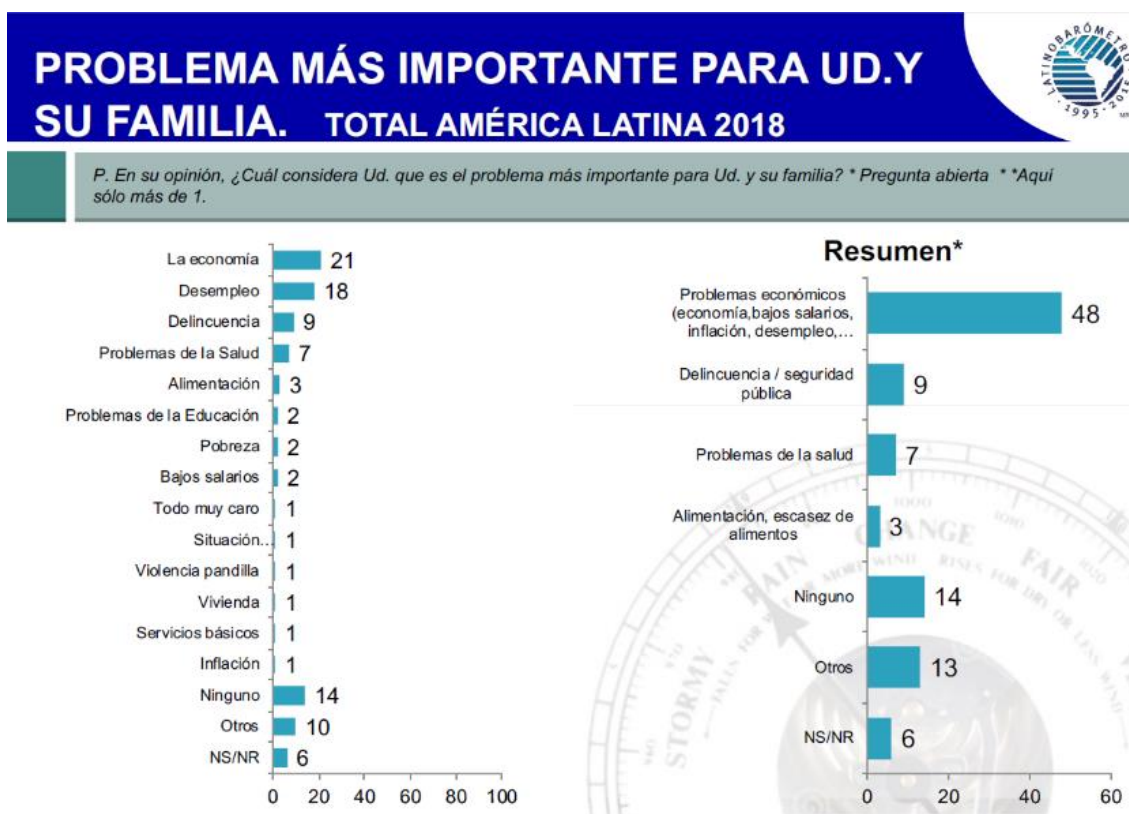
For the purpose of this study we took up again the concept of democracy as “an organized form of liberty, in both its political and economic aspects. In fact, if there are not enough political liberties, such as being able to elect the leaders, the economic liberties that might exist will be precarious” Sanguinety, J. (n.d.).

The prevailing economic conditions of Latin America at any given moment establish, to a greater or a lesser extent, the opportunities for employment, income, and investment in the Mexican society. It means that as long as an economy is not healthy, its population relates it to a mismanagement of public-economic policies and this situation is reflected as the rejection of political participation and repudiation of the political system.

It means that citizens are free to be employed wherever they want according to their qualifications, but they cannot do it easily due to the lack of available jobs. This same aspect happens when, despite the fact that there are a wide range of liberties for investment or to generate incomes, opportunities do not emerge due to the country’s economic situation. Sanguinety, J. (n.d.).

To 48% of Latin American families, the most important problem is the economy, as indicated in the 2018 Latinobarómetro report.

Incomes, job stability, social security, violence, the fear of being a victim, become the central issues that afflict the citizens of Latin America.



**Graph 2:** Most important problems for you and your family  
**Source:** Latinobarómetro 2018.

The last Latinobarómetro report of 2018 indicates that there are ten countries in the region where 10% or less of their population claim that there is a good economic situation. Among them there are Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil and Venezuela, all of these countries had presidential elections in 2018. The only exception is Paraguay, which had presidential elections and 15% of its population affirmed that there was a good economic situation, being among the five countries in the region claiming to have a better economic situation.

Another aspect, related to the topic of this study, is the political participation of young people in the framework of the politicized democracy in Latin America. This is a phenomenon worthy of being studied deeply, in the context of some characteristic features of the Mexican political system: presidentialism, the legitimacy of the State, its congresses, governments, and its institutions of democracy.

#### **4.1 Political Participation of Young Mexicans in the Construction of Democracy.**

“Clearly democracy is the result, in some way, of collective action. In these terms we can affirm that democracy is possible if the sufficient incentives to organize it or maintain it exist” Sanguinety, J. (n.d.).

Latin America citizens have a hegemonic role in the decision-making of each Nation, either through their electoral vote or their abstentionism. Both are undoubtedly acts of a clear message, agreement, disagreement or indifference (Pérez, K.; Mendieta, A.; Coutiño, F. 2018).

