No. 309 31 January 2024

www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html

INDOCTRINATION

German Association for East European Studies | Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies The George Washington University | Research Centre for East European Studies University of Bremen | Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich | Center for Eastern European Studies University of Zurich

ANALYSIS

Indoctrination in Russia

Eugenia Nazrullaeva (LSE), Ksenia Northmore-Ball (QMUL), Katerina Tertytchnaya (University of Oxford), and Anja Neundorf (University of Glasgow)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000657554

Abstract

Drawing on original evidence from the Varieties of Indoctrination dataset, this article reviews changes in the politicization of school education in Russia between 1945 and 2021. It also puts Russia in comparative perspective, comparing Russia's indoctrination efforts and content to those of other non-democratic regimes. The evidence suggests that although Putin has insisted that students learn patriotic values in school ever since first coming to power in the early 2000s, his initial efforts at education reform had limited success. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 coincided with renewed investments in patriotic education and a clampdown on freedom of expression in the classroom.

In the months following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian authorities embarked on wide-ranging education reforms. They expanded lessons in "patriotism," passed new education laws, and introduced new school textbooks. The timing of these reforms was no coincidence. As research reminds us, war and conflict are key drivers of (changes in) state education efforts (Paglayan, 2022; Aghion et al., 2018). Governments invest in education in order to shape the preferences and behavior of the masses and produce obedient citizens. By heightening perceptions of threat and generating consensus, wars and conflict allow governments to push through costly and potentially controversial reforms in the sphere of education.

Recent changes in Russian education have drawn renewed attention to the role of Russia's education system in fueling patriotism and generating support for the authorities and the war. In this analysis, we ask whether, in the period leading up to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian authorities intensified their efforts to control the content and delivery of school education. We examine regime efforts to indoctrinate youth in schools and compare Russia to other authoritarian regimes. To do so, we draw on original data on indoctrination around the world. With the help of the V-Dem team and 760 newly recruited education experts from around the world, we conceptualized and measured the extent of politicization of primary and secondary education worldwide (Neundorf et al., 2023a). The Varieties of Indoctrination (V-Indoc) dataset, which we use throughout this work, is publicly available and covers 160 countries from 1945 to 2021 (Neundorf et al., 2023b).

Our data suggest that Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea coincided with increased investments in patriotic education. Around this period, pressures on teachers also increased, while freedom of expression in Russian classrooms declined. Nevertheless, the process of rebuilding Russia's indoctrination potential and the gradual shift toward more authoritarian educational content began at least as early as the late 1990s, according to the V-Indoc data, and likely even earlier, according to Edwards (2021) (and this issue).

Facets of Indoctrination in Russia

Understanding the degree of and trends in indoctrination in the Russian education system requires looking at the various dimensions of indoctrination. In Neundorf et al. (2023a, p. 2), we define indoctrination broadly as "a regime-led socialization process that aims to increase congruence between the views and principles of the regime and of its citizens," and distinguish between two key dimensions of the indoctrination process: indoctrination *potential* and *content*.

First, a regime needs to have the *potential* to indoctrinate, i.e., the ability to inculcate in its citizens a preferred ideology. We conceptualize ideology as "the core principles, values, and norms of a society that are used by the regime to legitimize its existence and actions" (Neundorf et al. 2023a p. 11, 16). To implement changes in education and successfully incorporate political content, regimes need control over the development of curricula and textbooks. Centralized (at the national level) curriculum and textbook approval help the regime to propagate the desired narrative. However, control over the curriculum is not enough: autocrats need to have control over teachers and education professionals to ensure they deliver the narratives favored by the regime. Finally, the regime must devote resources and attention to political education.

All regimes—whether democratic or authoritarian—have the potential to shape citizens through education, but what differentiates regimes is the nature of the content. Among scholars who look at indoctrination in education, the focus is often on the *content* of the curriculum: whether the curriculum promotes the regime's dominant ideology

