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RUSSIA**



RUSSIAN YOUTH: A Look Inside the “Black Box”

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Russian Youth: A Look Inside the “Black Box”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017 protests across Russia surprised many observers both inside and outside the country—no one quite expected to see so many young people, including high school students, taking to the streets to express dissatisfaction with the current political leadership. For years, young Russians were criticized for political apathy, conformism, and proneness to trade freedoms and rights for careers and consumerism. Last year, as a new crop of Russian voters came of age in time for Vladimir Putin’s re-election for his fourth presidential term, numerous media outlets across the globe called them the “Putin generation.” Still, the 2017 protest sentiment that seeped into 2018 was a crucial political phenomenon: this series of protests highlighted the complexity and diversity of the Russian youth—the social group that over the last years has been misunderstood or overlooked by both the Kremlin and independent observers. This fact puts young people at the center of political discussions with regards to Russia’s future and raises a plethora of critical questions. What is actually going with the young Russians? What are their values, attitudes, beliefs, and how are they shaped? Are these youngsters, in fact, disinterested in politics and loyal to the regime, as has been pointed out so many times before, or have they become aware of the regime’s flaws and begun to look for opportunities to overcome them?

This report is an attempt to look inside the proverbial “black box” that Russian youth (formally defined here as the group aged 17-25 in 2019) turned out to be to many observers. The report taps into two different approaches to studying youth—the traditional generational approach and the so-called “solidarities” approach, which allows for a deeper understanding of the youth’s subcultural differences and behavior strategies. A combination of different approaches underscores the fact that diverse, sometimes opposing groups co-exist under a broad term of “Russian youth.” To address this issue and provide a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the future generations of Russians, this report dissects the following aspects of the new phenomenon: sociological characteristics of the Russian youth and their key attitudes (as shown by various national polls); the way they differ from or match those of their counterparts in several CIS countries (particularly,

Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan); the Kremlin’s youth policy and the efficiency of the pro-government youth organizations within a larger context of the Putin regime’s strategy.

The analysis conducted in this report led us to several important conclusions: 1) the phenomenon of Russian youth is understudied, complex, and laced with internal cultural, subcultural, and value-based conflicts that should not be underestimated and must be researched in further detail; 2) the notions of political apathy, conformism and cynicism among Russian youth are often not rooted in reality, as many youngsters tend to mistrust existing political infrastructure and prefer to organize on a grassroots level and online to solve small, pragmatic issues (this comes as a global trend, as young people in the West also grow increasingly disappointed with traditional forms of political participation); 3) Russian youth’s access to global internet and social networks exposes them to a much more diverse and rich information space (the space that the Kremlin has not been able to fully control), which inevitably shapes a different set of attitudes and beliefs among young people compared to older generations of Russians; 4) despite early success in engaging and mobilizing the youth, the Kremlin’s youth policy has failed on crucial points of consistency and strategic vision for the future as it is largely driven by the regime’s goal of its own survival. Based on this analysis, the report also offers some recommendations for Russia experts, media and policymakers.

Going forward, the analysis conducted in this report yields cautious optimism: as younger generations of Russians will begin to take over the country’s labor market and political force, their vision of the world—shaped by digital culture and more diverse information as well as by different experiences—will diffuse current tensions and create opportunities for opening up of the country.

INTRODUCTION

If youth knew; if age could.

Henri Estienne

The 2017-2018 protests in Russia that brought many young faces to the forefront of the opposition to Vladimir Putin have sparked a new round of discussions about aspirations of Russian youth, the efficiency of the Kremlin's youth policy, and the future of the regime.

These recent protests are different from the 2011-2012 demonstrations that had emerged as a public reaction to the infamous “swap” between Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev and the rigging of the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections. The “youth factor” of the former sets them apart. According to a Levada Center poll regarding the December 24, 2011 protest held on Sakharov Avenue, only 25 percent of participants were aged 18-24, while 45 percent were 40 or older.¹ By contrast, 40-45 percent of participants in the 2017-2018 protests were below 25 years old and about two-thirds or more were below 30, according to various surveys.

As the current regime's life span approaches its 20th anniversary, a whole new generation of Russians has come of age under Putin's unremitting leadership, which raises a question: Is the Kremlin capable of reigning in these youngsters in order to preserve the regime? For quite a while, the regime was successful in its tactics of “divide and conquer” with respect to political opposition, taking over independent institutions and destroying the nascent system of checks and balances, while “seducing” the youth with various benefits (careers, social lifts, material well-being) in return for their loyalty and thus diffusing dissent. It would seem, at first glance, that the Kremlin managed to bring numerous youth groups into the orbit of Putin's system. However, the Kremlin-

sponsored youth movements, built on a bizarre mixture of the Komsomol-style practices and the principles of multilevel marketing, gained momentum in mid-2000s only to be abandoned and shut down by early 2010s.

In the light of the 2011-2012 protests and especially following the 2017-2018 demonstrations that featured large numbers of young participants, the Kremlin's initial success is now being questioned. The recent protests reflect a growing disillusionment among young people with Putin personally and the country's state of affairs in general—the sentiment that is also registered by the polls. While a new phenomenon—active, wordly, and “digitally native” youth groups—has emerged in Russian political life, it is yet to be seen what these groups will do next and how the Kremlin will address the new challenge.

In the meantime, it is worth asking: Who are these young people? What happened to them over the last few years? What factors shaped their newly found activism? Can the Kremlin contain their dissent?

This report will try to unpack these complex questions.

¹ Levada Center, “Levada Center compiled a [collective] portrait of the participants in the protest on Sakharov Avenue,” December 26, 2011 (in Russian: «“Левада-центр” составил портрет участников митинга на проспекте Сахарова»). <https://www.levada.ru/2011/12/26/levada-tsentr-sostavil-portret-uchastnikov-mitinga-na-prospekte-saharova/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019]

I. YOUNG RUSSIANS: WHO ARE THEY?

“Russian youth” is a broad term, normally describing people aged 17-25. The size of this group in today’s Russia is not immediately clear, as the country’s official statistics service (Rosstat) breaks down age groups by a five-year difference (e.g. 15-20, 21-25, etc.), but based on its latest data, one can estimate that those aged 17-25 constitute about 13.6 million people, or slightly over nine percent of the total population.² Until recent protests of 2017-2018, this group has not been considered a significant political force by any measure, with Russian youth in general deemed as politically indifferent and apathetic. However, recent research shows that this “apathy” may not reflect the reality. Moreover, a deeper look into what Russian youth is, shows that this group is quite complex: it is not homogenous in terms of their values, life strategies, and key political issues—on the contrary, it is fragmented and polarized.

GENERATIONS VS “SOLIDARITIES”

A general overview of the existing research into the subject of the modern Russian youth brings back an incomplete picture as a result of at least one crucial issue: as many sociologists have observed, there has been an insufficient number of comprehensive longitudinal studies of Russian youth over the last decades. Another problem is that some Russian sociological research carried over ideological biases from the Soviet times. As one researcher noted, “despite new forms of youth socialization in the 1990s, a pro-Soviet, ideological approach to these groups, within which they were assessed in the context of Western [deviant] influence, prevailed.”³ Yet another problem is the lack of a holistic approach that accounts for different dimensions of the Russian youth groups—not just based on their demographics or opinion polls, but the one that also considers various subcultures, life strategies, values, etc. Still, a number of in-depth studies produced by the Russian and Western sociologists help build a nuanced, contextual picture of what different youth groups look like in

Russia today.

One widely used approach to the youth studies is generational: simply put, it allows to identify different generations based on the year when their members were born. Generation theory⁴ posits that certain key events can shape views, values, and attitudes of the young people coming of age during these times. Examples of such events in recent history include the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 2008 global financial crisis, the annexation of Crimea, etc. Since this theory became part of popular culture with the publication of Douglas Coupland’s bestseller *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, different labels have been applied to describe different generations. The ones that are most commonly used with regards to most recent generations, are: Generation X (for people born in 1963-1984), Generation Y (1984-2000)⁵ and Generation Z (2000 – present).

This report looks at young Russians who are currently 17-25 years old, which means that they are roughly members of two generations—late GenY (or “Millennials”) and early GenZ. Since no generation is born into a vacuum or exists in one, this report also looks at certain aspects of GenX as the first generation of Russians who came of age in the post-Soviet period and were largely exposed to the opening up of the country and to new, foreign influences. Additionally, in the light of the internet revolution and Russia’s integration into the international community, this report also compares the attitudes of GenY and GenZ to those of their counterparts in former Soviet republics—Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

It is noteworthy, however, that some researchers warn against making definitive conclusions about members of GenZ, as this generation has not been fully shaped yet; many of youngsters belonging to it are still in the development stage. Additionally, a 2019 study by the Institute of Education at the Higher School of Economics⁶ found that many of the stereotypes often ascribed to the young people by the mass media and, consequently, by the general population, are not rooted in reality—in fact, in terms of personal and social development, members of GenZ are hardly different from their predecessors—GenY. The study looked at a number of such stereotypes, including

2 “Demographics: The size and composition of the population of the Russian Federation” (as of June 14, 2018). Official website of Federal State Statistics Service http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/# [Accessed on April 2, 2019]

3 Omelchenko, E. “Solidarities and cultural practices of the Russian youth in the beginning of the 21st century: A theoretical context.” (in Russian: «Солидарности и культурные практики российской молодежи начала XXI века: теоретический контекст»). *Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya*, No. 10, 2013. http://www.isras.ru/files/File/Socis/2013_10/Omelchenko.pdf [Accessed on February 13, 2019].

4 Mainheim, K. “The Problem of Generations,” in Mainheim, K. *Essays*. Routledge, 1952.

5 Some researchers identify this generation as “millennials” (See, for example: Howe, N., Strauss, W. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Vintage Books, 2000). The term is also widely used in the media.

6 Bogacheva, N. “Myths of the Generation Z” (in Russian: «Мифы о поколении Z»). A study by the Institute of Education at the Higher School of Economics, March 2019 <https://ioe.hse.ru/seminar1819> [Accessed on April 2, 2019].



ability to multitask, small attention span, lack of critical thinking, infantilism, proneness to depression and anxiety, isolation due to pervasiveness of the social media, and could not confirm that these are specific features inherent to GenZ. Some of the core characteristics that were in fact confirmed in GenZ are specific personality traits (pragmatism, individualism, moderation), values (freedom, success), and emotions (higher rates of depression and anxiety among modern Russian youth).

There are, however, limitations to the generational theory, as it often fails to grasp the complexity of the picture. Most of the time this approach focuses on the attitudes of the middle class youth; it doesn't differentiate between "buffer" or "cusp" generations (people who were born on the last year of the older generation or on the first year of the newer one); and it doesn't draw distinctions between genders. Besides, multiple labels applied as part of this approach (some recent examples include: "Android generation," "Putin generation," "Crimea generation," etc.) confuse this issue furthermore.

A different approach that overcomes these problems has been formulated by a group of Russian researchers over the last decade. It is based on identifying the youth groups through the values they adhere to, or their "solidarities."⁷

This approach allows to distinguish between two broad cultural strategies of the Russian youth across recent generations. The first strategy aspires for

self-actualization, growth, cosmopolitanism, looking and moving forward. The second strategy evolves around friendships and security; it is based on the ideas of a common (shared) territory and the need to maintain order. While these two strategies can be used to discern different types of youth—the first strategy is associated with urban youth, the second one with suburban kids—they, in fact, often overlap.⁸ In Russia, these strategies are employed by culturally opposing groups. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the first strategy was typical for the so-called "advanced" groups (продвинутые), which also include the informal (неформалы)⁹, the alternative, and other subcultures. The second strategy was inherent to the so-called "normal" (нормальные), which incorporated groups, like "mainstream," "usual," "deviants," and "gopniki."¹⁰ In the last decade, a similar juxtaposition has been observed between hipsters and "patsany" (пацаны).¹¹

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the main cultural conflict among Russian young people was between *neformaly* and *gopniki*, which, according to some observers, ended when *gopniki* prevailed by mid-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Unofficial, informal groups and organizations, e.g. hippies, punks, metalheads, goths—as opposed to official groups, such as Komso-mol and others.

¹⁰ Stereotypically identified youth groups, usually of lower-class, living in suburban areas.

¹¹ Also called by "pro-patsany groups" (in criminal jargon, patsany means candidates to become "thieves-in-law."

aughts.¹² Today, a similar conflict is underway between *hipsters* and *patsany*.

In the current divide, opposing youth groups uphold different values and adhere to different behaviors. Usually, *hipsters* would be members of the urban middle class—better educated, more worldly, and less aggressive. *Patsany* groups are more patriotic, nationalistic, and hostile to those they identify as “others.” Other values attributed to the first cultural strategy include pacifism, democracy (liberalism), tolerance, gender equality, orientation toward the West; while hostility (aggression), order (loyalty), authoritarianism, nationalism, xeno- and homophobia, patriarchy, orientation toward the East are more distinct qualities of the second strategy.