(...) citizenry can be understood as a conjunction of three constitutive elements: the possession of certain rights, as well as the obligation to comply with certain duties in a specific society; belonging to a certain political community (usually the State), which has generally been linked to nationality; and the opportunity to contribute to the public life of that community through participation... (García and Lukes, 1999).

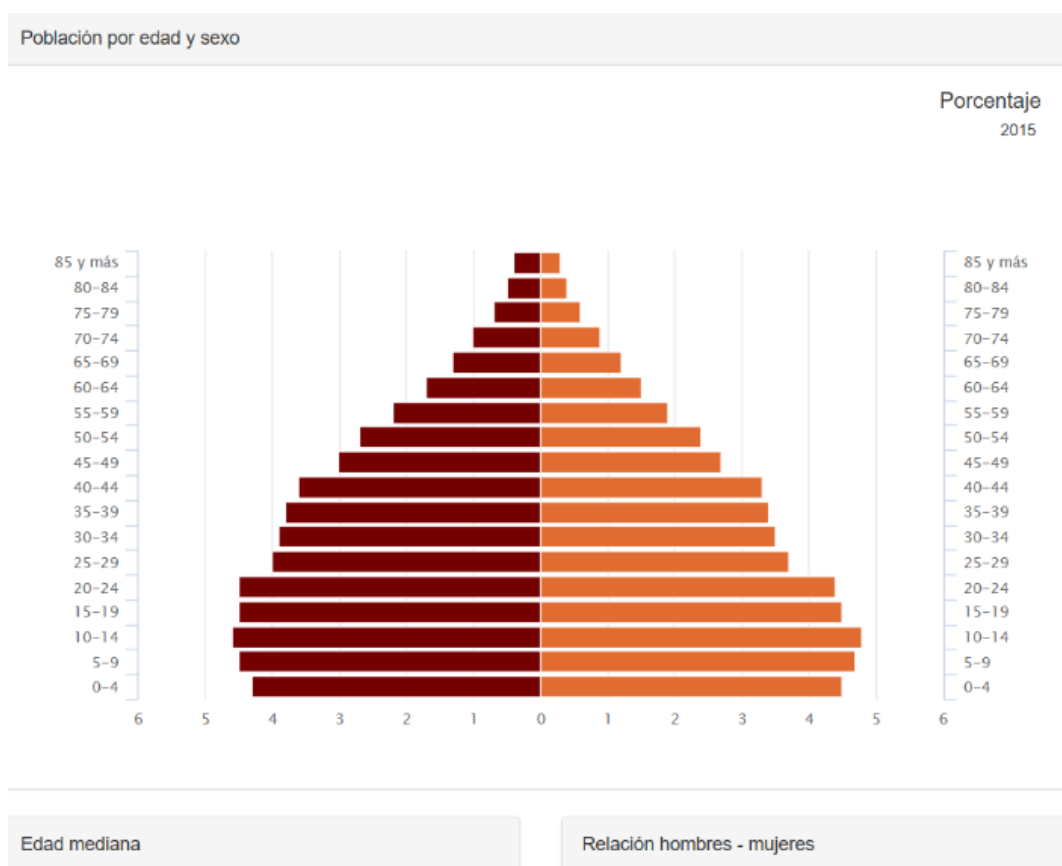
In the exercise of democracy, it is important to consider the actions of the State, the Citizens and the Institutions; all of this in the legal framework written in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States.

For the purpose of this study, we will talk about the Mexican citizenry of young people who are in the age group from 18 to 23 years old, considering this age range for the initiation into the political and democratic life of Mexico, and to know through the sample, if their perception of current politics is related or not to a recessionary trend of democracy; meaning when the economy activity recedes and generates in society not only a perception of economic but democratic stagnation, producing abstinence of social groups, and in this case of the young population of Mexico, from participating in the democratic life of their country.

The participation of citizens is essential for the construction of the State; we cannot establish a democratic society without the participation of its citizens.

The foundations of any solid democracy lie in citizen participation; in the political life that constitutes a Nation. As the following graph shows, young people between 18 and 23 years old is the predominant group of the Mexican population, hence its political relevance to the point that since the beginning of the 21st century it was said that Mexico had a demographic bonus.





**Graph 3:** Population by age and sex.  
**Source:** INEGI 2015.

The importance of educating young generations in political duties is fundamental. As Horbath and Gracia (2013) point out, “likewise, the generational replacement of the population allows educating future societies to consolidate democratizing processes”.

Young Mexicans understand democracy as the rights and duties that they have as citizens without knowing clearly what rights and what duties.

To O’Donnell, Lazetta, and Vargas, (2003), democracy is grounded in four main ideas: a) human beings as bearers of rights; b) society organized in a way that guarantees the exercise and promotes the expansion of citizenship; c) free and competitive elections, in combination with the validity of the Rule according to higher law, as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of democracy, and d) the historical specificity of Latin America nations in their national construction processes.

To Cuna (2012), “young people face a discouraging panorama, in a national context they are still the most affected ones not only by unemployment, but also by

the lack of health coverage, discrimination, violence, and the fight against organized crime”.

