
Russia: Youth and Politics



Mikhail Korostikov

April 2014

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ISBN: 978-2-36567-266-5**

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Abstract

Young people are the most politically active and impulsive part of any society. They were among the first to come out on the streets during the 2011-2013 worldwide protests in the Middle East, Thailand, Ukraine, Europe and the United States, to express their disagreement with the existing political and economic order. In Russia, protests began immediately after parliamentary elections in December 2011 and the youth took a very active role in the movement. However, a study of the Kryshstanovskaya Laboratory in 2012-2013 shows that not all of young Russians are opposed to the government.

The majority of Russian youth are not interested in politics, and despite the fact that almost all of them do not agree with the government's current policies and would like to change many things, almost no one is willing to take the action necessary to change the current political situation. Young people are unsatisfied with both the authorities and the opposition. They are convinced that opposition leaders simply use their support to try to get into public office, with the sole purpose of taking the place of acting corrupt officials. Disbelief in the political system, coupled with social anomie and uncertain economic conditions has led to apathy and a desire to emigrate. Such sentiments of its younger citizens hinder the development of Russia and will lead to a long-term deterioration of the country's social and human potential, and a mass exodus of skilled professionals abroad.

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Introduction

Youth have historically been the engine of social change. Despite the fact that revolutionary ideas more often grow in the minds of elder people, their practical implementation often falls on the shoulders of students, young professionals, unemployed youth and even schoolchildren. Political figures usually explain protests sweeping across their countries by some unnamed political forces, which make a tool of young citizens for their own purposes. However historians and political scientists who study this issue give a different explanation. The fact is that young people are better placed to see the society's vices acutely. They have not had time to absorb the norms of social structure and can firmly challenge them, and attempt to gain a foothold in the new world. A typical "fathers and sons" confrontation takes place, which in every era gains a new meaning, passing through the prism of social order and technological achievement. In the 21st century, after the emergence of new technologies of communication and growth of mobility, the fall of technological and moral barriers, this confrontation has become radically different from the student protests of 1968 in France, West Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia, Belgium and Czechoslovakia. The end of the first decade of the new millennium was marked by a global economic crisis that turned into an ideology crisis. Waves of unrest in the Arab world have swept away many of the region's governments which had survived the Soviet collapse and had long seemed unshakable. Many people in the United States and Europe have openly expressed their opposition to the capitalist system, which, in their opinion, has led society to the brink of collapse. In Russia, after the State Duma elections in December 2011, tens of thousands of people protested in peaceful demonstrations for more than a year, on a scale unseen since 1993.

These conflicts have occurred in various parts of the world thus marking the start of a new global era of open protest. In 2013, seeds of protest sprouted in Ukraine and Thailand: a massive popular movement is fiercely fighting there against the government, with the firm intention of changing it. The outcome of these protests was different in every country, from the collapse of North African and Ukrainian regimes to no result at all the United States. Nevertheless, all these protests are united by one thing: the young people were their driving force and their "awakening" can almost be considered as the main achievement of the protests. Youth, armed with the latest

Translated from Russian by Joe Carter.

means of communication and the desire to change the world, have shown that they can actively resist the cumbersome state apparatus. Russia found herself an honorable place among a number of countries where protests have forced the authorities to make immediate concessions in the political sphere, including the simplification of legislation on party registration, return to gubernatorial elections and restoring the “against all” option on ballot papers.

But do all young Russians share these revolutionary ideals? Is there a difference between Moscow and the provinces in the perception of the political and social situation? Is it fair to assume that all young Russian people in general support the opposition? What are their values and ideals? A study by the “Kryshtanovskaya Laboratory” between November 2012 and February 2013 sought to answer these questions and to understand the worldview of young Russians in this era of change.¹

¹ In a series of 31 focus groups conducted in 26 major cities in eight federal districts (totaling 325 individuals), young people from 18 to 30 were divided into four categories: students in human sciences, students in technical sciences, young professionals with higher education and young workers with secondary education. Their answers help to better grasp the political evolution in Russia.

Social Study of Young People in Russia²

After the collapse of the USSR, academic research on Russia's youth have become rarer. In the 1990s statistics were not even being collected. In a country with a resource based economy and an aging population it proved more advantageous to analyze the views and preferences of the older citizens who were more active in the electoral process and easier to influence. As Russian philosopher and sociologist I.M. Ilinsky identified in his 2001 study, young people in this period felt useless, they had to face an increase in alcoholism, drug addiction, crime and disease. They also were left with a keen feeling of moral crisis at not being able to satisfy their need for justice.³ After an initial period of stabilization in the political and economic system in the early 2000s, research progressively came back to studying the young generation. However, for the most part it was an analysis of the problems and challenges faced by youth in general rather than a study of youth itself. Indeed, the UN Youth Task Force noted that as a result of demographic failure between the late 1980s and late 1990s today there are fewer young people in Russia than ever.⁴ That said, according to data released in 2012 there are still 38 million citizens between the ages of 18 and 34, which exceeds the total population of most European countries.⁵ From a political point of view they represent a rather significant part of the electorate. If young people had "their own" political parties and candidates, it might very well make for more competitive elections.

This is what happened in Ukraine during the 2004-2005 "Orange Revolution", in which a pro-Russian candidate was ousted by a pro-Western candidate as the result of massive popular demonstrations supported by the U.S. and the European Union. As American sociologist Douglas Bloom suggested, the fact that the budget for youth policies increased 25 fold in 2005 (with the funds

² This section focuses on the latest stage in the development of youth research in Russia, the last 15 years history of this area can be found in:

V.A. Lukov, "Issledovanie molodezhnoy problematiki v Rossii" [Research on youth issues in Russia], *Trudy MGUU pravitel'stva Moskvyy* [Moscow Metropolitan Governance University], Moscow, 2005.

³ I.M. Ilinsky, *Youth and Youth Policy*, Moscow, Golos, 2001.