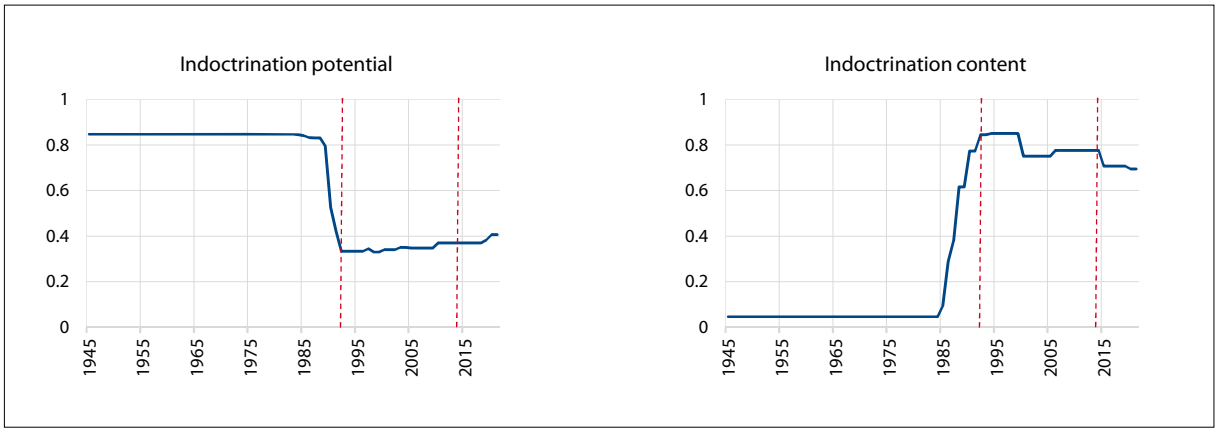
(Woods and Barrow, 2006) and the character of this ideology (i.e., whether it is a "personality cult," socialism or communism, among others). However, having an ideology is not enough. For indoctrination to succeed, critical thinking in the classroom needs to be actively discouraged and diversity of opinions must be prohibited. The desired product of this process is a closed-minded but loyal citizen (Taylor, 2017).

What can we learn from the V-Indoc data about Russia's historical indoctrination efforts? Figure 1 shows the dynamics of indoctrination potential and content in the USSR and Russia. Overall, the index for potential shows a drop in the late 1980s leading up to the collapse of the USSR, followed by general stability, with a very slight creep upwards in more recent years. The introduction of the 1992 Federal Law on Education led to a significant drop in indoctrination potential and "democratized" the content of education (Zajda, 2017; UNESCO, 2011). This makes sense, since the regime's potential to indoctrinate hinges on slow-moving aspects of the education system, such as centralization of the curriculum or textbook approval, whereas the content of indoctrination also captures what happens inside the classroom.[1] On the dimension of indoctrination content in Figure 1, after the positive shifts in the early post-Soviet period, we see content becoming less democratic over time, with a final shift after the annexation of Crimea.

The V-Indoc index of indoctrination content captures "the extent to which democratic values are emphasized in the official curriculum" (Neundorf et al. 2023a, p. 16).[2] More democratic content means that the regime is more likely to promote democratic norms and diverse perspectives in the curriculum, as well as to emphasize critical thinking in the classroom.

The next stage of education reforms took place in the early 2000s, which is reflected in the fact that the content of education (see Figure 1) became more authoritarian. These changes align with the introduction of the National Concept (Doctrine) of Education by the Ministry of Education (2000) and the Concept of "Modernization of Russian Education" (2001) (UNESCO, 2011). The Ministry of Education was reformed in 2004 and updated national education standards were introduced between 2009 and 2012 (Sitarov, 2019), marking a gradual trend toward the recentralization of education policies at the national level.

Figure 1: Indoctrination Potential and Content in Education in Russia



Note: The indices vary between 0 (low values) and 1 (high values). In this figure, indoctrination content is the index of "democratic content," with high values for more democratic content and low values for more authoritarian content. Indoctrination potential varies from low potential to high potential, and potential is not inherently authoritarian or democratic. For more detail about the indices, please see the V-Indoc codebook (Neundorf et al., 2023b; Coppedge et al., 2022). The vertical lines mark the major education reforms of 1992 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Source: V-Indoc Neundorf et al. (2023a,b).

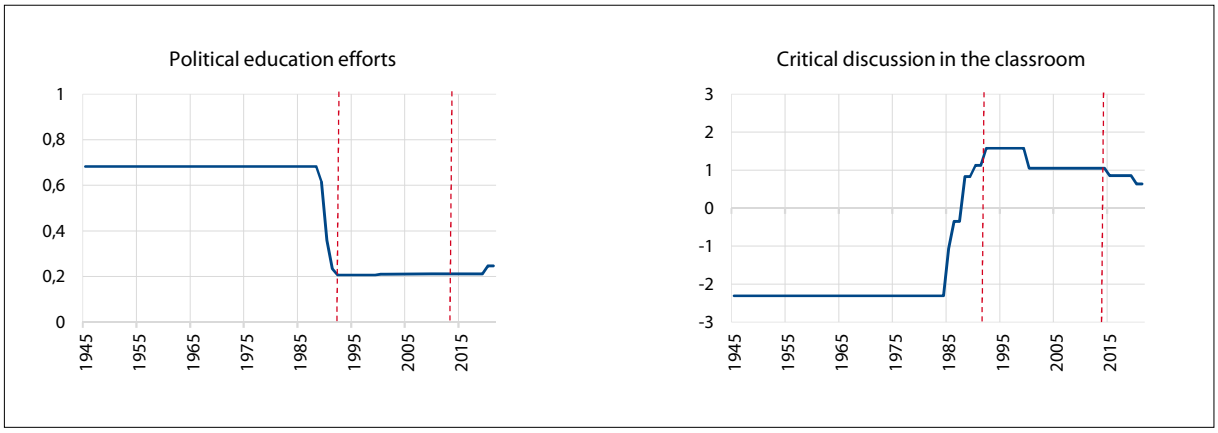
In Figure 2, we focus on two important components of the aggregate potential and content indices: political education efforts (part of potential) and critical thinking (part of content). The index of political education efforts measures the extent to which the regime uses the school curriculum to promote its preferred ideology (Neundorf et al. 2023a, p. 16). Interestingly, the regime's political education efforts remain at low levels but non-zero values. Among scholars, there is a debate as to whether Putin in fact has an ideology and, if so, what it is.[3] Guriev and Treisman (2022) argue that bygone dictatorships relied on ideologies, whereas modern-day autocrats do not have clear doctrines and hide