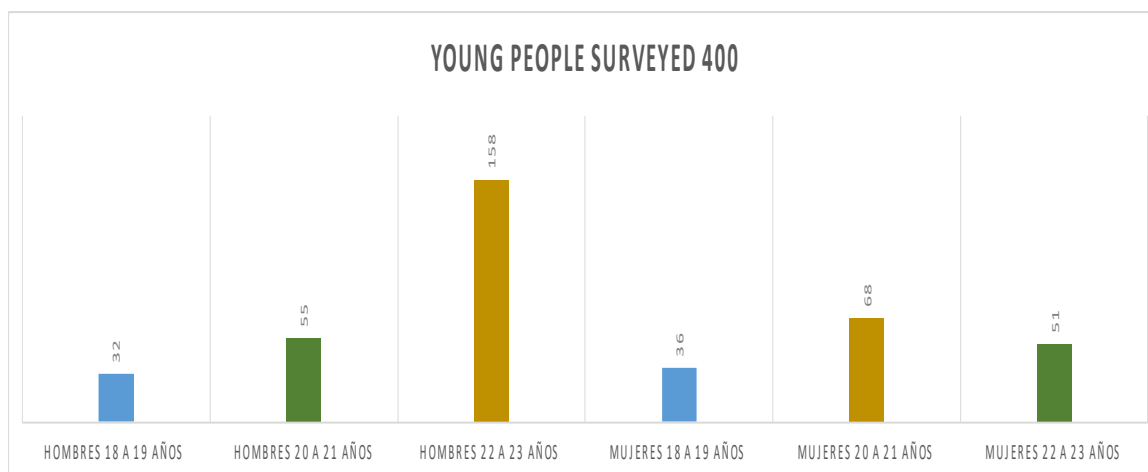
Another fundamental aspect in the construction of democracy is education, although it is not a main point in this study, it is necessary to mention it because thanks to it, not only concepts but also the praxis of democratic life are transmitted.

“The need to strengthen social organization and participation has been historically highlighted in the field of education, especially from the progressive thinking and forces” Torres, R. (2001). “Social participation in education emerged formally in Mexico after the educational reform of 1993, when the creation of different entities for social participation were established in the General Law for Education (LGE [ES: *Ley General de Education*])”.

In Mexico, young people between the ages of 18 and 23 maintain limited participation in political life, but it is important to mention that every bit of participation must be grounded in teaching itself, but it is not clear in the current educational system, from primary education to higher education levels, in which subjects this is taught.

#### 4.2 Democratic life of young people

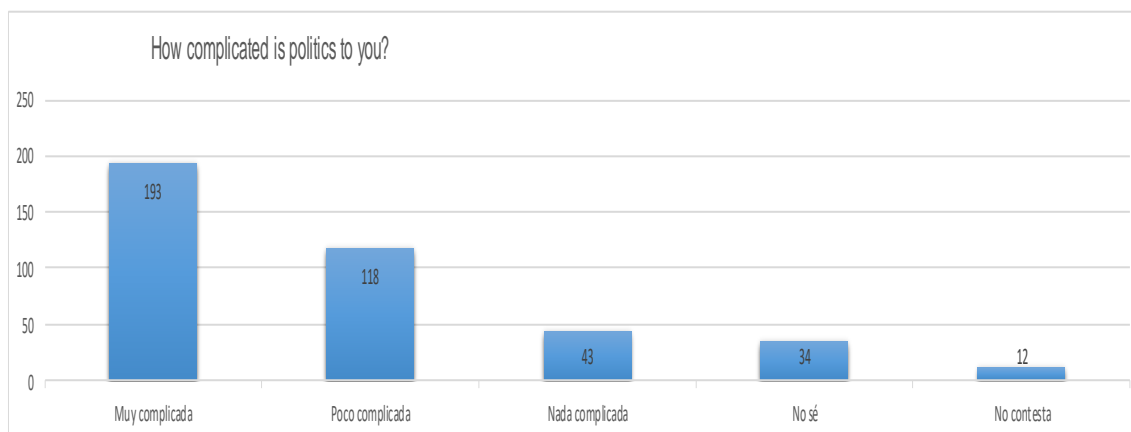
The following results were obtained from the survey administered to 400 young people between 18 and 23 years old:



**Graph 4:** Young people surveyed.

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

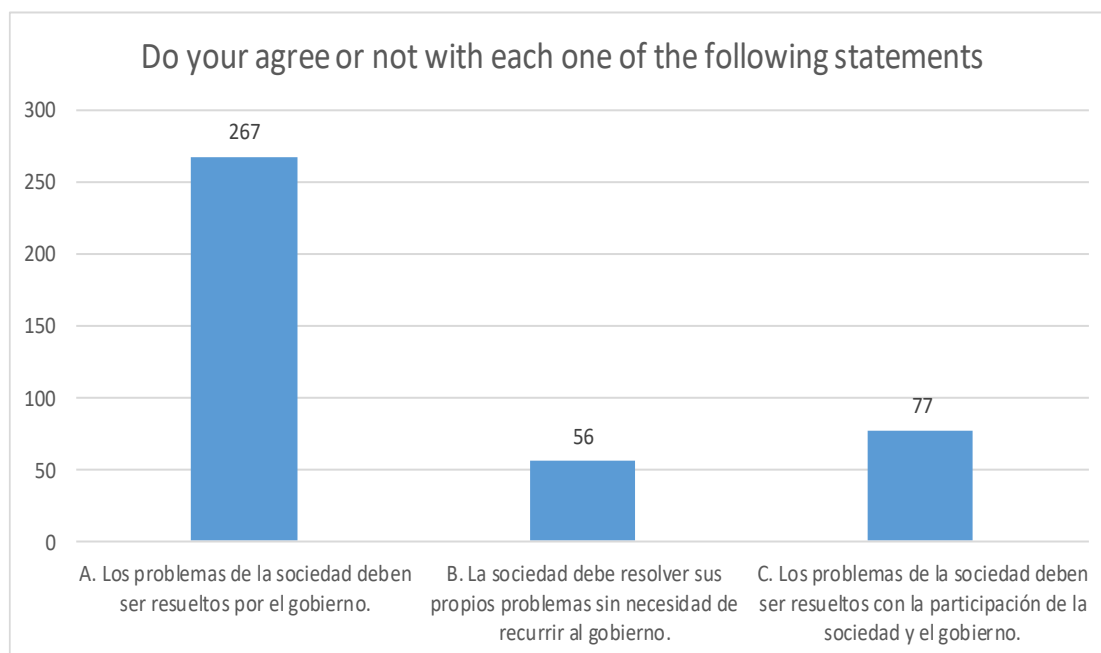
Out of the 400 people surveyed, 158 were men from 22 to 23 years old, compared to 68 women in the same age group. 55 were men from 20 to 21 years old, compared to 51 women in the same range, and finally, there were 36 women from 18 to 19, compared to 32 men in the same age group.