⁴ Ya. Okhana, V.A. Lukov, Yu. Zubok *et. al.*, "Molodezh v Rossii" [Youth in Russia], Moscow, 2010
<www.unrussia.ru/sites/default/files/doc/youth_in_Russia_Executive_Summary_rus.pdf>.

⁵ Rosstat, <www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b12_111/Main.htm>.

dedicated to the 2006-2010 federal program for young people) proves that the government acknowledged the necessity to work with the young generation.⁶ During the implementation of the budget numerous pro-government youth movements were created to recruit politically active young people and direct their energy in the “right” direction, for example “Nashi” or “Rossiya Molodaya.” A program of mass construction of sports facilities was launched throughout the country, as well as nationwide educational discussion forums for young Russians, the most famous being *Seliger*, an educational camp held since 2005 at Lake Seliger in Tver Oblast. These programs were in many ways purely preventive measures and a way for the government to reassure itself. Zircon, a Russian research group, found that in 2005 over 70% of young people already trusted and supported Putin.⁷ At that time, living standards were increasing rapidly, and with the economy growing by 6-8% annually there was nothing to worry about. The 2008 Zircon study “Social Activity of the youth” showed that on average, young people are not too different from other citizens when it comes to attitude toward general living arrangements and other various aspects of Russia’s domestic matters. The only difference the study revealed was that among young people liberal ideology is more popular than socialism.⁸ Young people also showed little interest in social activism and proved to be more practical. Also, even in the sphere of charitable activities, which were on average much more popular than political activity, young people sought benefits by widening their contact network and acquiring new and specific skills.

The slowdown of economic growth after the 2008-2009 financial crisis had an immediate impact on the ratings of the political elite. The percentage of people trusting Vladimir Putin decreased from 70% in 2008 to 47% in 2011, according to a study by the Public Opinion Foundation, a Russian research agency.⁹ Among young people, this figure fell from 80% in 2009 to 63% in 2011. A large-scale study in 2011 by the Levada-Center, a Russian non-governmental sociological research organization, revealed that the main subjects of concern for young people were low income (71%), unemployment or the prospect of job loss (54%) and housing (42%), while only 7% were worried about political issues.¹⁰ Overall socio-economic concerns increased with age. As they grew older, young people were

⁶ D. Blum, “Current Trends in Russian Youth Policy,” *PONARS Policy Memo*, No. 384, December 2005, p. 110.

⁷ Zircon Research Group, “Molodezh i vlast’: v poiskakh vzaimnoy opory” [Youth and Power: In Search of Mutual Support], *Politia*, No. 4. 2005, p. 34-47, <<http://ecsocman.hse.ru/text/50332051>>.

⁸ Zircon Research Group, analytical review, “Sotsial'naya aktivnost' molodezhy” [Social Activity of the Youth], 2008, <www.zircon.ru/upload/iblock/3a3/081117.pdf>.

⁹ Opinion poll by “FOMinus”. 12-13 November 2011, <http://lostpic.net/orig_images/9/0/b/90b5d7454f111d48e19fcbfbcf32e1bd.jpg>.

¹⁰ L.D. Gudkov, B.V. Dubin, N.A. Zorkaya, “Molodezh Rossii” [The Youth of Russia], supplement in the journal *Obchshaya tetrad'*, *Moskovskaya shkola politicheskikh issledovaniy* [Moscow School of Political Research], 2011, <www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/molodezh.pdf>.

more and more concerned with economic insecurity (18% for 15-20 year olds and 32% for 31-34 year olds).

That was the situation in Russia on the eve of mass protests in Moscow against the rigged election results of December 2011. According to another study by the Levada-Center conducted in the first six months of the protests, the methods for gathering protestors and disseminating information to them had much in common with the Arab Spring protests in 2011.¹¹ For instance, young people, who formed a large group among those who came to the first rally, were recruited through Facebook and Twitter. However, by February 2012 the age structure became more varied and the proportion of people under 25 and those over 55 became more equal.¹²

Unfortunately, a separate qualitative research into youth motivations at these rallies has not been carried out. The question why the majority of young people stayed at home, and only a small number of their peers took part in mass demonstrations has not been answered either. Dissatisfaction with the socio-economic environment, housing difficulties and the constant fear of losing one's job does not always translate into political action, as has occurred in Arab countries, Brazil, Turkey and Greece.

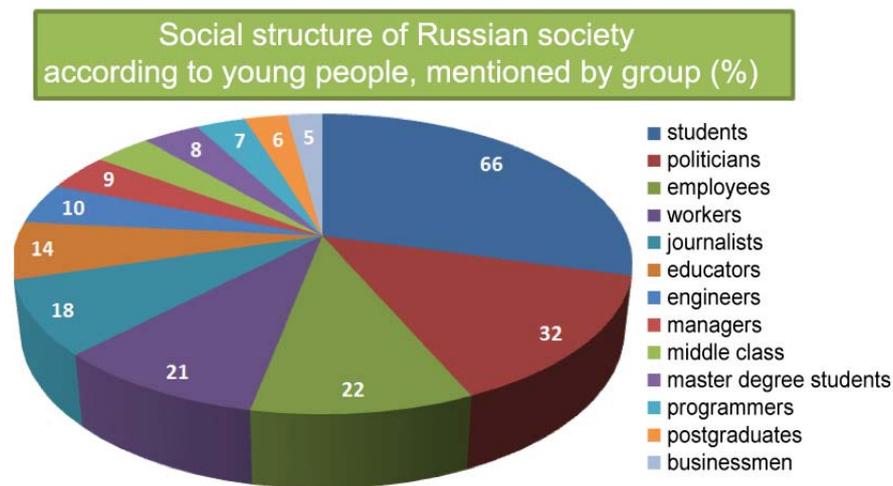
¹¹ D. Volkov, "Protestnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v kontse 2011-2012 godov" [The protest movement in Russia at the end of the 2011-2012], Levada Center, September 2012, <www.levada.ru/books/protestnoe-dvizhenie-v-rossii-v-kontse-2011-2012-gg>.