An interesting nuance that sometimes shows in the studies of the Russian youth is the lingering Soviet legacy. As some observers posit, “[h]istorical experience of state socialism is inherent, albeit in deformed, mythological way, in the daily practices of the Russian youth. These ‘echoes of the past’ can be observed in the interpretations of meanings that young people ascribe to their life choices, in their ideas of significant events or heroes, in the way they construct themselves, their peers, defining ‘their owns’ (*свои*) and ‘others’ (*чужие*).”¹³

HIPSTERS VS. PATSANY

Based on the “solidarities” approach, Center for Youth Studies at the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in St. Petersburg conducted a qualitative study of the Russian youth in five Russian cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ulyanovsk, Samara, Makhachkala). The findings were reported by the Center’s director Elena Omelchenko in a public lecture in November 2016.¹⁴

Giving credit to the generational approach, Omelchenko notes that some of the typical characteristics of Russia’s GenY include: visual culture,¹⁵ work and engagement through gamification, strong need for communication and feedback,

mobility, healthy lifestyle («здоровый образ жизни», or ЗОЖ), biking, street sports, street racing (i.e. activities called ВРАН, or БПАН—«без посадки авто нет»—which requires one to tune and lower the car). These activities are sometimes observed across opposing cultural groups bridging the aforementioned divide. GenY has also been described as a “trophy generation,” for which mere participation in a competition matters more than winning.

It is noteworthy that the annexation of Crimea became a value-defining event for all generations in Russia with division lines and tensions forming around the issue of “ours / not ours.” According to Omelchenko, this event sent a dangerous signal to the youth by claiming that the powerful has the right to do anything and that power (political, economic, military, but not cultural) trumps everything else. It is not clear what the implications of this event will be in the long term.

In the recent past, the Pussy Riot punk band’s performance in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow in 2010 had been a similar, albeit less dire, value-defining event for many people in Russia, but especially for the youth, with questions arising about the limits of one’s creative freedom and religious beliefs. In her earlier research, Omelchenko also notes the importance of the 2008 financial crisis for GenZ and GenY generations, calling the groups of young people who were 15-19 during the crisis the “recession generation.” She observes that “losses of status and communicative opportunities because of the decrease in the living standards” made them the “most susceptible” to the crisis’ implications. “This will affect their behavior and practices until around 2020 when they conclude their youth cycle and begin to reach adult status,” she notes.¹⁶

The 2009 national representative study conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences corroborates Omelchenko’s argument regarding the “recession generation.”¹⁷ The study paints a picture of the youth right in the midst of the financial crisis. First, the authors argue that young people in contemporary Russia cannot be “called individualistic, aggressive, or overly ambitious.” What they see as best accomplishments in life are having a “close-knit family and children and being respected;” other priorities include “material well-being and having an interesting job.” Second, they point to the simplistic dichotomy of the political views shared by the Russian youth: Russia versus the West, democrats

12 ITMO University, “Elena Omelchenko’s lecture: Generation portrait of the Russian youth. (in Russian: «Елена Омельченко: поколенческий портрет российской молодежи»). YouTube, November 12, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulL_CUJVC_I [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

13 Omelchenko E., Pilkington H. (ed.) Where does the Motherland begin: youth in the labyrinth of patriotism. (In Russian: «С чего начинается Родина: молодежь в лабиринте патриотизма»). Ulyanovsk State University Publishing, 2012. <https://publications.hse.ru/books/71108113> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

14 Omelchenko’s lecture (YouTube), 2016.

15 As we will see later in this report, this factor played an important rule with the youth overwhelmingly responding to Alexey Navalny’s 2017 documentary that exposed corruption of Prime Minister Medvedev.

16 Omelchenko, E. “Russian Youth from the 1990s until 2010: Generational Changes,” in *Generation X Goes Global: Mapping a Youth Culture in Motion*. Ed. By Henseler, Christine. Routledge, 2012, p. 254.

17 Gorshkov M., Sheregi F. “Historical, Theoretical, and Methodological Background for Youth Studies in Russia” in *Handbook Of The Sociology Of Youth In Brics Countries*. Ed. by Dwyer, World Scientific Publishing Company (January 5, 2018), p. 37.

versus authoritarianism supporters, which the study attributes to the fact that “political differences are not clear in young people’s consciousness.”¹⁸ And third, the authors observe that 43.8 percent of the youth “expect the authorities to be paternalistic and to protect and support youth whenever possible,” which is why youngsters are ready to “accept authoritarian state,” if it fits a certain paternalistic profile. At the same time, 56.5 percent of young Russians want “equality in their relations with the state;” they are willing to take risks and for this reason prefer democracy.” The youth is thus presented as polarized over the nature of the regime, but lacking political awareness and mostly career- and family-oriented.

This notion of youth lacking political experience has evolved over several years as seen in the findings of the 2016 HSE study led by Omelchenko that showcased a spike in activism among young Russians, regardless of whether they belong among hipsters or *patsany*. The study shows that nowadays Russian youth is very interested in day-to-day, grassroots activism at a local level, focusing on resolving concrete, pragmatic problems, which, at the same time, often have moral underpinnings. The overarching implications for the future here could be, as follows: Russian youth is turning away from the traditional forms of political participation, thus overthrowing the idea of political apathy among its ranks. Time will show if this theory is accurate.

The idea of political apathy may have stemmed from earlier observations of the Russian youth. The aforementioned 2009 study by the Institute of Sociology, for instance, shows that most of young Russians (67.8 percent) believed they had no influence over state policy, while 56.5 percent said they “cannot make the authorities hear them in order to protect their interests.” These attitudes may also be a reflection of a specific period in the country’s history or the result of the general disillusionment after the 2008 financial crisis. Sociologist Mikhail Gorshkov, director of the Institute of Sociology and one of authors of the study, argues that this could also be due to the “lack of autonomous youth civil organizations” in Russia (most of the youth initiatives were controlled by the Kremlin). Ironically, according to the 2016 HSE study, it was the Kremlin-sponsored youth movements that had played a crucial role in reformatting youth cultural movements and shifting their attitudes to activism. (The Kremlin’s youth policy is analyzed in detail in Part II of this report.)

“INNER REBELS”

Ellen Mickiewicz’s *No Illusions: The Voices of Russia’s Future Leaders* (2014) offers an important insight into the worldviews and mindsets of what she calls “future Russian elite.” For her qualitative study, Mickiewicz conducted 10 focus groups with 108 students from three leading Russian universities: the Lomonosov Moscow State University, the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Affairs (MGIMO), and the Higher School of Economics. Forty-two of the respondents came from cities outside Moscow, men and women were almost equally represented in the cohort.

Despite the fact that all interviews were taken in 2010–2011—before such value-defining events for GenZ as the Bolotnaya protests, the Euromaidan revolution, and the annexation of Crimea—the attitudes and especially the arguments of the young Russians are still highly relevant for this report, as they provide both context and the logic behind their attitudes, beliefs, and life choices.

According to Mickiewicz, what sets this group of youngsters apart from Russia’s current leaders and older generations is the **internet**—a “new phenomenon that has played an impressive role in who these new leaders are,” having profoundly shifted their “cognitive tools and norms.” For example, they are already “better educated than their predecessors, far more worldly, and dedicated to the application of their learning, of which they are proud and which they want to put to use as best as they can.”¹⁹

Another notable characteristic is their lack of **trust** in the Russian society. One of the respondents is quoted, saying: “You can’t open your soul to everyone and say everything, be sincere. Because sometimes people really use this information against you.” Another person notes that competition is asymmetrical because “95 percent of the population [in Russia] as a rule does not follow any ethical or moral principles.”

At the same time, the respondents know that trust is desirable—both for society and for themselves as individuals. In the focus groups, they laid down their criteria of trust: appearance, which includes ethnicity, looks, clothes (“tidy,” “clean”), and age (i.e. “anyone over 35 cannot be trusted”). These criteria are essentially used to draw lines between “ours” and “others.” The imbalance “between disclosure and expectations of the benefits of trust,” writes Mickiewicz, brings uncertainty with harmful implications.

The respondents’ views on **domestic politics** are somewhat inconsistent and contradictory. Almost half of them are “essentially dismissive of their civic duty

18 Again, as we will see later, lack of political savviness and simplistic views of politics in general, is one of the reasons why the Russian youth is less incline to participation.

19 Mickiewicz, E., *No Illusions: The Voices of Russia’s Future Leaders*. Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 61.



and exercise of their rights,” calling voting “absolutely useless.”

The respondents also say harsh things about their leaders and “expect little enlightenment from those higher up.” Some of them praise Alexei Navalny, Russian anticorruption-blogger-turned-opposition-leader, for his smart investigations, exposing “crooks and thieves” in the government. However, Mickiewicz underscores the dissonance with which many of the respondents live: they say that they would still vote for the regime (e.g. United Russia party) responsible for the corruption—“with full realization that it is meaningless.” She offers a possible explanation to “this apparent contradictory behavior:” the civic ritual of voting is an “emblem of [the] attachment” that the focus-group participants “have to Russia and not to any other country.”²⁰

Since the interviews were held before the mass protests of December 2011–May 2012, the views of the respondents on **protesting** in general provide an interesting insight. Some say that they are “inner rebels, cognizant of how ineffectual are the government’s self-serving attempts to reach people, especially the inhabitants of the internet world.” Others elaborate further that they “would not consider entering into spontaneous public activities and demonstrations [because otherwise] their government or private sector jobs would be at risk.” Mickiewicz interprets their arguments, as follows: “They do not appear to consider such mass protest as a means to policy solutions, especially in what they know are complex issues.”²¹

In terms of **media consumption**, many participants in the focus groups mentioned that they often read foreign outlets, such as *Euronews*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Agence France Press*, *BBC*, *The Economist*, and *The Guardian*. In their opinion, these sources of information have “authority.”²² It is evident that the respondents seek objectivity and are interested in different sides of the story. Among Russian publications that they trust, the respondents mentioned *Ekho Moskvy* and TV Rain as “exceptions in quality and integrity.” They also have no illusions regarding state-controlled national television news and information programs. Mickiewicz writes that they refer to First Channel “with bitterness:” in their view, all main television channels “lie or omit information,” are “not worth trusting.”²³ They also feel “insulted” by propaganda, because it means they are considered “users with immature brains.” Given the lack of trust in general, it comes as no surprise when one of them says that “all information is embellished.”²⁴

While the internet comes naturally as the first choice of news and information, number two is unexpected: people—the notion that includes friends, and also knowledgeable, “competent,” “special people,” who won’t “harm their career.” Again, career comes up in this study as an important factor defining their values and life choices.

²² Ibid, p. 39.

²³ Ibid, p. 126.

²⁴ Media preferences of the Russian youth are discussed in further detail below.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 48-49.

²¹ Ibid, p. 160.

RUSSIAN YOUTH IN THE NATIONAL POLLS

Overview of the research works above provides an insight into the attitudes of the Russian youth through the lense of qualitative studies that deal with slightly older cohorts of the young Russians. Below is the analysis of the most recent quantitative studies—national polls reflecting the young people’s current attitudes. It has to be noted that Russian pollsters often do not provide full breakdown across different age groups, therefore the number of surveys pertinent to this report is limited. Still, some conclusions can be drawn, in many cases corroborating the findings of the qualitative studies.

Values

One of the few surveys that offer a breakdown of the Russian youth groups (those aged 18-22, 23-27 and 28-30) is the poll on their key values conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) in November 2016.²⁵ The poll revealed noticeable differences in what these three groups consider their priorities. (The key findings of the survey are summarized in *Table 1*).

Table 1. Key findings of the FOM poll on values among the Russian youth groups

	All respondents	Aged 18-22	Aged 23-27	Aged 27-30
What of the following is the most important to you?				
Understanding and good relations in the family	75%	69 %	77 %	79 %
Material well-being and comfort	62%	48 %	67 %	71 %
Good physical shape	30 %	27 %	30 %	32 %
Interesting job and professional development	26 %	27 %	27 %	25 %
Communication with friends and acquaintances	23 %	28 %	22 %	20 %
Self-actualization and self-growth	20 %	23 %	19 %	17 %
Love and romantic relationships	17 %	24 %	16 %	10 %
Creative activities and hobbies	5 %	8 %	4 %	4 %
Do you think it is better to choose a job you like, even if it's not well paid, or the one you don't like if it's better paid?				
Better to choose a job you like even if it's not well paid	38 %	43 %	38 %	33 %
Better to choose a job which is well paid even if you don't like it	52 %	47 %	53 %	58 %
Do you consider yourself a believer, and if yes, to which religion you belong?				
Don't consider myself a believer	28 %	31 %	27 %	26 %
Orthodox	57 %	54 %	58 %	60 %

²⁵ Public Opinion Foundation, “Reference points and values of the young Russians. What is important for the youngster?” (in Russian: «Ориентиры и ценности молодых россиян. Что важно для молодых?»), November 3, 2016. <https://fom.ru/TSennosti/13083> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

Less “traditional values,”²⁶ more self-actualization, self-growth, and creativity

According to the poll, family relations are important to 79 percent of the Russians aged 28-30 and to 69 percent of the respondents aged 18-22. The latter group is also more indifferent to religion: 38 percent—the highest percentage among all youth groups—either call themselves non-believers or can’t name their faith, while 54 percent consider themselves “Orthodox,” as opposed to 30 and 60 percent, respectively, in the 28-30 age group. Twenty-three percent of Russians aged 18-22 prioritize “self-actualization and self-growth” as opposed to 17 percent of those aged 28-30; 8 percent of the former group also name “creativity and hobbies” among their priorities versus 4 percent of the latter.