**Graph 5:** How complicated is politics to you?

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

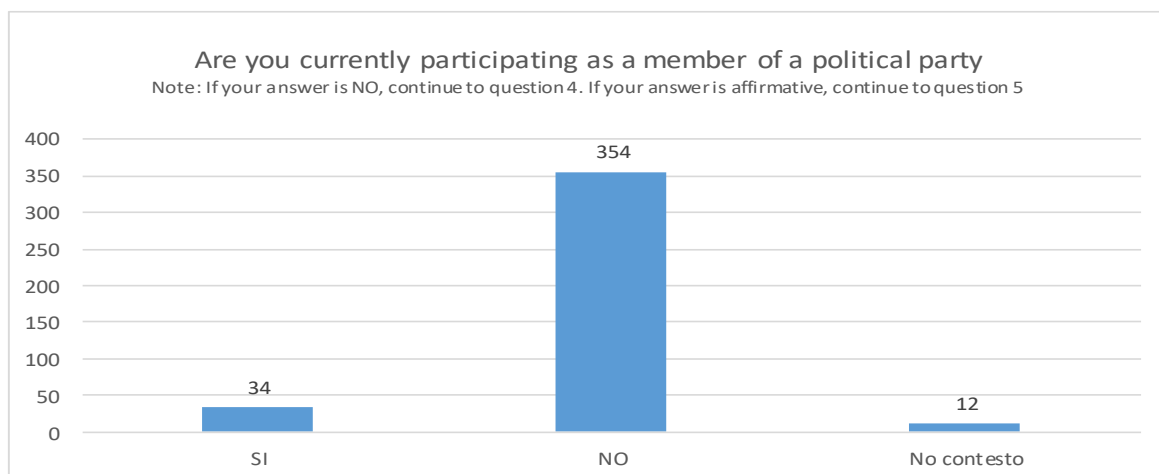
The study found a marked trend in young people who think that politics is very complicated with 48.25%. 29.50% deem politics little complicated. 10.75% answered not complicated, 8.5% do not know if it is, and finally, 3% did not answer.



**Graph 6:** Do you agree or not with each one of the following statements

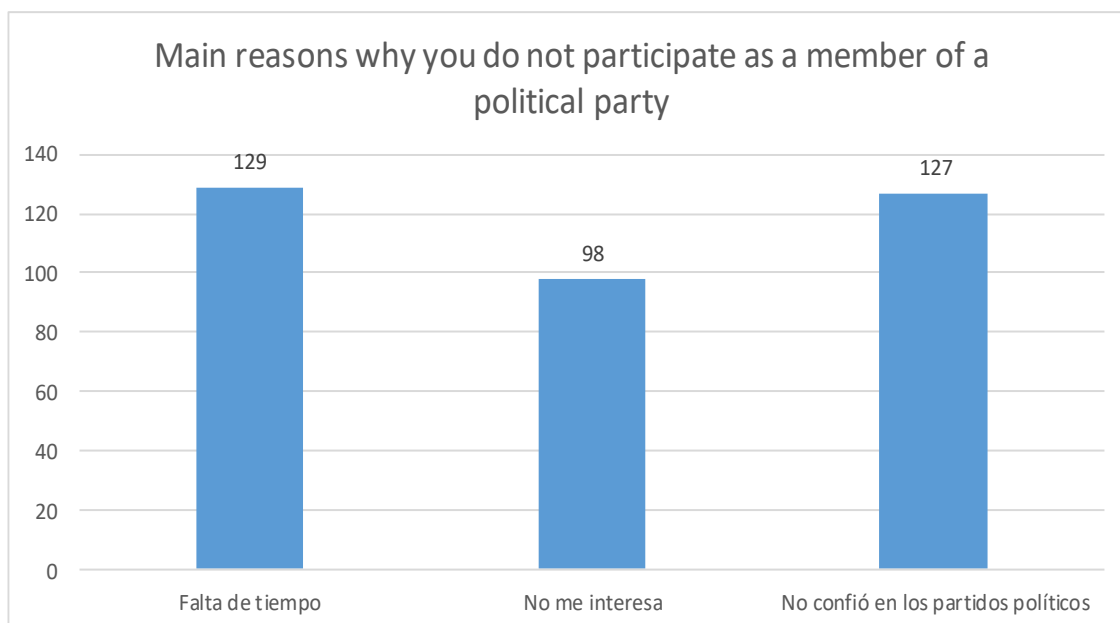
**Source:** Authors' own creation.

To 66.75% of the young people surveyed, the problems of a society must be solved by the government. 14% think that a society must solve its own problems without turning to the government. Lastly, 19.25% affirm that problems must be solved with the participation of society and the government.