¹² *Ibidem*

Youth and Society

The study revealed the anomie of Russian youth, which is due to the rupture of social cohesion, the confusion in the perception of different social groups and their perimeters, as well as the absence of a system of values. Young people do not understand social hierarchy or the constituents of society and cannot picture their country's and their own future in ten or twenty years. The Soviet system that divided society into classes of workers, peasants and *intelligentsia* is long gone and nothing has taken its place. The diagram below (Figure 1) was drawn based on the lexical analysis of the focus groups and it reflects how frequently they refer to various community groups. It gives an idea of the youth's perception of Russian society.

Figure 1. Social structure of society through the eyes of young people

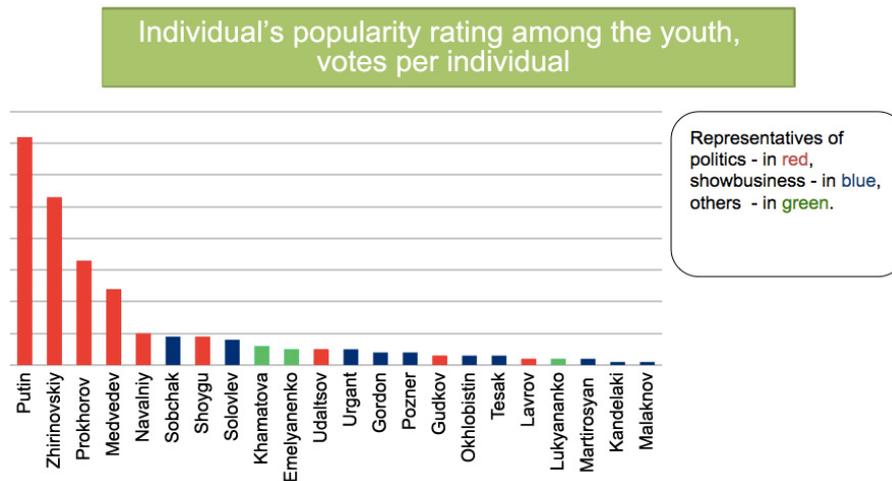


A greater frequency of references to students and postgraduates is understandable given that studying is the most likely area of activity for young people. However, it is followed closely by politicians (respondents frequently include all politicians and high-ranking officials in the same group). While they make up less than 1% of the population, they occupy an unwarranted amount of space in the youth's consciousness. The concepts of "worker" and "employee" are synonymous and simply refer to a working person (by no means just factory workers), regardless of the type of work. The notion of a peasant or at least a farmer is virtually non-existent in the youth's consciousness. Young people, regardless of age and region live in a world of white-collar professions, politicians, journalists and

teachers. Engineers and programmers, whose qualifications could, in some way, be attributed to the productive class, are much less popular. Such attitudes leave an imprint on the aspirations of Russia's youth and their vision of their future. The most important part of their socialization process comes from the choice of role models and examples to follow. For harmonious socialization, young people should have role models on three different levels: the "microcosm," the "mesoworld" and the "macrocosm." The microcosm is the immediate environment in which one sees examples of behavior in their friends and relatives. The mesoworld is a regional level where one can align with experts recognized in the region. Finally, the macrocosm is the federal and even international level, the field of television characters and brilliant personalities, admiration for whom compels one to choose a certain course in life.

Research has shown that the Russian youth identifies with role models on the micro and macro-level, but a gaping void exists between them. Youth happily refer to their parents, tell about their friends' and classmates' business and material success. Youth is also enthusiastic about famous personalities on Russia's TV channels. On the question about whom they think worthy of respect in Russia and who inspires them, young people gave the following answers (figure 2):

Figure 2. Youth role models



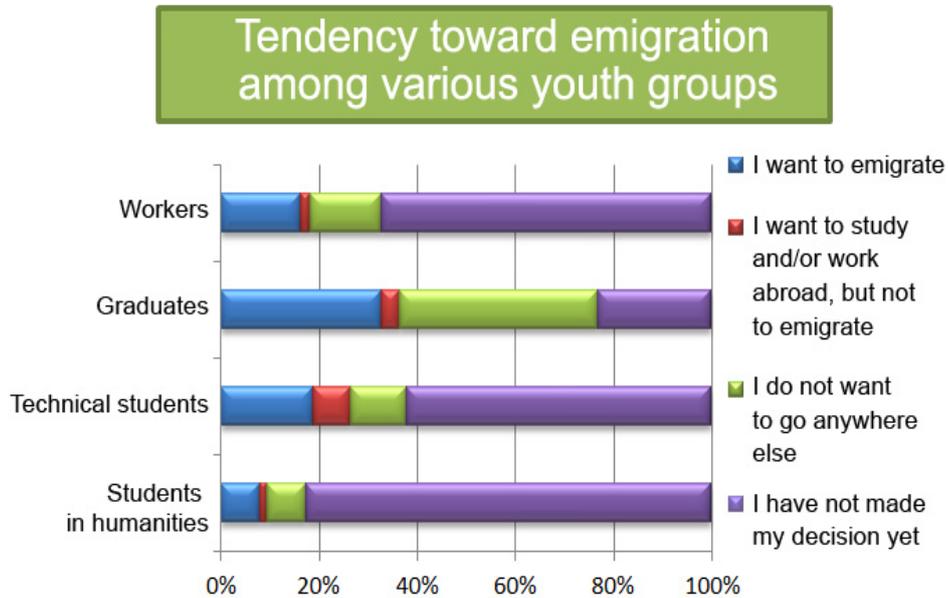
According to the survey illustrated by figure 2, Vladimir Putin is the most popular role model among Russian youths. According to the respondents, he is the only politician strong-willed enough to resist the corrupting influence of power (more on this below). Even if respondents do not like him or disagree with his policies, they recognize him as a strong and respectable man. Young people make a distinction between Putin and the rest of the state apparatus. The latter is, in general, negatively perceived. In second position comes Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. He got his share of popularity through criticism of officials and politicians and his nationalist and populist rhetoric. Although he is firmly integrated into the existing power hierarchy, the

youth sees him as a political opponent and a “fighter for the truth.” The next three most popular role models are opposition leader Alexei Navalny and businessmen Mikhail Prokhorov, as well as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. All three are considered to belong to the liberal political camp, although Navalny is a major critic of the Russian government, while Prokhorov and Medvedev are part of the political system.