Less material well-being, more human relations

Attitudes to material well-being significantly fluctuate across three groups of young Russians. Its importance sharply drops—from 71 percent to 48 percent—when one shifts from people aged 28-30 to those aged 18-22. For the latter group communication with friends and acquaintances comes more important, compared to the former—28 versus 20 percent—as well as the importance of love and romantic relationships—24 percent versus 10 percent.

These dynamics can be explained by the facts that people tend to grow more pragmatic and less idealistic over time and that their attitudes are prone to change. But these differences can also be attributed to the fact the older groups came of age in Putin’s “golden era” (mid-2000s) and their views were shaped by its relative stability and economic growth.

Social and political attitudes

Poor knowledge of history and simplistic views of political solutions reinforce support for authoritarian leadership

This phenomenon is detailed in the 2017 Kommersant article²⁷ that taps and cross-references a wide number of surveys of the Russian youth, including quantitative polls and focus groups by FOM, Higher School of Economics, the “Platform” Center of Social Design, the Institute of Basic and Applied Research, and the Moscow University for the Humanities. Polling data and interviews point to a strong pattern of idealizing authoritarian leadership and authoritarian methods of solving the problems. This

pattern is entrenched under the conditions of poor knowledge of history and misunderstanding of how authoritarianism works.²⁸

As shown by the 2018 Levada poll on the attitudes toward Stalin,²⁹ young Russians are not well-versed in their country’s history. While the respondents aged 18-27 hold the least favorable views of the Soviet dictator, they also struggle to elaborate on the reasons for such views. For example, in the follow-up questions, 37-38 percent had difficulty sharing their thoughts (agree/disagree) on statements, like this one: “Stalin is a wise leader who led the country to power and prosperity.”

Putin’s rating is lowest among youth groups

The January 2019 FOM opinion poll³⁰ offers an insight into various age groups’ attitudes to Vladimir Putin. It shows that young people aged 18-30 have the least favorable view of the Russian president—32 percent as opposed to the average of 42 percent or 64 percent of the people aged 60+. The number of the youngsters who hold unfavorable views of Putin is also the highest: 18 percent versus the average of 14 percent or 8 percent among those over 60 years old.

This is a relatively new development. Levada Center’s sociologists also observe³¹ this trend while stipulating that, until recently, Russian youth appeared in the polls as one of the most loyal demographic groups in terms of their views of Putin, falling into the same category as those aged 60+.

28 A videoclip from Daria Navalnaya’s (Alexei Navalny’s 17-year-old daughter) videoblog titled “Voice of my generation” serves as an example of the youth’s sometimes simplistic and contradictory thinking. In her blog Daria posts interviews with other young people on Russia’s political and social problems. In the aforementioned videoclip, she speaks to a teenager named Timofey, who complains about endemic corruption in Russia and suggests, as a solution to this problem, to “introduce execution of corrupt officials like they do in China.” Timofey seems oblivious to the fact that executions did not help China overcome corruption, whereas the world’s least corrupt countries do not resort to executions and apply an entirely different set of anticorruption measures instead. See: Dasha Navalnaya, “A voice of my generation: Timofey” (in Russian: «Голос моего поколения: Тимофей»). YouTube, October 10, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37Aw3VqZTCI> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

29 Levada Center. “Stalin in public opinion,” (in Russian: «Сталин в общественном мнении»). April 10, 2018 <https://www.levada.ru/2018/04/10/17896/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

30 Public Opinion Foundation, “Vladimir Putin: rating, attitude, assessment of his work” (in Russian: «В. Путин: рейтинг, отношение, оценки работы»), February 21, 2019. <https://fom.ru/Politika/10946> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

31 Volkov, D., How the Russian Youth Is Different From Its Parents (in Russian: «Чем российская молодежь отличается от своих родителей»). Vedomosti, December 5, 2018 <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/12/05/788410-rossiiskaya-molodezh> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

26 “Traditional values” were declared by Vladimir Putin as part of Russia’s national identity and the crucial principle of the state policies.

27 Bashmakova, M. The Party of Age. “Ъ” examined the Russian students’ political potential (in Russian: «Партия возраста. “Ъ” изучил политический потенциал российских студентов»). Kommersant, December 4, 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3486512> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].



Protests are not viewed as an effective method of political participation

It is also noteworthy that the youth is very sceptical about traditional methods of political participation, such as protesting, for expressing their frustration with the government. According to the 2017 poll conducted by the Higher School of Economics among over 6,000 students at 109 Russian universities,³² only 14 percent are ready to take part in a protest, while 72 percent deem protests ineffective in terms of influencing the authorities.³³

Patriotism is strong, but so are anger with corruption and demand for having the country's problems fixed

This attitude is registered in a number of recent polls.³⁴ While the majority of young Russians claim to be very patriotic, many openly point to corruption, low quality of healthcare and education as the country's key problems that have to be fixed. This connection between patriotism and criticisms of the government is important—as it directly contradicts the Kremlin's objective of intertwining patriotism with blind loyalty. This could also serve as an indicator of the limits to the Kremlin's propaganda efforts vis-à-vis Russian youth. Their understanding of patriotism is unaffected by the “mobilization patriotism” promoted by the Kremlin and does not preclude them from asking the authorities hard questions about widespread corruption and the lack of social and economic development in the country.

Yet, it is not entirely clear how young Russians define their “patriotism.” Describing themselves as “patriotic,” they still appear eager to emigrate in pursuit of better opportunities.

Growing emigration intent—the strongest among all age groups

³² For details, see: Bashmakova, 2017 (in Russian).

³³ Notably, the same poll shows that Vladimir Putin's support among the Russian students stands only at 47 percent, whereas, for example, Alexei Navalny's is at 7 percent.

³⁴ Bashmakova, M., 2017.

A series of the FOM opinion polls demonstrate youth's growing aspirations to leave Russia: in 2007, only 23 percent of the respondents aged 18-30 wanted to emigrate and reside abroad permanently, in 2011—there were 28 percent, and in 2013—37 percent.³⁵ The October 2017 poll³⁶ puts this number at 38 percent, as opposed to the average of 22 percent across all age groups.

Other pollsters corroborate this trend. The July 2018 WCIOM poll shows that 31 percent of young Russians aged 18-24 are willing to leave the country, as opposed to the national average of 10 percent.³⁷ The November 2018 poll by ROMIR Holding, a private market research company, provides similar numbers: 27 percent of youngsters aged 18-24 hold favorable views of emigration, with the national average being 12 percent.³⁸

The latest February 2019 Levada poll³⁹ has revealed an even higher level of emigration aspirations among Russian youth—41 percent, with 18 percent of the respondents aged 18-24 “definitely” and 23 percent “more likely” preferring to leave Russia. This is a 20-percent spike compared to Levada's October 2015 survey on the matter that polled people aged 18-29.⁴⁰

It is noteworthy that Western countries, particularly Europe (and especially, Germany), top the list of potential destinations for the young Russians, which, again, goes against the goals of the Kremlin propaganda. (We discuss the youth's views on the West in a separate section below).

³⁵ Kertman, G., “Youth: Thoughts about emigration are no longer rare” (in Russian: «Молодежь: помыслы об эмиграции – уже не редкость»). Public Opinion Foundation, June 2, 2013. <https://fom.ru/blogs/10934> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

³⁶ Public Opinion Foundation, “On emigration. Attitudes to Russians who permanently move abroad (in Russian: «Об эмиграции. Отношение к россиянам, навсегда уезжающими за границу»). October 10, 2017 <https://fom.ru/Nastroeniya/13801> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

³⁷ Russian Public Opinion Research Center (WCIOM), “Emigration moods of the Russians” (in Russian: «Эмиграционные настроения россиян-2018»). July 2, 2018. <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9187> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

³⁸ “Survey: The majority of Russians don't think about emigration,” (in Russian: «Опрос: большая часть россиян не задумываются об эмиграции»). Vesti Finance, November 27, 2018. <https://www.vestifinance.ru/articles/110783> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

³⁹ Levada Center, “Emigration moods” (in Russian: «Эмиграционные настроения»), February 4, 2019. <https://www.levada.ru/2019/02/04/emigratsionnye-nastroeniya-3/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

⁴⁰ Levada Center, “The West: Perception and striving for emigration,” (in Russian: «“Запад”: восприятие и стремление эмигрировать»), October 13, 2015. <https://www.levada.ru/2015/10/13/zapad-vospriyatie-i-stremlenie-emigrirovat/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].



RUSSIAN YOUTH AND THE MEDIA

Much has been said about the disruptive effects of the recent technological revolution that reshaped the ways people, especially younger generations (GenY and GenZ), communicate and interact with each other. Despite its growing international isolation, Russia remains part of the global economy and global internet, and, therefore, is not immune to this disruption. We have seen in the above sections that the Russian youth is capable of resisting the Kremlin's propaganda efforts. With young generations often described as "digital natives," the question arises: What is the role of the internet in authoritarian countries, like Russia, in shaping attitudes and beliefs?

Ellen Mickiewicz's 2014 study of the future Russian elite points out that the internet has profoundly shifted young people's "cognitive tools and norms," having, to a large extent, opened up their minds to diversity of the global information space. This view is confirmed by the national polls, which show that:

Russian youth relies on the internet as their main source of information, more so than any other age group

The November 2018 Levada poll, for example, suggests that 90 percent of Russians aged 18-24 are daily internet users (83 percent of those aged 25-39,

60 percent of those aged 40-55).⁴¹ The September 2018 WCIOM poll puts this number at 97 percent for the same youth group, with 68 percent using it mostly for work or education purposes.⁴²

However, the contents of their information consumption, are mostly related to entertainment—not hard-core journalism. The June 2017 WCIOM poll breaks down youth's interests on the internet, showing that 49 percent of those aged 18-24 are mostly interested in humor, 44 percent in sports, 36 percent in science, 32 percent in fashion and style. Politics interests only 14 percent of the young online audience.⁴³

Social networks are used for communication with

41 Levada Center, "On internet usage" (in Russian: «О пользовании интернетом»), November 13, 2018. <https://www.levada.ru/2018/11/13/polzovanie-internetom-2/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

42 WCIOM, "The spaces of internet: for work or for entertainment?" (in Russian: «Просторы интернета: для работы или развлечений?»), September 20, 2018. <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9322>

43 Kuznetsova, Y., Sociologists speak about the youth's low interest in politics on social media. (in Russian: «Социологи рассказали о низком интересе молодежи в соцсетях к политике»), RBC, June 2, 2017. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/02/06/2017/59304aea9a79474ab825cecb> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

friends, not for political discussions

This lack of interest in politics is further confirmed by the January 2018 Levada survey on the use of social networks in Russia across various age groups, including 18-29 year-olds.⁴⁴ When asked whether they are using social networks, and if yes, for what purpose, young Russians gave the following answers (only 3 percent said they did not use social networks): to communicate with friends (87 percent) and with relatives (59 percent), listen to music (51 percent), search for news and information (46 percent). Discussions of political topics are named only by 4 percent of the young respondents. However, 16 percent said they followed famous journalists (television and press) online.

The question about the type of news they were reading on social networks rendered the following answers: culture and entertainment (53 percent), health and medicine (35 percent), international politics (25 percent), economy (24 percent), and domestic politics (22 percent). To compare, people aged 30-49 and 50+ were more interested in social networks as news sources on domestic politics (32 and 35 percent, respectively) and international politics (29 and 28 percent, respectively).

Additionally, according to a 2017 study by political scientist Valeria Kasamara, the main news sources for college students are social networks: VKontakte (70.3 percent), Instagram (42.5 percent), Facebook, (8.9 percent), Odnoklassniki (9.7 percent); and online search engines, such as Google (39.6 percent) and Yandex.ru (31 percent). Only 21.4 percent of respondents named TV as their primary information source.⁴⁵

Television is still important, while trust in social networks declines

The 2018 report by Deloitte CIS Research Center, titled “Recovery of Tolerance for Internet Advertising: Media Consumption in Russia, 2018”⁴⁶ provides a broader picture of the media consumption habits in Russia. However, this information is not broken down into age categories. The report gives some examples of consumption differences among various

age groups, which allows us to make a few interesting observations.

First, according to the study, in 2018, internet has become the key source of information for news, analytics and official websites for Russians of all ages (42 percent).⁴⁷ Pensioners and unemployed are said to be among the least active media consumers, while it comes as no surprise that people aged 16–29 are significantly more active, and they tend to share news both online and during face-to-face contacts more often (+11 percent on the average).