1 Although, strictly speaking, we should say that V-Indoc data collection efforts—with indicators coded by education experts—stop at the door of the classroom.

2 For a more detailed discussion of the V-Indoc concepts and indices, please see Neundorf et al. 2023a.

3 For more discussion, please see Maria Snegovaya, Michael Kimmage and Jade McGlynn, "The Ideology of Putinism: Is It Sustainable?" CSIS (report), September 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/ideology-putinism-it-sustainable, accessed November 23, 2023), as well as the debate

Figure 2: Political Education Efforts vs. Critical Thinking in Russia



Note: The index of political education efforts varies between 0 (low effort, i.e., no ideology is promoted through the curriculum) and 1 (high effort, i.e., there is a dominant ideology in the curriculum). The indicator of critical discussion is an interval measure converted by the measurement model and varies between roughly –3 (no critical discussion) and 3 (a lot of critical discussion). For more detail about the indicators, please see the V-Indoc codebook (Neundorf et al., 2023b; Coppedge et al., 2022). The vertical lines mark the major education reforms of 1992 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Source: V-Indoc Neundorf et al. (2023a,b).

behind the facade of "democracy." While Putin's ideology is not as dominant or coherent as the ideology of the Soviet regime, the indicator of critical thinking (critical discussion in the classroom) shows a clear negative trend. This indicator measures whether students are given the opportunity to critically discuss what they are taught in history classes (Neundorf et al., 2023b). We can see that at least one of the elements of successful indoctrination—undermining critical thinking in the classroom—has been ongoing in Russia under Putin and intensified after 2014 and then in 2020.

It is also worth noting that since coming to power in the early 2000s, Putin has insisted that schools teach children patriotic values. At a meeting with history teachers in 2003 (President of Russia, 2003), Putin expressed concern that diverse narratives in history books not "become a platform for a new political and ideological struggle" and stated that textbooks should inspire pride in their country among young people. Putin's desire to promote a single narrative in history textbooks became clearly apparent to the Russian public in June 2007, when Putin addressed the delegates at the All-Russian Conference of History and Social Science Teachers (President of Russia, 2007). On that occasion, Putin endorsed the newly published history manual for teachers,[4] saying that without a common standard, the country's students would have a messy "porridge" (*kasha*) in their heads. Putin went on to discuss the need for textbooks with a coherent narrative that would resolve the various "contradictions" in the understanding of Russia's history promoted by the existing textbooks, as well as for a "positive" take on Russia's history that would help foster patriotism among the youth. Putin's aspirations reflect the idea of using state indoctrination for the political purpose of socializing citizens in a way that would increase congruence between the views and principles of the regime and of its citizens. However, there has been a long lag between this discourse and actual implementation. The new history textbook containing the regime's revised view of history, which was edited by Vladimir Medinsky, was only unveiled in 2023 (Amnesty International, 2023).

Impact of Russian Aggression against Ukraine: A Rise in Patriotic Education?

In addition to indoctrination potential and content in general, we consider a separate dimension: patriotic content. We consider the promotion of patriotism not to be inherently authoritarian, as all regimes promote patriotic values. What sets autocracies apart is their combination of patriotism with authoritarian doctrines. While the goal of using education for indoctrination purposes—that is, to create "model" citizens—long predates the invasion of Ukraine, we see in Figure 3 that the annexation of Crimea coincided with a shift toward patriotic education content.