According to the diagram, the vast majority of young people believe that the role models worth emulating are politicians and celebrities. Other important public figures include sportsmen, writers and representatives of creative professions. However, they all share one common characteristic: they are far from the young people’s real life and constitute a small percentage of citizens. Moreover, for many of these personalities, getting to these positions is mostly due to innate qualities and luck much more than to persistence and high professional achievements. Such professions are to a great extent opportunistic and few achieve success in these particular domains. Moreover, they produce nothing, be it material or spiritual.

The lack of everyday role models combined with admiration for the “elite” only creates a frustrating situation: young people consider worth of admiration only those who are difficult to reach. Such a frustration has led, among other consequences, to an outflow of human capital from country to regional capitals and metropolis or abroad. Emigration is an option seriously considered by a majority of young people. Around the age of 30, most of them have already made up their mind about whether to leave or keep on living where they were born. Many want to see the world and gain experience abroad, but plan to return to Russia (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Propensity to emigrate among youth



According to figure 3, about 60% of participants have not yet made their mind about emigration. Most of them are students in social sciences. Meanwhile, young professionals are the group that considers emigration most seriously. Among them, 32.7% have the desire to leave Russia permanently. At the same time 40.4% firmly believe that staying in Russia would be better. Few expressed a desire to study abroad, which perhaps speaks of low awareness among young people about academic mobility and training programs. Often, young people want to change their location without having to emigrate. Relocation to somewhere more comfortable is also popular, as can be seen on figure 4.

Figure 4. Preferred destinations of emigration

Humanities students dream of moving to another country more frequently than others. They represent a group less integrated into the real economy and their outlook is the most “culture-specific.” Those who want to change citizenship the least are young workers. It might be due to the narrowness of their outlook. It might also mean that the situation of blue-collar workers in Russia is not as bad as people would usually think. In favor of the second version is the relative patriotism of young specialists: while they have more opportunities for emigrating abroad than many others, half of them still prefer to simply move to another city.

Moscow, St. Petersburg and Sochi are the only really popular destinations in terms of domestic migration within Russia (Sochi is especially popular in the Siberian Federal District), as young people believe that these cities hold more opportunities for self-realization. In both cases of emigration and domestic migration, the syndrome of a “search for Eldorado” has manifested: most respondents wanted to go somewhere they had either not been at all or had been during a brief leisure trip. Young people also tend to romanticize Western countries, which, according to them, possess a high quality of life, with no crime, corruption and everyday rudeness.

Attitude toward Russia

Young people have very different ideas about Russia, and these differences in attitudes are visible between those who work and those who study. Students describe Russia as a great power, one of the world's centers of power and as an independent player on the international stage. Their country, in their opinion, represents a separate civilization and identity, neither western nor eastern. Russia allegedly has its own destiny and its own special path, connected with the mysterious "Russian soul" and other unique national characteristics.

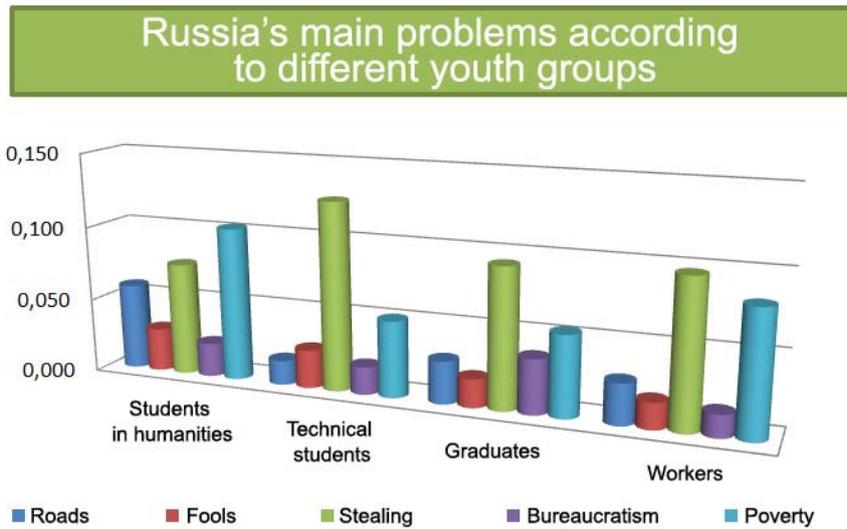
With age however, enthusiasm gradually decreases and young professionals and workers become more restrained in their assessments. They point out the technological and economic backwardness of Russia, and the presence of many domestic problems, which are already solved in "the West." Morals in Russia have deteriorated, the number of "quality people" has decreased and the country has accumulated so many internal contradictions that there is a threat to its integrity. An interesting phenomenon emerged during the study. Young people believe that Russia has a brilliant future and a wonderful past, whereas the country's present is described as grave and gloomy. However, virtually no one doubts that the country's situation will get better in the future. At the same time, improvements in people's living conditions are seldom associated with the strengthening or even the prosperity of the State. For the respondents, Russia is a cultural phenomenon rather than a set of institutions. Often, the fate of the State as a machine of governance is seen as much gloomier or is not discussed at all.

Paradoxically, talks about a possible and forthcoming disaster that will prompt the country's deterioration and decay do not inspire serious concerns amongst the respondents. They consider it a matter far less dangerous than, for example, theft or corruption within the government. The country's collapse is seen as a possibility, but which, if desired, can be overcome. While everyone understands that their lives would change dramatically, almost no one has expressed concern about it.