Television still ranks as the second most important source of information for the majority of age categories, but its importance tends to increase with age: 41 percent of the respondents aged 16–24 call it important, as opposed to 75–76 percent of those aged over 45. However, according to subjective perception of all the respondents, their consumption of television has been decreasing over the last four years (i.e. down 7 percent compared to 2017).

Figure 1. Top-3 news and internet sources in Russia



Source: Deloitte CIS Research Center, 2018

Second, a more detailed look into the use of television reveals an interesting and somewhat surprising pattern. While television is much less popular with those aged 16–19 (13 percent below the average), in 2018, it became more popular with youngsters aged 20–24 (up 8 percent compared to the previous year)—a trend that is not, however, explained in the Deloitte report. It can be attributed, for example, to the trend mentioned above: TV becomes more popular with age.

Third, in 2018, social networks became less important as a source of news among youngsters aged 16–19 (down 13 percent) with a growing importance of news and analytics websites (up 18 percent). Overall, falling

44 Levada Center, “Social media” (in Russian: «Социальные сети»), March 6, 2018. <https://www.levada.ru/2018/03/06/sotsialnye-seti/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

45 The study was conducted in 109 Russian universities; 6,055 respondents participated in the survey. Cited in: Snegovaya, M. “Will Russia’s “Digital Natives” Change their Country’s Future?” Center for European Policy Analysis, April 2018. https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=5061 [Accessed on April 2, 2019].

46 Deloitte, “Recovery of tolerance for Internet advertising. Media consumption in Russia 2018,” Deloitte CIS Research Center. Moscow, 2018 <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ru/Documents/research-center/media-consumption-in-russia-2018-en.pdf> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

47 It is also noteworthy that overall media reach in Russia is estimated at 53 percent, with the highest reach in Moscow (60 percent), which means that roughly half of the Russian population are not paying attention to the media.

trust in social networks and blogs remains a strong trend in Russia: 10 percent trusted them in 2018—down by 4 percent since 2015.

Finally, a breakdown of social network preferences points to the platforms with the highest concentration of the young users. VKontakte and Instagram are the most popular social media among the youngest audience aged 16–24 (as are streaming services), with the number of users growing by 19 and 15 percent, respectively, compared to 2017. But these platforms become less popular as the respondents age and switch over to Facebook, Twitter and news websites—the older the age, the more popular these networks are.

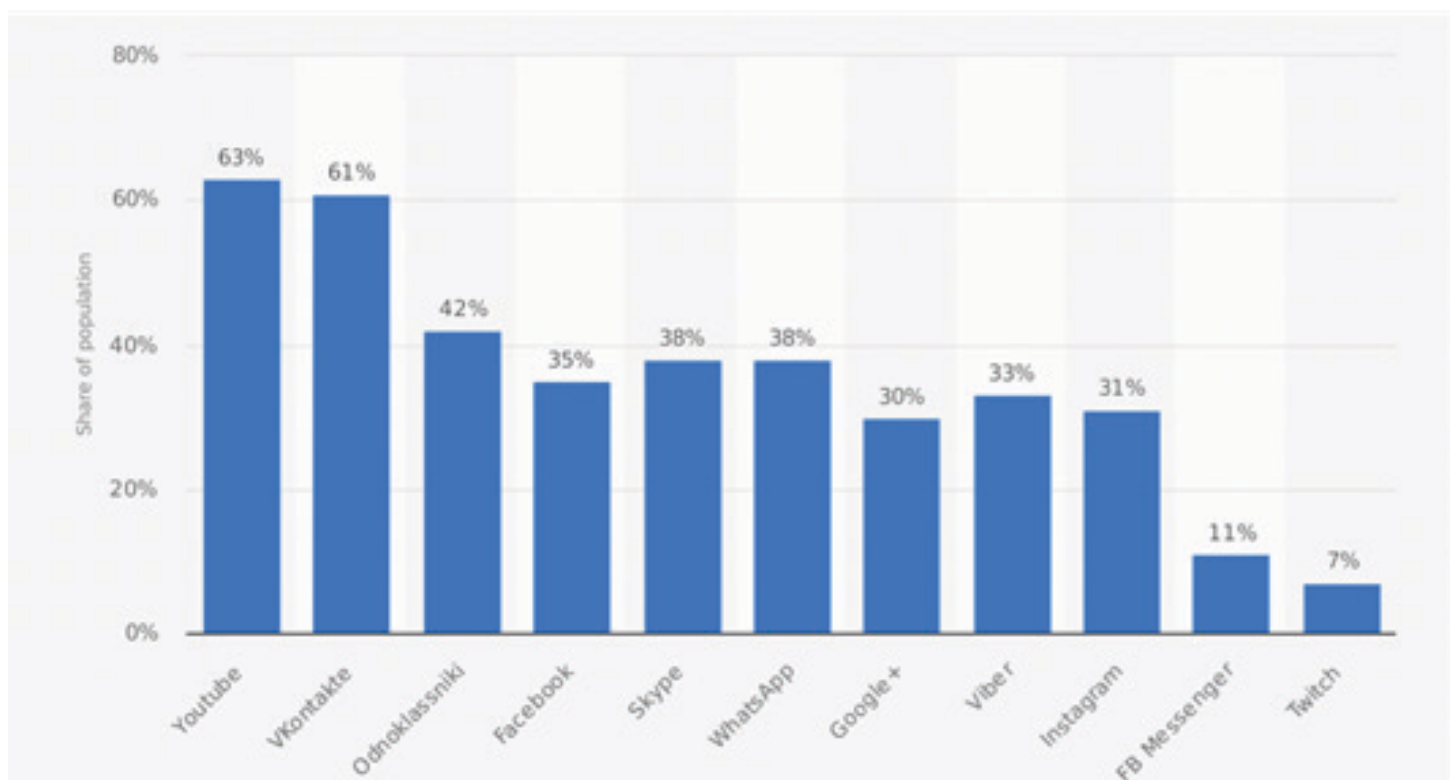
This brief overview of media preferences of the young Russians once again highlights the importance of internet as a source of information and as a counterweight to official propaganda. At the same time, media preferences reveal a low interest in politics among youth groups: despite having free access to the internet, Russian youngsters are not using it for political discussions, nor do they see protests as an effective tool of political change. This points to potential problems for the Russian youth, should its members decide to act on their frustration with Vladimir Putin, corruption, or the general state of affairs in the country.

Figure 2. Popularity of social networks among various age groups in Russia



Source: Deloitte CIS Research Center, 2018

Figure 3. Penetration of Social Networks in Russia (Q4, 2017)



Source: Statista, 2017

RUSSIAN YOUTH'S VIEWS ON THE WEST

Given the fact that young Russians are looking at the West as a potential emigration destination, while the Kremlin is pumping massive propaganda to discredit the Western-style liberal democracy and to build the image of the “foreign enemy,” a review of the Russian youth’s attitudes to Western countries (specifically, the United States) can offer an additional dimension to understanding the young generations. To put these attitudes into global context, we have also included a brief analysis of the key attitudes of the Western youth, comparing them to the Russian counterparts.

The country of “oversized importance”

Mickiewicz’s 2014 study provides crucial information about the views of the “future Russian elites” regarding **the West** in general and, specifically, **the United States**—the country of seemingly “oversized importance” to many Russians. The respondents in Mickiewicz’s study blame the West and the U.S. for Russia’s current woes. They believe that “the West has been successful not in exporting democracy, but a way of life and values of constant deceiving and fraudulent competition, scrambling for riches on the backs of others,” writes Mickiewicz. “The contribution of the West to today’s Russia ... is rampant corruption and monopolies of state property and natural resources by a small ring of vicious cronies.” Additionally, two participants in the focus groups elaborate that, in their opinion, the assistance of the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the destruction of trust among Russian and became “the source—symbolic and real—of the worst of Russian life.”⁴⁸

The heightened interest in the United States appears amazing to Mickiewicz who notes the lack of balance in the bilateral relationship: “However much or however little attention is paid to Russia by the United States, the very fact of it will be hugely magnified in Russia. The two countries have a widely asymmetrical interest in each other: these elite Russians consume all they can about the United States and mistakenly imagine that America’s interest in and coverage of Russia is similarly strong.”

This imbalance, which is not a new phenomenon, yields misperceptions on both sides and reflects a larger problem in the attitudes of the Russian elites toward the U.S. As Mickiewicz explains: “That intense searchlight fixed on America mistakenly expects equal light in return. That is why these young Russians are so irritated and disappointed when Western media at times get the facts wrong... They believe these mistakes happen on purpose and prove that,

for America, the Cold War is very much alive.”⁴⁹ It appears only natural that, despite the fact that most of the respondents find the United States an interesting and important country, only 17 out of 108 judged it as “positive” and “most influential.”⁵⁰

Russian youth’s views of the West are still more positive than those of other age groups

Despite these grievances about Russia’s imbalanced relations with the West, 44 percent of the Russian urban youth still favor the country’s future as a “Western-style market democracy” over other options, such as “Russia’s own unique way” or “socialist state like the USSR,” according to the 2011 Levada study.⁵¹

The more recent, October 2015 Levada poll⁵² on Russians’ attitude towards the West shows that 40 percent of Russians aged 18-29 had a favorable opinion of the “Western way of life,” as opposed to the average of 30 percent or 20 percent of the 50+ age group. In 2018, a Levada sociologist observed that about 60 percent of the Russians younger than 25 years old view the U.S. favorably—twice as many as average Russians.⁵³ In other words, this attitude has not been affected by the deterioration of Russia’s relations with the West over the recent years. At the same time, Levada’s expert cautiously underscores that many young Russians, while holding favorable opinions of the West, are still suspicious about the following ideas: “Western interests competing with Russian interests,” “the West intending to unfairly repress Russian influence at the world stage,” and “the West interfering in Russia’s domestic politics.”

YOUTH’S ATTITUDES IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Youth in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus: Looking for economic, social and political change

Now that we have a better understanding of the different groups existing under the broad term of the Russian youth and a clearer view of their values, attitudes (including toward the West), and media preferences, we can compare these groups with their counterparts in the former Soviet republics to control our research for cultural differences and the regional context.

49 Ibid, p. 30.

50 Ibid, p. 24.

51 Gudkov, et al., 2011.

52 See Table 33 in: Levada Center, “The West: Perception and striving for emigration,” (in Russian: «Запад»: восприятие и стремление эмигрировать»), October 13, 2015. <https://www.levada.ru/2015/10/13/zapad-vospriyatie-i-stremlenie-emigrirovat> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

53 Volkov, 2018.

48 Mickiewicz, 2014, pp. 42-43.

A 2018 study by Levada Center titled “Ideas about the future among youth people in large cities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus”⁵⁴ provides a crucial insight into the issue. One thousand respondents aged 18-35, living in large cities were polled in each country in September 2018 (see the methodology section of the report for full details). The results revealed a certain confluence of attitudes in some aspects while highlighting differences in others.

One dimension that was measured in the survey is the youth’s vision of the future. It turns out that most respondents in all three countries don’t plan their life beyond the short term of one to two years due to what they perceive as poor economic situation, potential rights violation and lack of the state support. All of these factors are perceived as more dire in Ukraine, compared to Russia and Belarus, with an additional reason—“everything is constantly changing in the country.” Meanwhile, the Belarusian youth is less concerned with the lack of the state support and more with difficulties in finding good jobs or with problems at work.

When asked about **their own future** in their respective countries, the attitudes in Russian and Ukraine were roughly split, with a small majority responding they were rather “calm and confident” (as opposed to “afraid or anxious”). Belarusians appeared the most confident in their feelings about their future. Interestingly, when asked about how they feel about the **future of their country**, the respondents revealed much more pessimistic views, especially in Ukraine, where almost 80 percent said they were pessimistic. In Russia, 67 percent were pessimistic (31 percent were optimistic), while in Belarus, the ratio was 58 to 40 percent.

Eighty-eight percent of young Ukrainians said they wanted “**fundamental, large-scale changes**” in their country—the highest number among all three countries, with 63 percent of Russians and 52 percent of Belarusians expressing the same view about their homes. Detailing the most desirable changes, the respondents in all three countries named higher living standards and increases in wages and pensions. Surprisingly, political change came second after the usual demands for economic and social improvements in both Ukraine and Russia—over 15 percent of the respondents said so. In Belarus, the demand for political change was voiced by about 7 percent.

According to the study, the most common responses to an open question in the category of political

change were: change of the power structure, the political line, the government, the president, and leadership. “In many cases, these responses go together with demands to fight corruption, oligarchs and to put an end to privileges government officials enjoy. Less frequent were calls for ‘free and fair elections’ and for good governance,” write the authors of the study.

In terms of their **model country**, young people in all three countries named Germany as the most attractive destination. In Russia, China takes the second place in top preferred countries, with United States, Japan, and Sweden taking the next four spots. In Ukraine, the top-5 list includes Poland, United States, Switzerland, and United Kingdom; while in Belarus, Germany is followed by Russia, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Despite the composition of the list, across all three countries, the respondents demonstrated strong pro-Western and pro-European orientation.