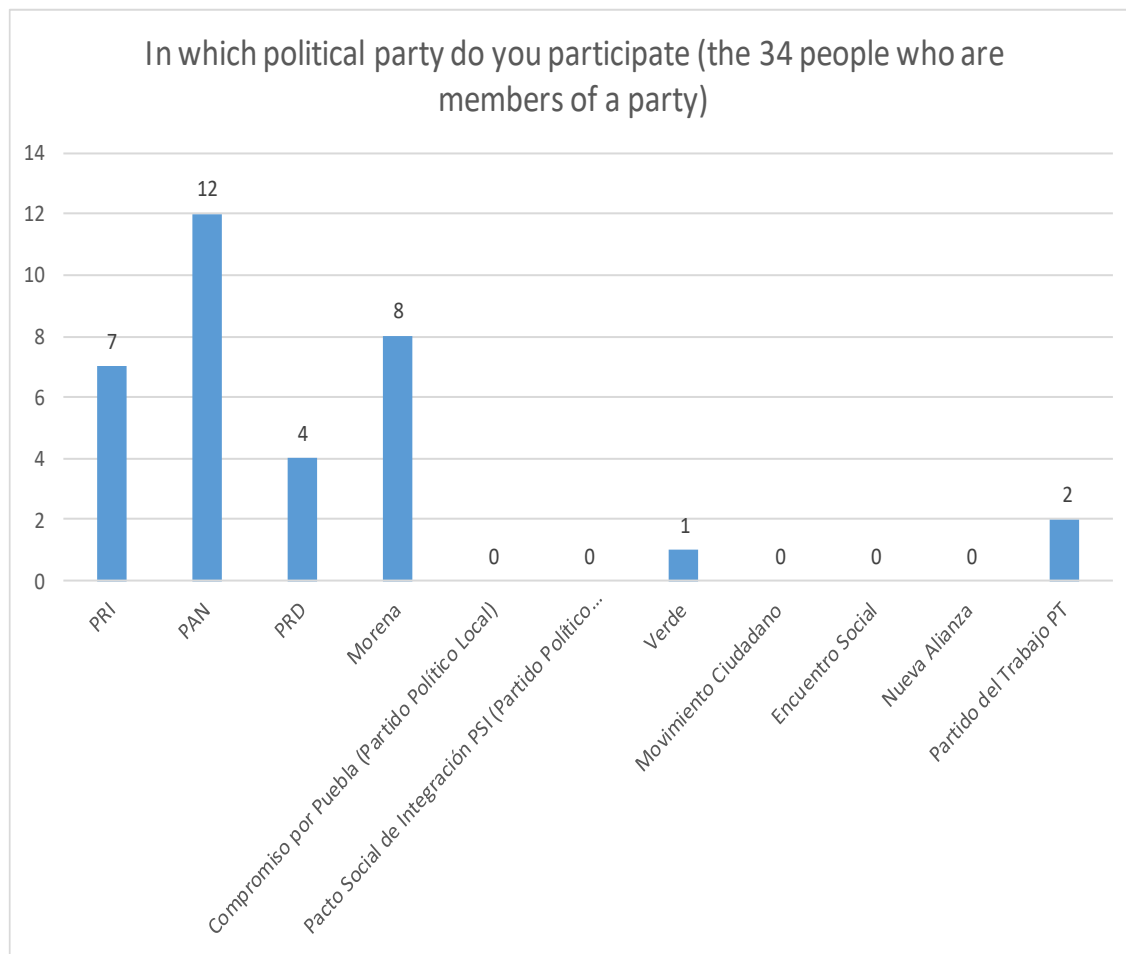
**Graph 7:** Are you currently participating as a member of a political party?  
**Source:** Authors' own creation.

The research showed that 88.50% of those who were surveyed do not participate as members of a political party, 8.5% do it, and 3% did not answer the question.



**Graph 8:** Main reasons why you do not participate as a member of a political party.  
**Source:** Authors' own creation.

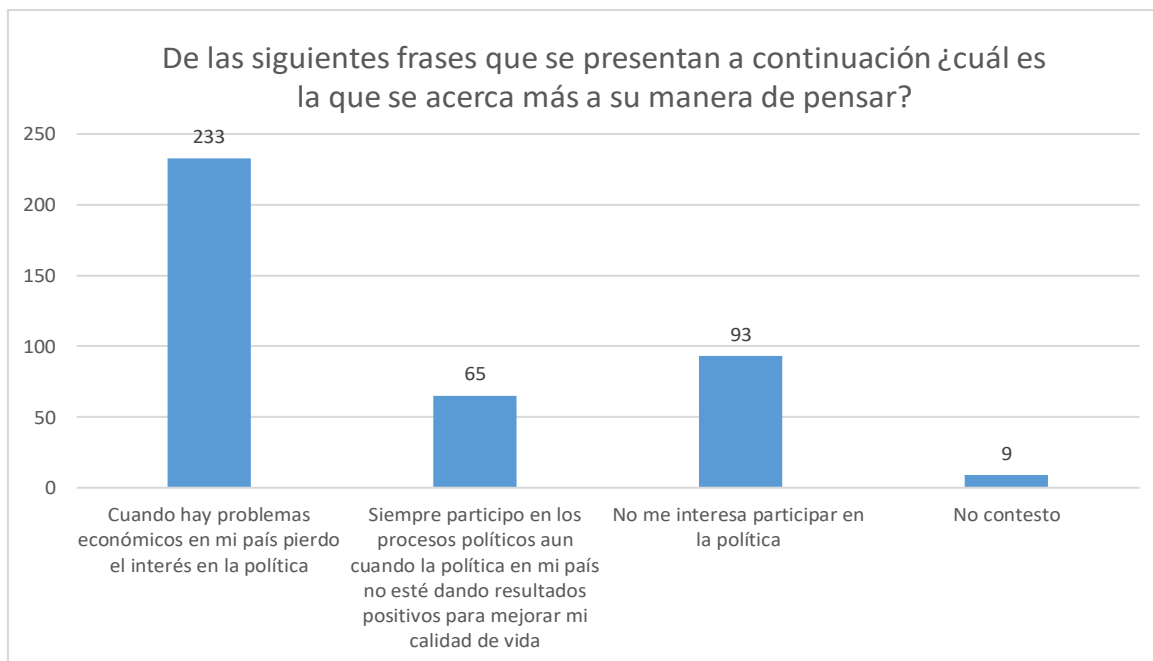
The 354 people who do not participate as members of a political party provided their reasons. 35.25% affirm that they do not have time to be part of a political party. 26.78% are not interested, and 34.70% affirm that they do not trust political parties.