The majority of respondents support Russia's main foreign policy initiatives. However, 44% of specialists and workers say they are displeased. The disgruntled have called on the government to abandon ambitious and costly international projects such as the Winter Olympics and the World Cup and Russia's bold foreign policy moves until the still unresolved economic and social problems are

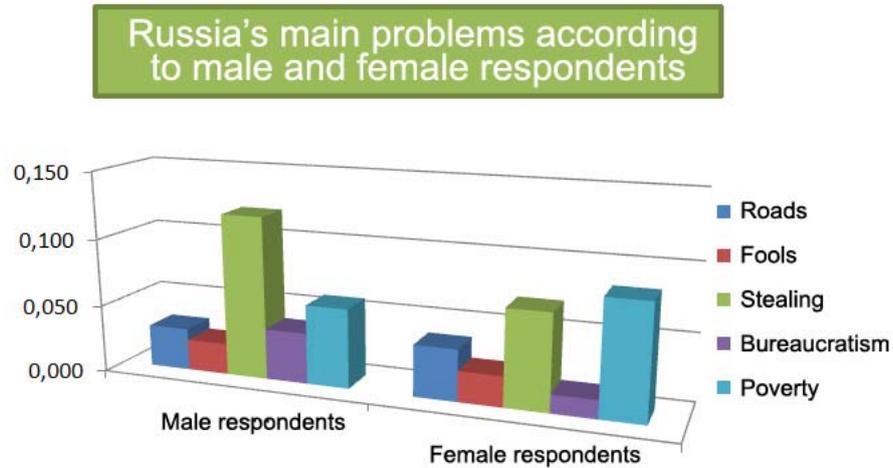
dealt with. Russia’s “imperial” mentality and the widening of its influence is not supported by this section of young people, but only because they consider the country’s internal problems and think the overall costs are too high. Once Russia has achieved its economic revival, they will no longer be opposed to the continuation of an assertive foreign policy.

Figure 5. Rating of problems in the eyes of Russia’s youth



According to figure 5, respondents think the most pressing issues facing Russia are corruption (“stealing”) government incompetence (“fools”), poverty, bureaucracy, alcoholism, and the quality of infrastructure (“roads”). Corruption traditionally occupies the pole position and in the eyes of respondents and holds an omnipresent and almost mythological status. Owing to objective reasons (such as their age), most young people could not and have never had close personal contact with corruption, however they can describe in detail the corruption in road construction, building, law adoption, etc. The social atmosphere and the way information is disseminated in the country makes them live with the feeling that corruption has permeated almost everything in Russia. According to the traditional mythology of Russian political culture, Russia is the richest country in the world, and material difficulties have not been solved only because the means to do so have been embezzled by officials.

Figure 6. Russia's problems in the eyes of male and female respondents



Poverty is the second biggest problem affecting Russia and the most important problem reported by female respondents (according to figure 6). The latter do not resent poverty as an abstract phenomenon but rather unjust poverty, such as the lack of means of pensioners who have worked honestly all their life. Young people almost never call themselves poor, but are very concerned with vulnerable population groups, to whom, in their view, the State does not provide enough help. Many young people (34.6%) participated in volunteer activities, for example assisting the elderly in nursing homes and in villages, as well as helping the homeless and children.

The quality of Russia's infrastructure, in particular the state of roads, is a great concern for youth in the polls. Respondents vividly describe the terrible quality of roadways next to their houses and tell stories about cars breaking down because of potholes in the pavement. Bad roads are a physical reminder of the embezzlement of funds by officials, to whom the next most acute problems of bureaucracy and incompetence are also attributed.

Youth and Power

For the respondents, high-ranking officials are the incarnation of evil and thus are responsible for all the troubles in the country. Blaming them requires no kind of evidence and is common place in Russia's political culture; therefore all respondents without exception automatically support such allegations. In this regard, officials have been combined with politicians into the catch-all category of "power-holders." Irrationally negative attitudes towards authorities in general are characteristic of young people belonging to all social layers. But it is especially characteristic of student groups in technical universities and specialists with higher education. Dislike of government is based on fragments of historical knowledge, propaganda clichés and myths from different eras, all combined to form an "explosive mix." The "authorities" are represented as totally corrupt, working only in the interests of their own enrichment and dealing with them is unnecessary and even dangerous to one's life and reputation. The majority of respondents perceive the authorities as a self-sufficient force with no legitimate source. Elections are not considered as a source of legitimacy since respondents are convinced that the voting results have little to do with the will of the people. Thus, the authorities are perceived as Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan: a cruel and loathed deity one has to deal with, since they cannot get rid of it.

Figure 7. The ratio of negative and positive vocabulary in respondents judgments about the power by region

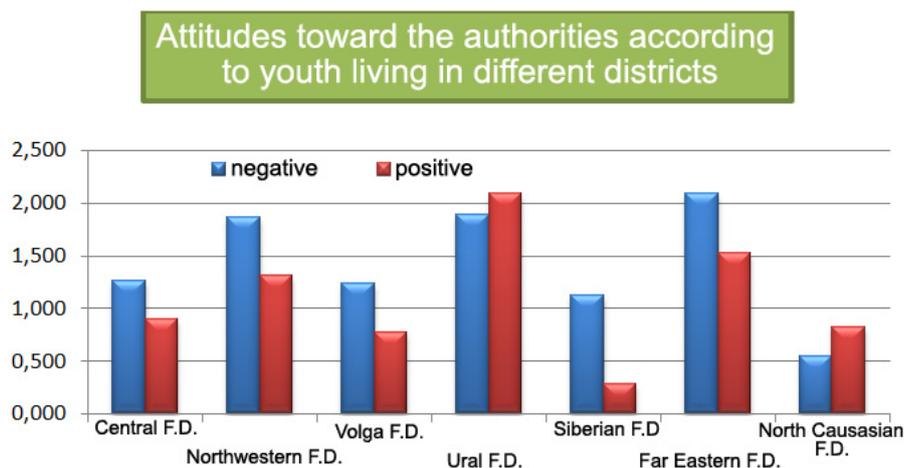


Figure 7 shows the prevalence of negative attitudes toward power in five of eight federal districts (the North Caucasian district