As for **emigration intent**, it is noticeably stronger among young Belarusians (59 percent) and young Ukrainians (56 percent) compared to young Russians (44 percent). The respondents’ reasons for potential leaving their respective countries vary: while the main reason across all three countries is a better quality of life abroad, 44 percent of Russians, 43 percent of Ukrainians and 25 percent of Belarusians name domestic politics as another important force driving their emigration sentiment.

At the same time, the study showed that most of the youngsters in all three countries expressed **no interest in politics**: “They either said it straightforwardly by claiming they have no interest in politics or found the question difficult to answer,” note the authors. Forty-two percent of Russians, 31 percent of Ukrainians and only 25% of Belarusians were able to (“or wanted to”) voice their political preferences.

At the same time, interestingly enough, the youth has shown **strong willingness to engage in civil activities** to improve things in their countries. The respondents were ready to vote, sign petitions, file complaints and submit proposals to the authorities (which raises the question of what they consider “politics”). More than a half of Russians and Ukrainians, while slightly less than a half of Belarusians, said they were willing to participate in civil and political organizations. Additionally, one-third of Russians and Ukrainians and one-fifth of Belarusians were ready to take part in street protests and demonstrations.

The study also found that the young people’s **political opinions** in all three countries fall into two broad categories—supporters of the current government and supporters of a liberal democracy. An additional third category for the Russians and Belarusians was supporters of the communist and socialist views, while for Ukraine—beside those who have no political preferences—it was those “who claimed to be against

54 Volkov, D., Goncharov, S. Ideas about the future among youth people in large cities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Study by the Levada-Center (as part of the project titled “How the New Generation Envisions the Future”). The Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom, 2018. <http://zukunftsbild.nemtsovfund.org/en/survey-en/> [Accessed on April 2, 2019]

all known political schools of thought.” “Monarchists and conservatives” is another group gaining visible support among young Russians.

In terms of concrete **political leaders**, the top five leaders named by the young Russians were: Vladimir Putin (11 percent), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (8 percent), Alexei Navalny (6 percent), Pavel Grudinin (4 percent) and Gennady Zyuganov (3%). The top three named by Ukrainians were: Yulia Tymoshenko (5 percent), Petro Poroshenko (3 percent), and Yevheniy Murayev (2 percent); for Belarusians they were Alexander Lukashenko (2 percent), Sergei Rumas (1 percent), and Hanna Kanapackaja (0.3 percent). These lists highlight the fact that, with a few exceptions, current heads of states or veteran politicians dominate in the young people’s minds.

The Kazakhstan Youth: conformist but individualistic, supportive of market economy but not Western values

Given recent political developments in Kazakhstan, where President Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down after nearly 30 years in power,⁵⁵ a few words need to be said about that country’s youth, especially since Nazarbayev’s power play is viewed by some observers as a potential scenario for Vladimir Putin in 2024.⁵⁶

An upcoming volume edited by Marlene Laruelle, a research professor at the George Washington University and an expert on the post-Soviet space, will present the results of the study of the so-called Nazarbayev Generation in Kazakhstan. Some preliminary observations made by Laruelle in a recent article⁵⁷ provide contextual richness for our study of the Russian youth.

According to Laruelle, the Nazarbayev Generation is “quite conformist in its life goals: it believes in family values, marriage, having children, healthy living, and material comfort.” This is not a “revolutionary generation” as they do not challenge their parents’ values and ways of life, trust family more than any other institution, and overwhelmingly (more than 90 percent) view their relationships with their parents positively. At the same time, they are more

individualistic than older generations of Kazakhs and hold positive views of the market economy, but are hardly concerned with social inequality—they seem quite happy with society as it is. Their support for competitive markets and entrepreneurship does not translate in support for democratic values either.

Lack of interest in politics is what young Kazakhs and young Russians have in common, but the former are much less attracted to the Western values than the latter. Interestingly, only 5 percent of young Kazakhs considered the United States a good model for development, 13 percent preferred Europe, 22 percent favored Russia, while 43 percent said a unique path for Kazakhstan would be their first choice. As the transition has begun in Kazakhstan, it would be interesting to see how the upcoming change will affect the country’s youth.

55 Kazakhstan leader Nazarbayev resigns after three decades, BBC, March 19, 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47628854> [Accessed on April 2, 2019]

56 Bershidsky, L. Kazakh Strongman Shows Putin a Path for Staying in Power. Bloomberg, March 19, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-03-19/kazakhstan-s-nazarbayev-shows-putin-how-to-stay-in-power> [Accessed on April 2, 2019]

57 Laruelle, M. Nazarbayev Generation. Kazakhstan’s Youth, National Identity Transformations and their Political Consequences. Voices of Central Asia, March 21, 2019 <http://voicesoncentralasia.org/nazarbayev-generation-kazakhstans-youth-national-identity-transformations-and-their-political-consequences> [Accessed on April 2, 2019]



II. RUSSIAN STATE vs RUSSIAN YOUTH

FROM “IDUSHCHIE VMESTE” TO ROSMOLODEZH

The analysis of the Kremlin’s youth policy is central to this section. It is particularly pertinent to this report since there is a long history of the Russian authorities supporting organized youth movements for their own political goals. Under Vladimir Putin, youth movements have been “called into existence” to be assigned with specific tasks, such as “launching cyber campaigns against domestic and foreign targets, organizing public rallies in support of a certain political course or against another civil movement...”⁵⁸

Since 2000, the Kremlin has launched numerous youth initiatives, most of which supplemented certain government policies, but essentially were used to strengthen the regime, grow a new generation of the loyal elite, and keep potential dissent in check. There were the infamous pro-Kremlin youth movements, such as “Walking Together” (*Idushchie vmeste*) and “Ours” (*Nashi*, both currently defunct), or the “Young Guard” (*Molodaya Gvardiya*), the youth wing of the

United Russia party. Inside the Russian government, there are several bodies working for the Kremlin’s youth policy. Implementing this policy is the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (*Rosmolodezh*) that oversees various youth programs and activities, a lot of which have to do with fostering patriotism. *Rosmolodezh* even has a designated Russian Center of the Civil and Patriotic Education of Children and Youth (*Rospatriottsentr*). Until 2014, *Rosmolodezh*’s signature annual event was the Seliger National Youth Forum (organized with *Nashi*) that would bring together tens of thousands of young Russians. Its successor, a new forum called “Territory of Senses” was launched by *Rosmolodezh* and the Young Guard in 2015 and is held in the Russian city of Klyazma.

On the surface, it appears that the Kremlin pursues a broad strategy of engaging the youth, but a closer look reveals many flaws and inconsistencies. What is at the core of this policy?

An initial vision of Putin’s youth policy emerged in the early days of his presidency back in 2000. The idea of creating pro-government youth movements was put forward by then-Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov who appointed his close ally Vassily Yakemenko to lead *Idushchie Vmeste*, the first pro-president youth movement. The project was very active in 2000-2001: the movement held numerous demonstrations, organized events, participated in other activities in support of Putin’s policies and attacked his opponents. This top-down pro-Kremlin youth mobilization movement was something unseen since the Soviet Komsomol.

⁵⁸ Linde, F., “Future Empire: State-Sponsored Eurasian Identity Promotion among Russian Youth in Eurasia 2.0 Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media. Ed. Suslov M., Bassinets, M. Lexington Books, 2016. P. 149.

In 2005-2007, *Idushchie Vmeste* slowly gave way to *Nashi*—a new iteration of the same idea. The movement was also chaired by Yakemenko. The main goal of *Nashi*, launched in 2005, was not only to build a mechanism of mass mobilization of the youth, but also to solve specific problems of the regime: cultivate a new generation of loyal political establishment, prevent a “color revolution” in Russia, and “make Russia great nashagain.”⁵⁹ Like its predecessor, *Nashi* was criticized as a modern version of Komsomol⁶⁰ for its colors and symbols, as well as for the fact that its membership was viewed as a “a stepping stone to jobs in government and state corporations.”⁶¹

In September 2007, at the peak of patriotic mobilization during the parliamentary election campaign,⁶² Yakemenko was appointed chairman of the re-established State Committee on Youth Affairs—the government body that had existed throughout 1990s but had not been known for any policy achievements. It was supposed to be eliminated in May 2000 during the cabinet reform under Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, but instead was transformed into a department at the Ministry of Education. In 2008, the Committee became the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (*Rosmolodezh*).

At its heyday, the Kremlin’s youth policy relied on the good old method of “carrots and sticks.”

The carrots: Career prospects for the loyal youth

Young people were lured into pro-Putin youth organizations and later into Rosmolodezh’s programs and initiatives by promises of career opportunities within the vast government system. Additional benefits, such as covering young people’s travel

and training expenses through pro-government structures, were also offered. For a while, the Seliger Youth Forum had been one of the most prestigious event for the youth, where young Russians could meet celebrities, prominent businessmen, and top politicians, including Putin. Many present-day government officials were able to jump-start their careers in the Putin system through the opportunities provided by the Kremlin’s youth organizations in the 2000s.

The sticks: Intimidation and attacks against the “enemies”

Youth organizations led by Yakemenko were harshly criticized for their intimidation campaigns against opposition activists and even foreign diplomats, including British ambassador Tony Brenton⁶³ and Estonian ambassador Marina Kaljurand.⁶⁴ After these incidents, observers were debating whether the Kremlin used *Nashi* as a “hard counter-force” to deter potential protests or to fight against the opposition in case the protests turned violent. While there are some reasons to believe that this scenario had been discussed, in reality, it was never realized.

The deterrence tactics didn’t work either. In December 2011, Russia saw one of the largest protests in its modern history, which resulted in, among other things, firing of Surkov. The Kremlin’s youth policy, aimed at engaging the youth to control it, failed. *Nashi* turned out to be ineffective in containing, let alone countering anti-Putin sentiment that had been growing since the 2008 financial crisis. The intimidation tactics used against opposition proved inefficient, too. In June 2012, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev fired Yakemenko, and *Nashi* was dissolved soon after that.

Yakemenko was directly blamed for the failures of the youth policy, which the Kremlin saw as one of the reasons for the 2011-2012 protests—this view was reported by *Kommersant-Vlast*, whose journalists cited numerous anonymous sources inside the Kremlin. The quotes were widely believed to be a sanctioned leak of the official version of the events.⁶⁵ However, there had been other indications of the rift between Yakemenko and top government officials

59 In 2008, an article by Kommersant cited an anonymous source in the presidential administration who said, referring to *Nashi*, that “cheering gopota was no longer needed.” The source was later revealed as Natalia Timakova, spokesperson for then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. See: Savina E., Taratuta Y., Shevchuk M. *Nashi Became Strangers* (in Russian: «Наши стали чужими»). Kommersant, January 29, 2008. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/846635> [Accessed on February 13, 2019].

60 Lucas, E. *The New Cold War: Putin’s Russia and the Threat to the West*. 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014. pp. 102–105.

61 Myers, S.L. Youth Groups Created by Kremlin Serve Putin’s Cause. *New York Times*, June 8, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/world/europe/08moscow.html> [Accessed on February 27, 2019]

62 In the fall of 2007, Vladimir Putin was at the top of the United Russia’s ballot, which helped that party win the elections with 64 percent of the vote. In November 2007, Putin gave his infamous “Luzhniki speech,” slamming the West, the 1990s, and supporters of democracy as “enemies of the state.” That period had arguably been the peak of pro-Putin mobilization before 2008-2009 financial crisis exposed problems with the Putin regime, which have only been piling up since then.

63 Stewart, W. British Ambassador to Moscow: “I was besieged by Putin thugs.” *Daily Mail*, September 27, 2008. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1063227/British-Ambassador-Moscow-I-be-sieged-Putin-thugs.html> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

64 Osadchuk, S. *Nashi Youth Chase Estonian Envoy*. *Moscow Times*, May 3, 2007. <http://old.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/2007/5/article/nashi-youth-chase-estonian-envoy/197313.html> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

65 Kashin, O., Vinokurova, Y. Our goal is to distract the youth from politics (in Russian: «Наша задача — отвлечь молодежь от политики»). *Kommersant-Vlast*, May 21, 2012. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1930532> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

before his resignation.⁶⁶

Rosmolodezh takes over

Since *Nashi* flopped, *Rosmolodezh* was consequently reduced into just another bureaucratic agency, stripped of much of its political influence and authority over the youth policy. Since 2012, it has been headed by low-profile officials. A new annual event (“Territory of Senses”) that replaced Seliger Youth Forum has been toned down compared to the *Nashi*-style aggressive brainwashing and mobilization of the youth. But the Kremlin continues to employ tactics of physical attacks against opposition activists, although these days it acts through different, ideology-driven proxy structures, like SERB (South East Radical Block) or NOD (National Liberation Movement),⁶⁷ which are not youth organizations.