**Graph 9:** In which political party do you participate?

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

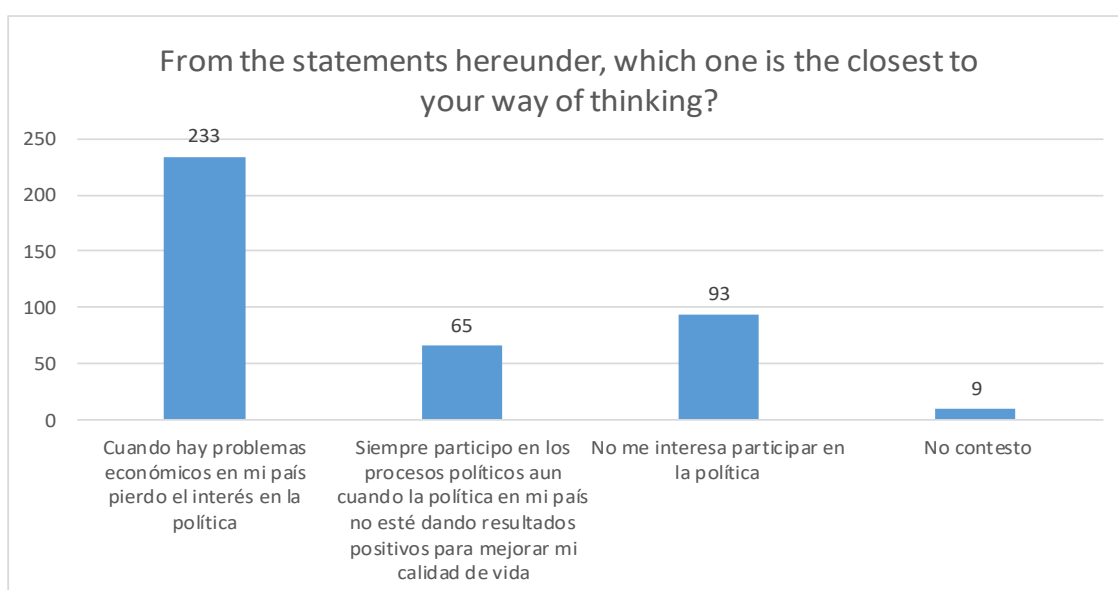
The study found a lack of interest in being a member of a political party; only 34 young people out of the 400 surveyed affirmed to be part of a party. 7 are members of the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], 12 of the PAN [National Action Party], 8 of the MORENA [National Regeneration Movement], 2 of the *Partido del Trabajo* [Labor Party] and 1 of the *Partido Verde* [Ecologist Green Party].



**Graph 10:** Which one is closest to your way of thinking?

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

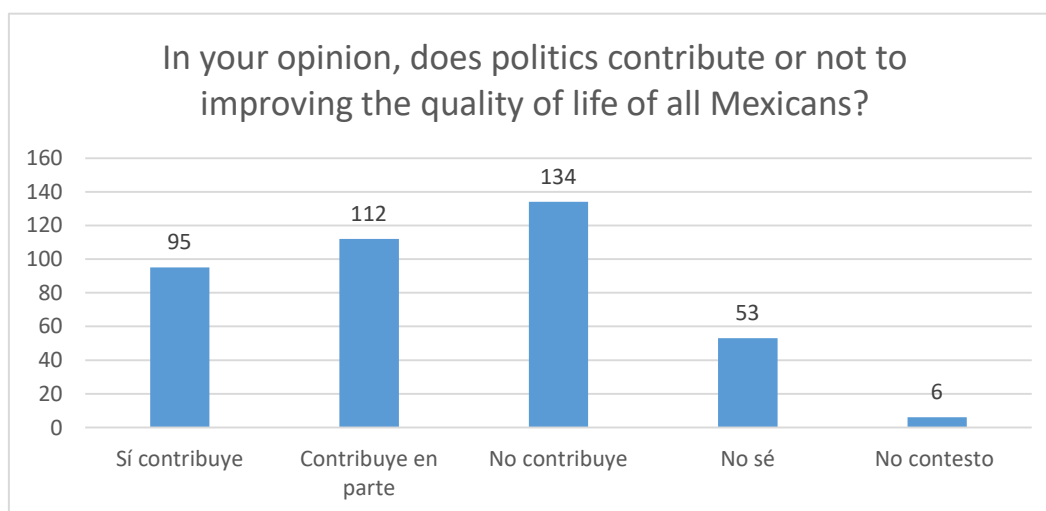
The study found that 30.50% of those surveyed claim that democracy is a form of government in which political power is exercised by citizens. 20.50% think that participation is important in a democratic system; 8% affirm that, under some circumstances, an authoritarian government may be preferable over a democratic one; 3% of those surveyed believe that participation is not necessary in a democratic system; and 38% think that the concept of democracy is currently not being fulfilled in Mexico.