and the Southern district were taken as one). The strongest negative feelings toward the government are found among residents of the Far Eastern and the Northwestern districts, two regions that are closest to the world's "growth centers," the European Union and the Asia-Pacific region. The most positive perceptions of authorities come from the North Caucasian and Southern districts where the proportion of ethnic minorities is higher. There are two possible explanations: either ethnic minorities are more permeable to the authorities' policies or the situation in the region is such that respondents preferred not to criticize the government. The first reason is more likely as young members of ethnic minorities have demonstrated a sufficiently coherent position, which in general has coincided with the government's stance. The study found that residents of the Caucasus, unlike people from other regions, compare Russia not with Europe, but with the independent Caucasian republics (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, etc.), and conclude that life in Russia is much better.

Russian youth, regardless of regional origin, continues to demonstrate a "parochial" political culture accordingly the original definition of G. Almond and S. Verba.¹³ This type of political culture means keeping distance from the authorities. The individual expects benefits from the State and fears harassment, but generally agrees that politics are none of their business. Only to a small degree they aspire to change the status quo, and prefer smoldering discontent or withdrawal into their microcosm rather than taking an active political position.

The respondents highlighted the opacity of the power structure, they do not understand how it works; on what basis decisions are made, and by what criteria new officials and politicians are recruited. Of 325 respondents, only two have expressed a wish to compete for any elective office or become a civil servant. It is worth noting that both these men were non-Russian representatives of the national republics. One gets the impression that the whole propagation of the authorities values and meanings succeed better in an ethnic minority environment, they are more willing to show patriotism and ready to take part in public life. At the same time, ethnic Russians are enthusiastic about working in state-owned corporations whose employees' perception is not much different from state officials.

¹³ G. Almond, S. Verba, "Grazhdanskaya kul'tura i stabil'nost demokratii" [The Civic Culture and Democratic Stability], *Politicheskie issledovaniya* [Political Studies], n° 4, 1992.

Figure 8. Ratio of negative opinions of the respondents about the power of to the total amount of negative vocabulary by group

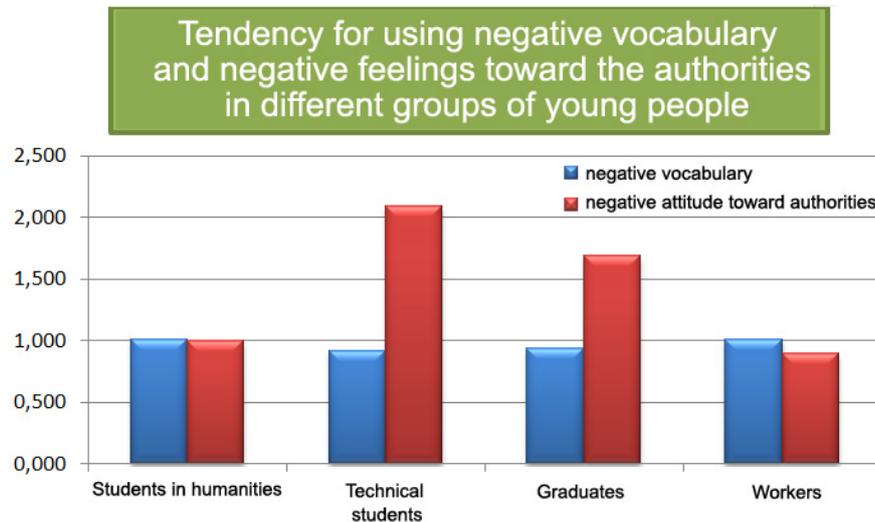


Figure 8 shows a comparison of the respondents' average use of negative vocabulary towards the authorities. The results show that the most aggressive groups of all surveyed are technical students and young specialists, the two groups that are most prone to critical thinking. There are various criticisms of power-holders, but all of them in one way or another can be reduced to the concept of "evil transformation." According to young people, no matter how honest and noble one may be, once integrated into the existing system, they inevitably become corrupt and greedy thieves never taking into consideration the people's needs. Young Russians think the majority of these people are not even originally good, because only the most lawless, cruel and opportunistic engage in politics. Professionalism is not an inherent features of officials.

In many respects, such a negative attitude towards Russian power-holders can be explained by the fact that young people do not understand the functioning of the Russian political system, although the subject is included in the school program which is not as far away from the young people's minds as it is from the pensioners'. Youth remain convinced that the main task of the authorities is limited to a mere function of social provision, such as the distribution of pensions and benefits, the organization of youth leisure, preventing the spread of alcoholism and other vices and the fight against youth unemployment.

In fact, most research done on the subject found that "care" is the main keyword young Russians associate with the government. Politicians and bureaucrats are ranked according to their level of concern about the population, in the sense of whether their behavior produces any tangible benefits or not. From this position, all political parties look like miniature copies of the State, their popularity also determined by the level of care, real or promised. That is why the

ruling party United Russia pays so much attention to grassroots-level social matters and policies, which are, in general, uncharacteristic for political parties, like the construction of hockey skates and playgrounds.¹⁴

The misunderstanding of the nature of power and the inability to dismember it into its constituent elements makes constructive reforms impossible. As for the question "what can be done to improve the situation?" 61.2% of respondents in one form or another answered "the entire hierarchy of power should be changed." Most of the remaining respondents were undecided. Other answers included "commit collective suicide," "surrender to the police" etc. Then, realizing the impossibility of achieving radical changes in the authorities, youth slide into apathy and apoliticism, preferring to delve into problems of everyday life.

Only 8.3% of young people stated that for them democratic elections, as the basis for the creation of a public administration, are a key factor. To the remaining respondents, elections do not matter. For them harmony between meritocratic standards, high educational and moral levels are much more important. Among the youth professionalism is appreciated more than adherence to democratic procedures – this basic idea in particular lies at the foundation of the governance model used in China. It is possibly the route along which the political system in Russia will develop.