At present, the Kremlin seems to have abandoned its attempts to build another mass youth movement. Some pro-Kremlin youth groups still exist, but their influence is limited. United Russia’s arm, Youth Guard, is arguably the most influential of them, still offering career opportunities for young loyalists, but its scale cannot be compared to the magnitude achieved by *Nashi* at its peak. Besides, the United Russia’s fading popularity and tainted image of the party of “thieves and crooks” further undermine Youth Guard’s potential.

However, despite the eventual failure of *Nashi*, the movement triggered a major shift in the minds of many young people: activism is no longer seen as marginal business. After *Nashi* was shut down, its former leaders, or “commissioners” (*комиссары*), successfully pursued their own projects, most of which are currently funded through *Rosmolodezh*. The 2016 HSE study named a number of such projects that the youth across different Russian regions is

aware of: “Stop, Boor!” («СтопХам»),⁶⁸ “Piggies Are Against” («Хрюши против»),⁶⁹ and “Eat Russian” («Ешь российское»).⁷⁰

A new phenomenon

What happened on 26 March, 2017, when a series of mass protest swept away across Russia, once again, caught the Kremlin by surprise. According to various reports, between 36,000 and 88,000 people in almost a hundred cities took to the streets to protest against government corruption.⁷¹ Over a thousand people were detained on that day in Moscow alone; nine of them eventually faced criminal prosecution.

As many observers point out, the protest was triggered by Alexei Navalny’s viral documentary (“Don’t Call Him Dimon”⁷²) that detailed Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev’s involvement in large-scale corruption. The crucial factor was not just the mind-blowing facts of this investigation, but rather its format and visual presentation. As one sociologist noted, the documentary accurately captured the youth’s understanding of how such stories should be told—digitally: “It was done in an interesting, engaging, tough way—in a good sense of the word; it was very smart and sensible.”⁷³

Another reason why the documentary resonated so deeply with those young Russians is a very relatable story about justice, which underpinned the investigation. According to the research done by the Center of Youth Studies at the Higher School of Economics, the problem of justice and the right to certain things was raised incredibly timely. In fact, the Kremlin inadvertently played a role in stimulating this sense of justice by publicizing high-profile arrests of government officials on embezzlement, bribery and other anticorruption charges (However, the Kremlin’s anticorruption agenda has little to do with real justice—instead, it serves as a tool for propaganda,

66 In February 2012, at the peak of the mass protests, Vitaly Mutko, then-Minister of Sports suggested that “Youth agency shall be led by someone really young” (Yakemenko was 40 at the time). See: RBC, “Leader of the ruling party Vassily Yakemenko is fired from the authorities” (in Russian: «Лидера Партии власти Василия Якеменко уволили из власти»), June 13, 2012. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/13/06/2012/5703f8ef9a7947ac81a68f50> [Accessed on February 27, 2019]. A month prior to that, Yakemenko gave an interview sharply criticizing an outgoing president Dmitry Medvedev, potentially sealing his fate. See: Azar, I. Until buildings catch fire. Interview with head of Rosmolodezh Vassily Yakemenko (in Russian: «Пока не загорятся здания. Интервью с главой Росмолодежи Василием Якеменко»), Lenta.ru, January 17, 2012. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2012/01/17/jakemenko/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

67 Proxy structures specifically created for physical attacks on opposition and event disruptions, a function largely performed by the *Nashi* movement. For more information about SERB and NOD, see (in Russian): <https://ovdinfo.org/articles/2016/10/08/lyudi-s-zhidkostyu-nod-i-drugie-prokremlevskie-provokatory> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

68 Launched as a federal program of the *Nashi* movement in 2010, it targeted people who violated road regulations; it was shut down in September 2018 by the Moscow City Court.

69 Another offspring of the *Nashi*, “Piggies” were launched in 2010 to fight against substandard and defective products in grocery stores and supermarkets.

70 The project was launched in 2015 through the grant of the Russian Youth Union and focused on promoting Russian food and exposing banned products illegally acquired by the grocery stores under the countersanctions regime.

71 OVD Info, “The 26 March case: how Russia is cracking down on freedom of assembly,” openDemocracy, December 19, 2017. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/ovd-info/26-march-russia-protest> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

72 Anticorruption Foundation, “Don’t Call Him ‘Dimon’,” March 2, 2017 <https://fbk.info/english/english/post/304/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

73 Galkina, Y. Elena Omelchenko: “Very good children” (in Russian: «Очень хорошие дети»). The Village, March 27, 2017. <https://www.the-village.ru/village/city/situation-comment/260770-school-protests> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

“politics of fear,” hijacking the opposition’s agenda, etc.). For example, a widely covered arrest in November 2016 of former Minister of Economy Alexei Ulyukayev, who was charged with receiving a \$2 million bribe,⁷⁴ set the tone for the public discourse on the matter. Conversations around justice inevitably lead to questions about equality and access to wealth, education, career opportunities. As many youth studies show, these are crucial issues for adolescents, whose core values are normally shaped at that age.⁷⁵

The momentum created by the March 26, 2017 protest continued into a series of demonstrations: April 29, 2017 (Open Russia’s “Fed up,” or *Nadoel*, an anti-Putin protest), June 12, 2017 (another anticorruption protest organized by Navalny), a few smaller protests on October 7, 2017 (on Putin’s birthday) and November 5, 2017 (following the national Unity Day). Protests spilled further into 2018 that was marked by Voters’ Boycott marches of January 28, an April 30 protest against the Kremlin’s decision to block Telegram (a popular messenger in Russia), a May 5 protest against Putin’s inauguration for the fourth presidential term, and finally a series of protests and rallies against the pension reform in July-September. Young people featured prominently in many of these demonstrations.

These developments is yet another proof that the Kremlin’s youth policy with its Soviet-style propaganda, heavy-handed approach and coercive tactics is failing. The Kremlin’s reaction to the 2017-2018 protests was predictable. Beyond the usual outburst of propaganda, mass arrests and persecutions against activist, the Kremlin took a few concrete steps. First, right after Vladimir Putin’s re-election in 2018 (ironically, the youth policy was one of the pillars of his campaign⁷⁶), *Rosmolodezh* was transferred under the direct command of the Russian government—a move that elevated this agency’s status. Second, the oversight of the youth policy was commissioned to Sergei Kiriienko, the current Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration, in coordination, on the highest level, directly with Dmitry

Medvedev.⁷⁷ Third, it has been recently reported that *Rosmolodezh*’s funding for 2019 increased by seven times compared to 2018.⁷⁸

On a separate front, a youth movement called the “Youth Army” overseen by the Defense Ministry has been reportedly elevated with an official goal of “preparing the next generation for military service.” But critics argue that the real purpose of early military and patriotic training of the Russian teenagers, whose numbers in the movement amount to half a million members, is to carve a loyal base for the regime.⁷⁹

All these actions show the Kremlin’s concern with the problem. Finally, the Russian State Duma banned minors (younger than 18 years old in Russia) to participate in the unsanctioned protests under a new law passed in December 2018.⁸⁰

77 Tovkaylo, M., Mukhametshina, E., et al. After the series of protests, *Rosmolodezh* has been subordinated directly to the government. (In Russian: «После серии митингов Росмолодежь переподчинили напрямую правительству»). *Vedomosti*, May 15, 2018. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2018/05/15/769587-putin-poruchil-medvedevu-zanyatsya-molodezhnoi-politikoi> [Accessed on February 27, 2019]

78 “*Rosmolodezh*’s funding for 2019 increased sevenfold in 2019 compared to previous year” (in Russian: “Росмолодежь” получила на 2019 год бюджет в семь раз больше, чем в прошлом году). *Current Time*, March 21, 2019. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/rosmolodezh-money-grant-russia-kremlin-budget/29834543.html> [Accessed on April 2, 2019]

79 Gershkovich, E. Russia’s Fast-Growing ‘Youth Army’ Aims to Breed Loyalty to the Fatherland. *The Moscow Times*, April 17, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/17/russias-fast-growing-youth-army-aimst-to-breed-loyalty-to-the-fatherland-a65256> [Accessed on April 17, 2019]

80 Russia Outlaws Youth Protestors, *Moscow Times*, December 18, 2018. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/12/28/russia-outlaws-youth-protestors-a63996> [Accessed on February 27, 2019]

74 Russian Economy Minister Ulyukayev charged with \$2m bribe, *BBC*, November 15, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37983744> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

75 Galkina Y., 2017.

76 Balmforth, T. Young People And Factory Workers: Launch Of Putin’s Reelection Bid Hints At Campaign Strategy. *RFL/RL*, December 6, 2017 <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-russia-reelection-strategy-analysis/28901505.html> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].



THE KREMLIN'S PRINCIPLES

To understand the Kremlin's youth policy in further detail, we review an official document titled "Principles of the State Youth Policy until 2025,"⁸¹ which was approved by the Russian government on November 29, 2014. It cannot be considered a guideline for the actual policy instruments detailed below—rather, it is a set of vague proclamations and platitudes about the "importance of youth to the national development." A few points are noteworthy:

- The key problem of the youth policy, as stated in this document, is not the government's failure to create a favorable environment for the youth, but a "destructive information influence" on the young people. (The source of this influence is not specified, but insinuation is made that it is external).
- Another crucial problem, according to the Russian government, is the "declining size of the young population, which may have a negative impact on the socio-economic development and the labor

market." The youth in this context is viewed in purely numeric, accounting terms, which is a telling sign in itself.

- The document is fraught with contradictions: for example, whereas the key goal of the policy is stated as "assistance to full-fledged self-fulfillment" of the Russian youth, the suggested set of policy tools barely mention creating conditions for such self-fulfillment.
- By contrast, policy tools range from offering patronage and guidance to ensure that the youth exercises the correct form of patriotism (patriotic education is predictably a significant component of the Principles), adheres to "moral values" and "contributes to the social and economic development." Little or no room is left for the measures that would encourage self-fulfillment.
- The paternalistic message that this document sends is clear: it is not "what you can do for your country" but "what your country can do for you."

What the existence of the Principles suggests is that the Kremlin does have a formal youth policy. It has learned from past mistakes and no longer relies on the aggressive style of youth mobilization of the Surkov/Yakemenko era. The manipulative style and

⁸¹ The official website of the government of the Russian Federation, "On the approval of the Principles of the state youth policy until 2025" (in Russian: «Об утверждении Основ государственной молодежной политики до 2025 года»), November 29, 2014. <http://government.ru/docs/15965/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

the top-to-bottom nature of the pro-Kremlin youth movements became too obvious, which is why they started to breed resentment among younger generations at the end. The Principles offer a more flexible youth policy, which is better aligned with the Kremlin's hybrid strategy of maintaining control over the Russian society in the times of Putin's fading popularity. This strategy is not formulated in any written document but it manifests through specific actions by the Kremlin and can be broken down into several key approaches.

Career mobilization

This has been a classic tool of the Kremlin's youth policy since early 2000s. At present, it is not limited to the social lifts operating through concrete youth organizations, but is used as part of the official propaganda: loyalty to the system pays off. If you are loyal, if you stay out of the opposition activities and avoid protests, you will get an opportunity to build a successful career and make a good living. But if you disobey, these opportunities will be out of reach.

This approach works, as the dilemma resonates with many young Russians who prefer a safe and stable career path in the government or in a state corporation over joining the private sector or taking individual risks to build their own business.⁸² Not just the Kremlin's message, but disillusionments in the private sector following the consecutive economic crises (2008-2009 and 2014-2018) are driving the youth's choice.

Tribal "patriotic" mobilization

"Patriotic" mobilization aimed at drawing division lines of the tribal nature is another crucial approach, which is also closely intertwined with the messages spread by the Kremlin's propaganda:

- You may not like something about the government, but this is your country, and it's unpatriotic to go against it, particularly when external forces are uniting against Russia and the country is "under attack";
- Criticizing the government in this challenging time equals to "working for the enemy";
- "Which team do you play for?"—this simplistic question triggers a "friend or foe" identification, which follows the sports fans' logic of staying loyal to their team, no matter what.

While this approach is used by the Kremlin across all

age groups, young Russians are susceptible to it due to their own nascent patriotic sentiment.

Promoting disbelief, disillusionment, disengagement

Another Kremlin's approach to the youth has to do with encouraging disengagement. This *laissez-faire* attitude is how the Russian government prefers the public to react to the country's problems—instead of participating or protesting. The promoted messages are:

- "If you don't like something about your country, leave" (encouraging disengagement and actual or "internal" emigration⁸³);
- "Politics are dirty everywhere," "Western democracy is just a façade" (sowing disbelief and disillusionment in the Western political system).

A large part of the Kremlin's propaganda has focused on "exposing" the West, imposing false equivalence between Russia and the West and proving that Western democratic institutions "don't work," just as they didn't work in Russia in the 1990s. By portraying the West as turbulent and unstable, the Kremlin elevates the idea of a "strong leader," which can resonate with the Russian youth due to their lack of trust in politics in general.