**Graph 11:** Which one is the closest to your way of thinking?

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

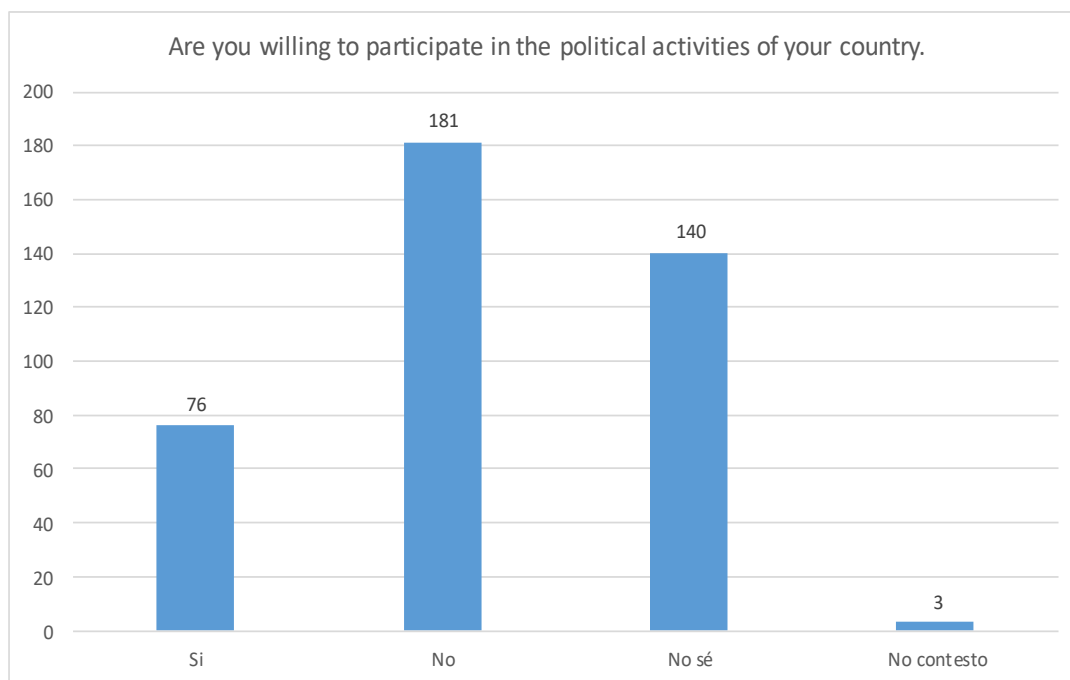
58.25% think that when there are problems in the Mexican economy, they lose interest in politics. 16.25% affirm that they always participate in political processes even when politics in Mexico does not provide positive results to improve their quality of life. 23.25% are not interested in participating in Mexican politics, and 2.25% did not answer.



**Graph 12:** Does politics contribute or not to improving the quality of life of all Mexicans?

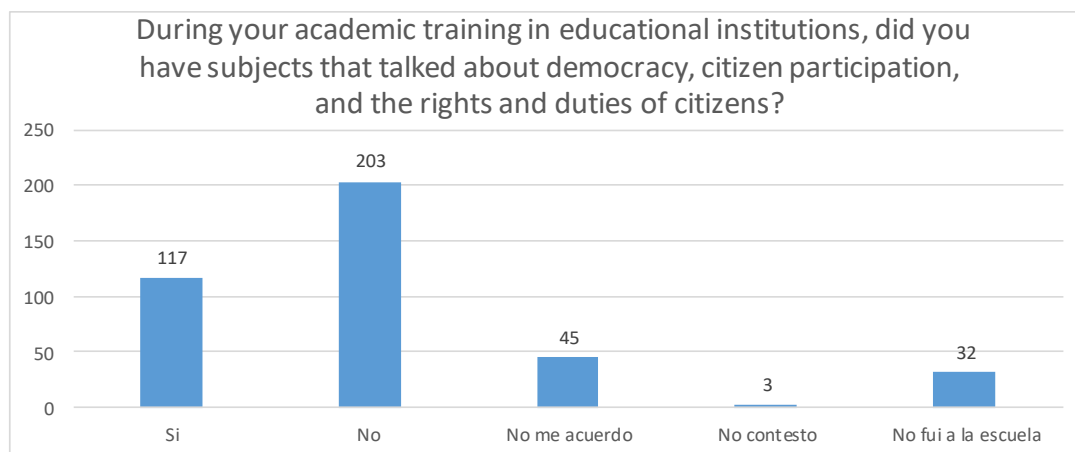
**Source:** Authors' own creation.

23.75% of those surveyed affirm that politics contributes to improving their quality of life, 28% answered that it contributes partially to it, 33.50% think that politics in Mexico does not contribute to their quality of life, 13.50% do not know, and 1.5% did not answer.



**Graph 13:** Are you willing to participate in the political activities of your country?  
**Source:** Authors' own creation.

19% of those surveyed are willing to participate in the political activities of Mexico, 45.25% are not willing to participate in political activities, 35% do not know if they are going to participate, and only 0.75% did not answer.