It is noteworthy that, despite their mistrust of the authorities, young people view them as a source of guidance and consider the current government policy toward themselves too passive. They perceive the lack of guidelines and action plans as neglect by the authorities. Despite the use of Western concepts and terminology, many young people would gladly embrace official government ideology, if one is ever adopted. However, the currently imposed "State patriotism" and adherence to the Orthodox Church is perceived negatively, as reactionary ideas, moreover originating from hated "officials." It can be said that respondents are willing to accept the ideology and give up the Constitution article which prohibits it, but only if the said ideology comes from people they respect and who would replace the thieves currently in power.

¹⁴ "Dva basseyna planiruet'sya postroit' v Irkutskoy oblasti po proektu partii Edinaya Rossiya" [Two pools will be built in the Irkutsk region after a project by United Russia], *Baikal Info*, 26 December 2013. <<http://baikal-info.ru/archives/97825>>

Opposition and Revolution

Despite the widespread dissatisfaction with the authorities, the lack of parties representing “them” and hatred of corruption, the youth cannot be considered as revolutionary-minded. In late 2012 and early 2013 young people in provinces generally have not heard anything about the year-long rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg. If they did hear about them, they could not name the leaders and reasons for the protests. Only seven of the 325 respondents had been personally involved in such events, and the rest said they did not intend to take part in any of them.

Nevertheless, the very idea of protesting is supported by young Russians. In their view, social problems that are worthy of breaking the silence are corruption, poverty and disorder. The State and its officials are the source of all problems according to young Russians. However, they do not express their protest more directly for different reasons.

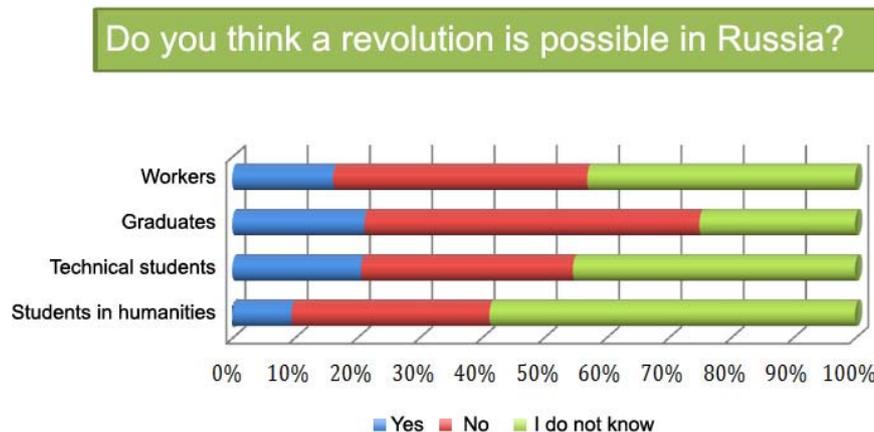
The most obvious answer is that a distrust of authority and resentment of the existing situation is part of the culture, a thought implicitly shared by all respondents. They do not mean to carry out real action but rather only pay lip service to change. The very same young people give several explanations:

- Protests are ineffective and do not lead to immediate and guaranteed results.
- Lack of time (despite the fact that the rallies are held on weekends, students claim they have many other important matters to attend to).
- Fear of getting hurt. People who had never been to the rallies picture them as endless collisions and fights with the police, though in fact the only case of a clash with the police was on May 6, 2012 during the dispersal of the “March of millions” on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow.
- Conspiracy theories. Many young people believe that the protests are a provocation cunningly conceived by the authorities to gauge discontent.
- The protest leaders. Most young people were not familiar with the “new” faces of the opposition, such as Alexei Navalny or Evgeniya Chirikova. Hearing the names of the Yeltsin era politicians Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov at the rallies caused a persistent negative reaction.

- Off-grid leaders do not care about their supporters, they only use them to protect themselves from the police. The concept of “care” also applies here.
- Impact of the “evil transformation.” Young people believe that once they confiscate power from the authorities, opposition leaders will immediately begin to steal and will eventually turn into the same officials they replaced.

A revolution also seems an unrealistic option to most of the respondents in the focus groups. There is an interesting paradox among the youth: in the minds of respondents opposition and revolution are virtually never connected. Most of the respondents (40%) consider the current opposition as fragmented, unable to develop a common position and maintain the enthusiasm of the masses. They do not see oppositionists as people who are able to lead a rebellion or revolution.

Figure 9. Chance of a revolution in Russia through the eyes of young people

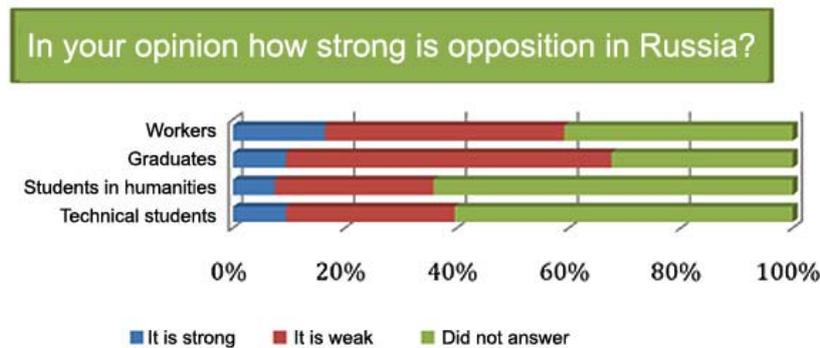


As can be seen on figure 9, the respondents who doubt the possibility of a revolution the most are young specialists who have the necessary experience and knowledge to assess the likelihood of such a scenario. However, at the same time, they are on a par with technical students who are most likely to believe that a revolution could occur in the future.