"Politics of fear"

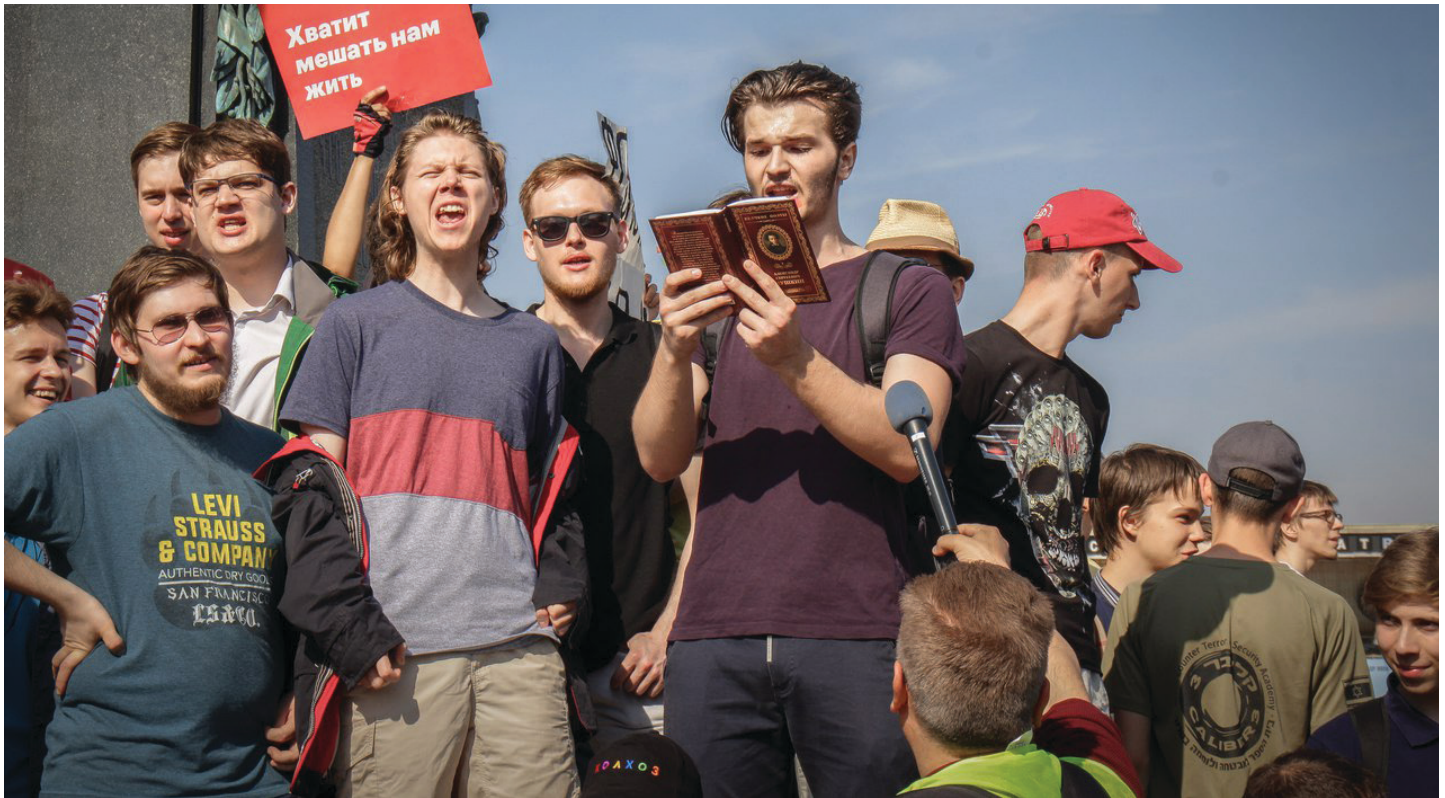
Intimidation of dissenters, pressure campaigns and target repressions have become central elements of the regime's politics. The message of this approach is clear: either you stay away from politics (and protests), or you will face serious consequences—from ruining your career to endangering your family or your own freedom and even life.

"Family politics"

This approach is based on encouraging older, more conservative generations of Russians who are more loyal to Putin (see poll numbers in Part I), to put pressure on their younger family members and thus prevent them from participating in political activities and protests. It is a deliberate and widely-used tactic. For example, analysis of the contents of Alexei Navalny and his political allies' meetings with supporters across Russian regions in 2017-2018, shows that this issue is often raised by younger activists who strive for independence and join the opposition movement despite severe pressure and

⁸² See, for example, this article based on the Career.ru polls: Podzub, M. Youth prefers state structures to private companies (in Russian: «Молодежь предпочитает госструктуры частным компаниям»). Vedomosti, June 7, 2016 <https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/articles/2016/06/07/644411-molodezh-predpochitaet> [Accessed February 27, 2019].

⁸³ "Internal emigration" refers to a state of recognition that you can't influence changes in your country, and making a deliberate choice of escaping into private life and avoiding political participation.



brainwashing from their older relatives.⁸⁴ The problem is quite serious: many young people are forced to leave the opposition movement and quit protesting just to calm down the situation at home. This issue is arguably equal to direct repressions.

Since the 2017-2018 protests, the propaganda aimed at older family members of the young protesters has only intensified: the state media constantly stress that the “youth is being deliberately manipulated” as part of the “efforts coordinated from abroad” and that these young protesters will face persecution or other serious problems.

IS PUTIN WINNING ANY HEARTS AND MINDS?

The Kremlin’s youth policy is focused on constraining the youth and preventing it from joining the opposition, but this policy lacks a positive agenda: most of the Kremlin’s efforts focus on underscoring the downsides of protesting and political participation.

Career opportunities are fading away

84 At the meeting with Navalny’s supporters in the town of Biysk in Siberia, one of the authors of this report, Vladimir Milov, was asked specifically about the pressure from relatives by a young girl. Watch the video (from 56:15) at: The Milov Team, Vladimir Milov’s speech at Navalny’s campaign office in Biysk, YouTube, November 2, 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITkn8qnZy_I [Accessed February 27, 2019].

Career opportunities might be the only exception to this rule but in recent years even this option has been devalued due to growing nepotism and favoritism in the government and state corporations. The most recent example is the appointment of Dmitry Patrushev, son of the former FSB chief and current Secretary of the National Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, to the position of Minister of Agriculture in May 2018. Young people can’t help but see this preferential treatment and face the fact that the existing system leaves them with grim perspectives.

For example, the September 2018 WCIOM poll⁸⁵ on career opportunities for the youth shows the following results:

- Answering the question “Is it easy for young people today to make a career or achieve success in business,” the total of 80 percent of the respondents across all age groups—the number that had hardly changed since 2007—said, “Very difficult” or “Almost impossible” (the number of those who gave the latter answer is 27 percent, an all-time high). The total of 14 percent thought it was “Relatively easy” or “Very easy” (the latter answer is given by 2 percent—a historic low).
- Moreover, zero percent of the young people aged 18-24 answered “Very easy” to the question—

85 WCIOM, “Professional career of the modern youth: assessment of the situation” (in Russian: «Профессиональная карьера современной молодежи: оценки ситуации»), September 4, 2018. <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9289> [Accessed February 27, 2019].

the most pessimistic response across all age groups; while about the same 80 percent thought it was “Very difficult” or “Almost impossible.”

The downsides of the Kremlin’s “containment” policy for the youth are plentiful, likely making the Putin regime unsustainable in the long term. Below we name some of them.

Economy promises no positives

According to Rosstat, Russia has finished 2018 with negative real disposable incomes (-0,2 percent compared to 2017) for the fifth year in a row. Even according to official projections for 2019 (that normally tend to be overly optimistic), Russia’s growth of real disposable incomes will not exceed 1 percent, year-on-year. Lack of growth of real incomes for six consecutive years should be a serious concern, but the government doesn’t seem to care—no major changes to its economic policy are being considered.

It is particularly disturbing for the Russian youth whose unemployment rate is much higher compared to other age groups—about 30 percent in the 15-19 age group and about 15 percent among those aged 20-24, as opposed to the average of 5-6 percent across all age groups.⁸⁶ Moreover, despite lower wages, young Russians were among the leading borrowers of new loans throughout 2018 among all age groups,⁸⁷ which creates serious risks for the youth, should the economy continue to stagnate or decline.

Lack of career opportunities for the youth mentioned above doesn’t bode well for the economy either. Nepotism and favoritism pervading state structures at the federal level is widely replicated at the regional and local levels, leaving little room and no incentives for the regime outsiders.

Growing government pressure on a wide range of issues—from internet to economic freedom—irritates the youth

In terms the Kremlin’s idea of potentially **disconnecting Russia from the global web**, the

January WCIOM poll⁸⁸ shows that only 29 percent of Russians aged 18-24 support an autonomous version of RuNet, with the average of 36 percent across all age groups; 68 percent of youngsters prefer a global network uniting the world, with the average of 52 percent.

The **new taxes on the self-employed**, introduced by the Russian government in November 2018,⁸⁹ are rejected by the majority of Russians, and while there is hardly any specific polling data on the opinions of the youth on this issue, we assume that they are at least no different.

For example, the December 2018 FOM poll⁹⁰ shows that 56 percent of Russians, who are self-employed or personally know someone who is self-employed, reject the new tax (the average for all the respondents is 47 percent). According to the November 2018 poll⁹¹ by Rabota.ru, one of Russia’s largest job hunting websites, 50 percent of Russians disapprove of the new tax, while only 13 percent are willing to register as officially self-employed. Additionally, the July 2018 survey⁹² by Tatarstan’s business ombudsman offers some specific data on the attitudes of the young people aged 18-35: many of them reject the limitations of the classic 9-to-6 working day, preferring freelancing, which makes them subject to a new tax.

International isolation goes against the youth’s aspirations

As discussed above, Russian youth holds a more favorable view of the West compared to older generations, despite the propaganda efforts and the crisis in Russia’s relations with Western countries. Putin’s anti-Western policy and rhetoric contradict this view and repel many young Russians.

88 WCIOM, “Internet independent from the United States: Illusion or reality?” (in Russian: «Независимый от США интернет: иллюзия или реальность?»), January 29, 2019. <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116657> [Accessed February 27, 2019].

89 Proshkin, M., Everyone has a right to a tax (in Russian: «Каждый имеет право на налог»), Novaya Gazeta, November 28, 2018. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/11/28/78735-kazhdy-imeet-pravo-na-nalog> [Accessed February 27, 2019].

90 FOM, “Tax for self-employed” (in Russian: «Налог для самозанятых»), December 5, 2018. <https://fom.ru/Rabota-i-dom/14141> [Accessed February 27, 2019].

91 Rabota.ru, “Only 13 percent of Russian are ready to admit they are self-employed” (in Russian: «Только 13 percent россиян готовы признать себя самозанятыми»), November 8, 2018. <https://www.rabota.ru/articles/career/samozanatie-opros-2018-5198> [Accessed February 27, 2019].

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86 Rosstat, “Labor and Employment in Russia,” 2017. http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1139916801766 [Accessed February 27, 2019]; “Workforce, Employment and Unemployment/Unemployed/Percentage of Unemployed by Age Groups,” 2017. http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b17_36/lssWWW.exe/Stg/01-62.doc [Accessed February 27, 2019].

87 According to the National Bureau of Credit Histories (NBCH), mortgage loans for Russians aged under 25 are growing faster (14,5 percent) than for any other group (9,7 percent on average). See: NBCH, February 14, 2019. <https://www.nbki.ru/company/news/?id=22703>. Also, according to NBCH, Russians aged under 25 are the second fastest-growing group by issue of new credit cards. See: NBCH, November 23, 2018. <https://www.nbki.ru/company/news/?id=21861>. [Both accessed February 27, 2019].

“Traditional values” don’t fit the youth culture

As many polls have shown, young Russians are less supportive of the Kremlin’s push for “traditional values”—even more so among younger groups aged 18-22. Fifty-four percent of the latter group identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, compared to 60 percent among people aged 28-30.⁹³ Similar developments are observed among younger Muslim groups as well. If this dynamic continues, we can expect further decline in the numbers of self-identified believers among younger generations of Russians.

Political leadership is increasingly seen as “outdated”

This is one of the most important, albeit harder to measure downsides of the Putin regime as seen by the Russian youth. Our analysis has shown that young Russians have all reasons to believe that their generational gap with the country’s leadership cannot be bridged. Top government officials are well over 60, and many of them will be over 70 by 2020. Their signaling system makes things even worse: the government’s rigid and bureaucratic communication style does not win any supporters among the youth, while Putin’s claims that he does not use internet appear obsolete.