**Graph 14:** During your academic training in educational institutions, did you have subjects that talked about democracy, citizen participation, and the rights and duties of citizens?  
**Source:** Authors' own creation.

29.25% affirm that, during their academic training, they had subjects in which they addressed topics regarding democracy, citizen participation, and rights and duties of citizens; 50.75% did not have subjects within the educational system that addressed



topics about democracy, citizen participation and rights and duties; 11.25% do not remember, 0.75% did not answer, and 8% did not go to school.

The results presented here integrate a complex framing of the socio-economic conditions that explain the causal relation between the stagnation/recession of the national economy -with its subsequent effect on employment and the income of families- and the willingness of young people to participate actively in political institutions or civil organizations that promote the rights of citizens.

Similarly, as shown in Graph 10, despite the recognition that the young people surveyed have towards democracy as a form of citizen participation in the public space, they expressed their disaffection with the way in which democracy is lived in Mexico and, consequently, the vast majority of them claimed that they would not be willing to intervene through institutional channels (political parties) in the decision-making that regulates national political life.

A fundamental fact that corroborates the research question that triggered this study is the correlation that young people establish between an economic crisis climate and their willingness to participate in political activities that consolidate the democratic life of Mexico, just as shown by the results in Graph 11.

The disenchantment caused by corruption scandals in Mexico; social inequality; poverty; insecurity, and violence, help explain this behavior in young people, and generate political immobility and disaffection with democracy as a way of life in the national and regional public space. In this context, we can all agree with what Córdova (2018) pointed out:

The problem is that despair is friends with immobility, and it is precisely there where that that we do not like -corruption, inequality, poverty, and violence- can flourish with greater force (Córdova, 2018, p. 8).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study found a marked trend in young people, since 48.25% of them think politics is complicated. This way of thinking is added to another predisposition in their mindsets, with 66.75% of those surveyed stating that the problems of a society must be solved by the government. This means that they do not see themselves immersed in political life to face, along with the government, social change.

Regarding the matters of democracy and citizen participation, the study found that 88.50% of those surveyed do not participate as members of any political party, apathy and disinterest predominate in the young people of Puebla. Among the answers as to why they do not participate in political parties, 35.25% affirm not having the time available, 26.78% are not interested, and 34.70% do not trust political parties.

The generational change in the democratic system in Mexico is forcing processes of greater incorporation of young people into the democratic life of

the country, strengthening transparency in the democratic institutions to promote trust in the young population that generationally has greater academic background and their ability of criticize electoral proposals is increasing (Horbath, J.; Gracia, M., 2013).

It is important to mention that out of the 100% of those surveyed only 8.5% are members of a political party.

To 30.50% of the people surveyed, the concept of democracy is clear and within the general concepts of its definition. But even this percentage is low compared to the other 69.50% of the sample.

Answering the main premise of this study, which is when the economic activity recedes and generates not only a perception of economic but also democratic stagnation in society, due to the abstinence of social groups from participating in the democratic life of their country, this study obtained the following results: 58.25% think that when there are problems in the Mexican economy, they lose interest in politics. However, 16.25% affirm that they always participate in political processes even when politics in Mexico is not providing positive results to improve their quality of life. 23.25% are not interested in participating in Mexican politics, and 2.25 did not answer.

It is not surprising that the participation of young people gets limited when the Mexican economy goes through moments of stagnation or non-growth. In addition to this, the issues of unemployment and lack of opportunities, changing to improve their state of life, are other elements that also make young people perceive this political abstinence with greater strength. A significant amount among the young people surveyed are not interested in participating in Mexican politics, that included to the 58.25% adds up to 81.5% for those who somehow perceive in a negative way the results of the governments in power in relation to economy, employment and quality of life.

Young people have tried to participate actively in different spaces of the political and public fields; however, the social, cultural, political, and corruption or discrimination conditions generate disaffection.

The same disaffection mentioned in the study of Martínez, J. (2013), "young people experience disaffection with democracy as a government regime and with the actions of the governors in Mexico, which has led young people to admit a frustrating vision for both the political future of the nation and their own".

The perception of the quality of life and its relation with Mexican politics to young people is a delicate topic to address. This study found that 23.75% of those surveyed affirm that politics contributes to improving their quality of life, 28% answered that it contributes partially to it, 33.50% think that Mexican politics does not contribute to their quality of life, 13.25% do not know, and 1.5% did not answer.

Citizen participation is essential for the exercise of democracy. This study showed that only 19% of those surveyed are willing to participate in political activities in Mexico, compared to 45.25% who are not willing to participate in political activities and 35% do not know if they will participate. This panorama is not favorable in terms of living in a democratic society.

As for education as a cornerstone of life in society and the favorable exercise for a democratic society, the study found that 50.75% did not have subjects within the educational system that addressed matters of democracy, citizen participation, and their rights and duties, and 8% did not go to school.

Greater participation and involvement in the political and social world has been demanded from them, but little has been taught to them as to how to participate. They live in a world where they are constantly reminded that their lives are the product of democracy, that their participation is the result of it, and that their interest reinforces and consolidates the democratic experience, but they are very little taken into account, very little is explained and informed to them about the possibilities of change, expression is very little allowed to them, not only in the world of proper politics, but also in the world of everyday life, where democracy makes sense (Cuna, E., 2012).

The panorama is not favorable for the exercise of democracy, much less for a participating citizenry, at least for the young people of Puebla who show a negative opinion of their government when issues about quality of life, economic growth, and political education are addressed. In addition to this, the little interest shown in being a member of a political party or participating in the democratic activities depicts a negative scenario.

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