Another thing working against the opposition is the fact that respondents tend to blame the country’s problems not only on the government but also on the Russian mentality in general. From this point of view, protests such as those of 2011-2012 do have the right to exist, but they do not solve most of the problems faced by the people. Despite certain anti-governmental attitude, respondents do not tend to support opposition leaders. They consider them as potential embezzlers who have not had the chance yet to feed on the State’s treasury. Their struggle is not perceived as a movement for the democratization of the country and against the abuse of power, but as an attempt to get to the resources of the state apparatus and

improve their own financial position. Sometimes it seems that respondents are simply unable to believe that someone could seek power for anything other than personal enrichment.

Figure 10. The strength of the opposition in the eyes of young Russians



Indeed, according to figure 10, those with the greatest doubt regarding the strength of the opposition are the working youth, who are tightly integrated in the socio-political life of the country. Students do not yet have the life experience to evaluate its capacity, therefore most of them cannot give a clear answer.

Despite their need for “care,” young people have rather radical views on the best ways to express disagreement with the State. Negative opinions against opposition leaders are related to yet another important factor: respondents perceive legitimate political struggles with rallies, pickets, calls for protest in the medias, etc. as trivial matters which are of no use to anyone. This is the reason 40% of the respondents consider the opposition as too small: it is not ready to “raise the stakes” and challenge the government with an armed conflict. Politicians, including the opposition, engage in a verbal tug of war, a behavior unworthy of great leaders according to the respondents. Anti-government protests must be waged as a matter of life and death, a view shared by both revolutionary-minded and apolitical respondents. The democratic and parliamentary struggle is seen as frivolous, and further strengthens the respondents' opinion that opposition leaders only seek power in order to participate in the embezzlement of public funds (something a true revolutionary would never do, for he is poor and noble). Respondents are convinced that if the protests included less intellectuals and more classical “bombers,” they would gain in efficiency and support. Thus, in the minds of the young respondents there are only two legitimate political systems: the status quo or a bloody revolution.

Conclusion

Young people in Russia are under pressure from a number of factors, which pre-form their distrust of the political system. Apart from the obvious subjectivity of their age, social disorder and the youth's search for their place in the world, there is the country's history. And Russian history shows that over the past 30 years starting from the Perestroika and through the chaotic years of the 1990s, politicians have deceived the people too many times to deserve another chance.

Feeling powerless before the monumental set of the country's problems, young people replace their troubled thoughts with small everyday concerns and personal matters. If their fear grows too strong, young people start thinking about emigration.

The decrease of interest in traditional electoral politics among young people is a global trend. However, in Russia the new generation does not trust anyone except their friends and acquaintances. Democracy is not only a right but also a responsibility: without the citizens' direct participation in governance the authorities will never be able to achieve legitimacy and effectiveness. Unfortunately in the memory of today's generation of young people the most popular form of political struggle is the war of compromising documents. In the minds of most, democracy is reduced to the choice of the lesser evil. People voting for a candidate to office do so not because he suggests the best political program, but because the other candidates are corrupt thieves and political "clowns". Moreover this tactic is used by all the political forces in the election race.

As a result, young people, convinced that all candidates for all positions are crooks and thieves, simply stay out of politics. Moreover, they begin to dream that one day some revolutionary hero, who would never dirty himself in any kind of cooperation with the government, will destroy the entire system. Alexei Navalny tried to turn these sentiments to his advantage, but they backfired: he too, because of his anti-corruption activities, got involved in the war of compromising documents.

Another explanation of this distrust of politics is the lack of understanding of its functioning. Young people cannot deconstruct the state apparatus into individual elements. Therefore, when they consider Russia's diseased political system, they prefer an outright amputation to a surgical intervention. This raises the question of the lack of political knowledge and competence among young people. During the 2000s, one of the main features of the "Putin consensus"

was the citizens' non-participation in politics. In a tacit agreement between the people and the authorities, consent with the then-current policies was traded for continuous growth, social benefits, security and stability.

This consensus gradually began to decay when the global financial crisis hit Russia in 2009. The economic problems combined with the Russians' fatigue of constantly seeing the same people in power started to undermine the consensus. Politics has returned to Russia, but only a small section of the country's youth were ready for it. The economic situation is still much better than in Egypt, Libya and Ukraine, but there is no experience of civilized political struggle whereas the fear of losing one's job, getting beaten up or sent to jail by the police is strong. The Ukrainian crisis of 2013-2014 would be impossible in Russia: protests would never come to throwing of "Molotov cocktails" and any actions beyond standing in a square with flags would be harshly suppressed.

We should state the crisis of humanities education in Russia. Humanities students who are supposed to be producers and interpreters of values are instead the least confident of their political outlook, demonstrating infantilism and a tendency for escapism. All of this is a consequence of the degradation of social education, which many in Russia perceive as the simplest way to avoid military service (examinations for admission to the humanities subjects are easier to pass), and not as an opportunity to better understand social realities and produce new ideas. Related to all these problems is the lack of political and civil education: the subject isn't taught in technical universities at all, whereas humanities students are impermeable to it.

This situation is very convenient for the government. The youth are the main participant of mass protests around the world. If they are passive and loath all the political figures equally and if they demonstrate a "parochial" political culture, then there will be nobody to challenge the established order. The downside of this process is the emigration of the most active and progressive young people who need a free and open environment, an exchange of ideas and an innovative political and economic climate.

The current situation then seems stuck in a vicious cycle. Pro-government experts and political scientists sometimes say that uncontrolled democracy would lead to the chaos of the 1990s or the "Ukrainian scenario" because citizens are still not "politically educated" enough. At the same time, socio-political education and the education system are aligned in such a way that people cannot become proficient in matters of governance and politics.

If the situation does not change, the modernization of the political system, a recurring subject in the leaders' rhetoric between 2008 and 2012, will become impossible. It seems however appropriate to the political course of Putin's third term, as the president advocates the respect of conservative and religious values. After all, truly conservative-religious countries like Iran or Saudi

Arabia do not need a youth population that is aware of its place in their home country and in the world.