According to Elena Shmeleva, a linguist who studies political speech, Putin’s way of speaking—even

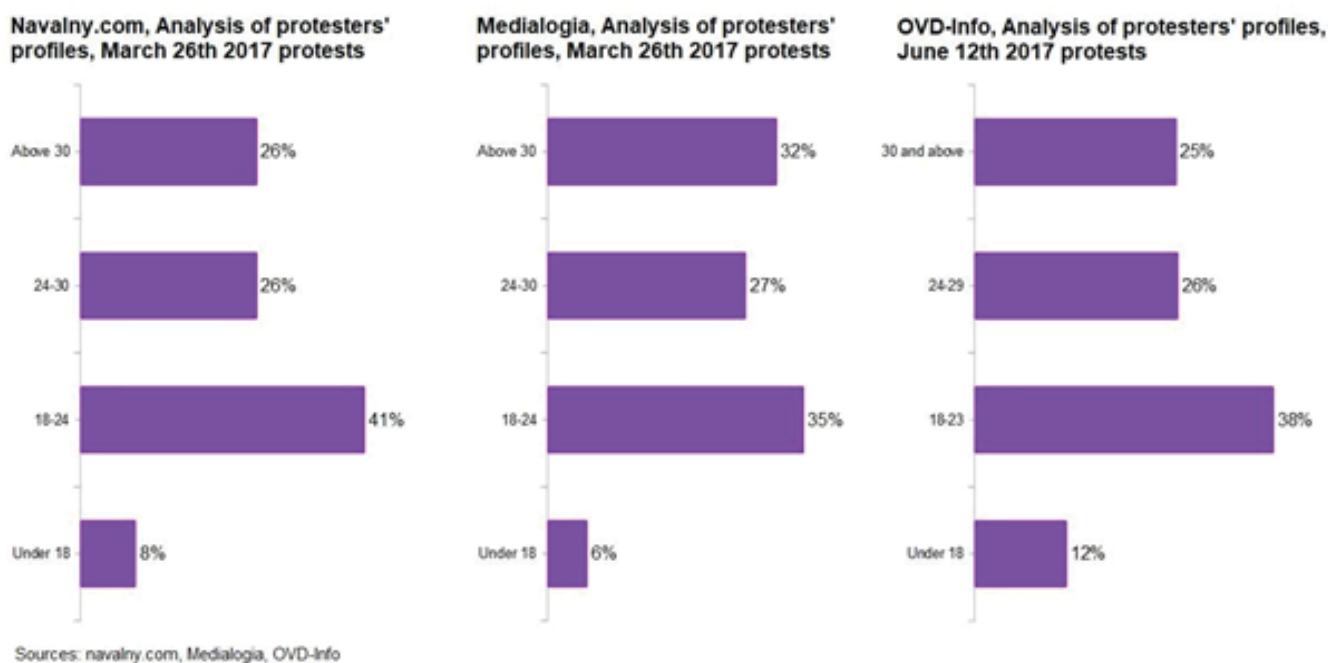
his infamous usage of sleazy jokes and vulgar commentaries that had made him popular with older Russians—does not resonate with the youth. The outdated language and lack of vision of the old elites make them look “not cool” in the eyes of the younger generation.⁹⁴ However, as political scientist Maria Snegovaya observes in her 2018 report on the Russian youth, “the emerging generational conflict is not just about aesthetics”—ethics is another reason why the Russian authorities “failed to build a dialogue with the younger generation based on a common value system.”⁹⁵

Technological revolution is another factor that shapes the youth’s perception of the Russian leadership. Many young people are increasingly disappointed that key innovations come not from Russian, but from abroad—mostly from the West. They can’t help but see that Russia under Putin failed to transform from a primitive, commodity-based economy into a modern, technologically advanced state. So far, the Kremlin failed to close the generational gap and resolve the ensuing issues. As this gap grows, Putin’s popularity among the youth declines.

Youth policy is incoherent and lacks strategic vision

According to political commentator Fyodor Krashenninikov, the decision-makers in the Kremlin are people whose values were shaped by the 1970s Soviet realities.⁹⁶ Their values range from the

Figure 4. Various age groups among participants in the March 26, 2017 and June 12, 2017 protests (percent)



93 FOM, “Reference points and values of the young Russians. What is important for the youngster?” (in Russian: «Ориентиры и ценности молодых россиян. Что важно для молодых?»). November 3, 2016. <https://fom.ru/TSennosti/13083> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

94 Cited in: Snegovaya, M. (2018), p. 8.

95 Ibid.

96 Krashenninikov, F. An Inconvenient Youth (as part of the project titled “How the new generation envisions the future”). Boris Nemtsov Foundation, December 2018. <http://zukunftsbild.nemtsovfund.org/en/ekaterinburg-en/essay-ekaterinburg-en/> [Accessed on April 2, 2019].

glorifying of the Soviet victory in WWII and elevating Stalin's role in the Russian history to hatred and mistrust for the West. As the Russian leaders get older, they get increasingly more uncomfortable with the likes of the youth. They impose their personal nostalgic, conservative values on the younger generations, forcing them to become "young old men" and act in unison praising Stalin, Great Patriotic war and criticizing the West. If young people abide by these rules, they are given access to the state's social lifts.

But the Kremlin is recruiting young loyalists to prevent public discontent over "social ossification" of the system and to avoid accusations of the aging of the elites. But this fake "rejuvenation" does not resolve the regime's long term sustainability problem; in fact, it puts more pressure on the inherent contradictions between generations that may accelerate the regime's demise.

The fact that the Kremlin failed to foresee two series of mass protests over the last decade—in 2011-2012 and 2017-2018—is a condemning verdict on its youth policy, whose goal was specifically to prevent protests from happening. It shows that the Kremlin does not have full control over the fast-paced environment inhabited by the youth, and this dissonance is likely growing.

Incoherence of the youth policy, which seems to be formed "on the principle of the coerced, catch-up modernization and belated reaction," as well as the lack of a long-term strategic vision drive this dissonance. Sociologists point out that the Kremlin constantly fails to cultivate loyal youth and integrate into the existing power hierarchy because it is more inclined to use youth groups as an instrument of ad-hoc mobilization.⁹⁷

The state-sponsored patriotic programs can work only in the short-term, whereas success in the long term depends on the regime's ability to allow genuine participation and inclusiveness—something that youth aspires for and what the Kremlin is unwilling to offer. On top of that, employment of the Soviet methods, like handing down directives to schools, attempting to politicize and "domesticate" the youth, is a short-lived measure that yields resentment.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES?

In the light of the 2017-2018 protests (and even before that), sociologists noticed a growing number of the grassroots movements and groups, many of which included young people. Participation grew in various directions—environmental work, animal protection, urban activism, volunteering, etc. On the one hand, these essentially non-political activities became a response to the sense of alienation among young Russians and the need for social inclusiveness and influence. On the other hand, these grassroots organization might represent a new understanding of politics and an emergence of a new civic consciousness as a result of the political vacuum created by the Kremlin. According to Omelchenko, this new development can be described as the "politics of small deeds" aimed at what can be influenced here and now—an individual, not a collective act.⁹⁸

The case of Alexei Navalny

One of the political alternatives to the Kremlin, relentlessly discussed in the media and studied inside and outside Russia, is the Navalny movement, which is quite different from other grassroots—largely non-political—organizations due to a large portion of the youth participation.

Youth was a dominant presence in the 2017-2018 demonstrations, according to various studies on the composition of protests. Alexey Navalny's team ran its own analysis of the March 26, 2017 events based on the social networks data and established that 75 percent of the participants were people under 30.⁹⁹ However, they were not "school children," as the Kremlin's propaganda tried to portray them. Only about 7-8 percent of the participants were younger than 18. The two largest age groups were people aged 18-21 and 21-24—about 20 percent each.

Navalny's data are corroborated by other analyses. A survey by Medialogia, a Russian monitoring company that provides real-time analysis of the mass media, found that about two-thirds of the March 26 protesters were under 30, with two largest groups being people aged 18-21 (17 percent) and 21-24 (18,4 percent). Youngsters under 18 were visibly present, but, again,

97 Lebedev D. "Gender Politics Becomes One of the Critical Issues," (interview with Elena Omelchenko). Republic, December 25, 2018 <https://republic.ru/posts/92757> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

98 Ibid.

99 Alexei Navalny's 2018 presidential campaign website, "Bearded schoolkids: Who went to March 26 protests" (in Russian: «Бородатые школьники: кто ходил на митинги 26 марта»), April 3, 2017 <https://2018.navalny.com/post/31/> [Accessed on February 27, 2019].

their number amounted only to 5,5 percent.¹⁰⁰ OVD Info, a Russian website that monitors arrests during mass protests, analyzed Vkontakte profiles of the participants in June 12, 2017 protest and reached similar conclusions: about 75 percent were people aged under 30, while people aged 18-23 were a dominating subgroup (37,6 percent).¹⁰¹ The proportion of minors that day was estimated at 11,6 percent.

Russian youth is somewhat cautious about Navalny, but is still willing to give him a chance, especially in the times of growing discontent. Despite his lack of access to the federal television networks, Navalny is listed among top-10 most popular politicians in Russia, according to Levada Center. Among the Russian youth, he polls sixth, higher than federal level politicians—Mayor of Moscow Sergei Sobyanin and a 2018 presidential candidate Pavel Grudinin.

As Levada's Denis Volkov observes, "Navalny looks more modern and speaks the same language to the youth as opposed to aging [Russian] leaders." He also points out that at the moment, the loyalty of the older generation, which is more numerous and politically active, remains a priority for the Kremlin. With economy in decline, the Kremlin will be forced to pick its fights. This means that in the coming 10-15 years, alienation between the youth and the Kremlin will continue to grow, and young people will increasingly feel "like losers."¹⁰² Unless the youth can surprise the Kremlin one more time.

100 TV Rain, "Portrait of a new oppositionist: Who was united by protest groups in Vkontakte" (In Russian: «Портрет нового оппозиционера: кого объединили протестные группы во «ВКонтакте», March 31, 2017 https://tvrain.ru/articles/medialogija_pro-analizirovala_sostav_protestnyh_grupp_vkontakte-431210/ [Accessed February 28, 2019].

101 OVD Info, "How young is the protest? Statistics against the Duma" (In Russian: «Насколько юн протест? Статистика против Думы»), December 19, 2018 <https://ovdinfo.org/articles/2018/12/19/naskolko-yun-protest-statistika-protiv-dumy> [Accessed February 28, 2019].

102 Volkov, Denis. How the Russian Youth Is Different From Its Parents. Vedomosti, December 5, 2018 <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/12/05/788410-rossiiskaya-molodezh> [Accessed February 28, 2019].

CONCLUSIONS

This report provides a complex picture of the Russian youth (age 17-25). This is, by any measure, not a homogenous group—it encompasses various social clusters holding different attitudes, adhering to different values, pursuing different cultural strategies (i.e. hipsters vs. patsany). However, there are certain similarities, the biggest of which, perhaps, is the fact that all of them face grim prospects under the current regime.

- Overall, young Russians appear as diverse generation, with priorities evenly distributed between material well-being, career, family, human relations, creativity, self-actualization.
- Their attitudes, to some extent, were shaped by such value-defining events as the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2014-2015 economic crisis in Russia, as well as the 2014 annexation of Crimea.
- They are “digital natives,” the most prolific users of the internet among all Russian generations. As such, they are less reliant on the traditional media and less susceptible to the Kremlin’s anti-West propaganda and the push for “traditional values.”
- Their interest in politics per se appears low on the surface. But, perhaps, this is due to the fact that the Kremlin hijacked political discourse and purged the political field in Russia, leaving little to no room for opposition or dissent. Still, young people in Russia are aware of the country’s most grave issues, such as endemic corruption, nepotism, lack of opportunities, and pervasive propaganda.
- Some of them describe themselves as “inner rebels.” Some support the government as the only available agency for career growth and economic well-being. Yet, some openly criticize the government and hold it accountable for the country’s problems. The latter group is emerging as the most politically active anti-Putin group in Russia.
- In the polls, most of the young people, however, claim that protests are inefficient as a form of political participation. They often appear dismissive of voting, which some deem as “absolutely useless.”

- They still aspire for inclusiveness and influence, launching numerous local initiatives and participating in grassroots organizations, pursuing the “politics of small deeds.”
- Some of them are self-proclaimed patriots who do not engage with the Kremlin-style “patriotic mobilization.” Yet, many youngsters are thinking about emigration.
- Despite criticisms of the West and the U.S. for their asymmetrical relationship with Russia and lack of recognition of Russia’s “creative potential,” they are still more open to the Western values than older generations.

That said, Russian youth still stands as the major net loser of the Kremlin’s increasingly authoritarian policies and declining economic conditions in the country. The Kremlin’s youth policy failed to win their hearts and minds: the regime speaks a different language, lacks a positive agenda and is incapable of offering a strategic vision for the future, because preservation of the status quo seems like the regime’s real priority. The gap between the Kremlin and the youth is growing, but the current political vacuum leave very few options for those youngster who wish to participate in the opposition movement.

Going forward, more in-depth studies of the Russia youth are necessary to develop a better understanding of the often opposing values, attitudes, and beliefs of the various groups co-existing within the same generation. It would make sense to make such studies available for journalists, experts, policymakers and activists both inside and outside Russia, so that new opportunities could be created to bring the Russian youth into a larger conversation on issues of their concern. It is remarkable to see smart, creative, patriotic young Russians thinking about their future, being open to the diverse information flows of the global internet and looking for the ways for change their lives for the better. It gives us reasons for cautious optimism regarding future generations of the Russian leadership.

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