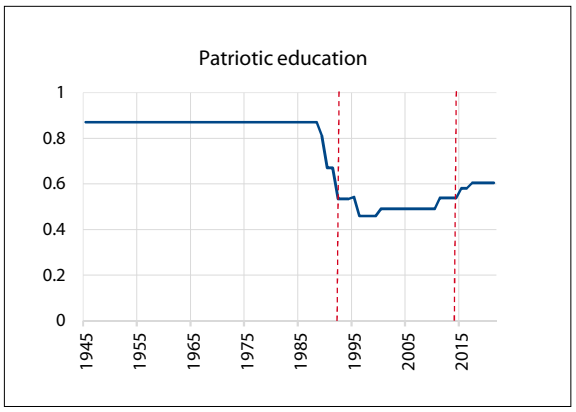
The indicators of celebration of patriotic symbols and patriotic content in the curriculum increased after 2014. In 2016, Putin declared patriotism to be the unifying "national idea" of Russia (The Moscow Times, 2016). The conflict in Ukraine has also been used as an excuse to put pressure on teachers and reduce freedom of discussion in class-

between Maria Snegovaya and Sergei Guriev, "The Ideology of Putinism with Sergei Guriev," CSIS, October 31, 2023, https://www.csis.org/events/ideology-putinism-sergei-guriev, accessed December 15, 2023.

4 *"A Modern History of Russia: 1945-2006: A Manual for History Teachers"* by Aleksandr Fillipov.

rooms (see Figure 2). While our data do not cover the year of the full-scale invasion and beyond, we would expect these trends to continue or even accelerate.

Figure 3: Patriotic Education in Russia



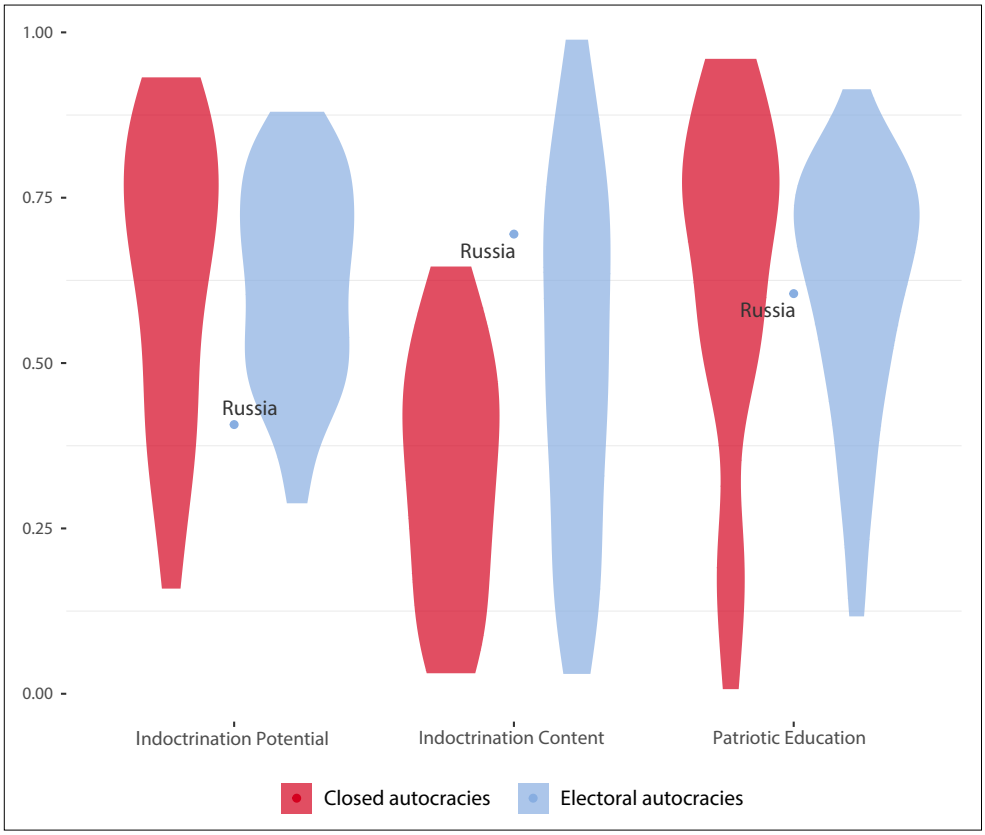
Note: The indicator of patriotism (patriotic education) is an interval measure converted by the measurement model, and varies between 0 (not patriotic) and 1 (very patriotic). The vertical lines mark the major education reforms of 1992 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The index of patriotism combines both patriotism in the curriculum and the celebration of patriotic symbols at schools. For more detail about the indicator, please see the V-Indoc codebook (Neundorf et al., 2023b; Coppedge et al., 2022).

Source: V-Indoc Neundorf et al. (2023a,b).

How Does Russia Compare to Other Autocracies?

How does Russia compare to other autocracies in terms of level of indoctrination? Figure 4 demonstrates that especially compared to so-called closed autocracies, like China, which do not have national elections, Russia in 2021 had relatively low indoctrination potential (in the bottom part of the distribution) and relatively "democratic" content (in the upper part of the distribution), although it scored relatively high on the index of patriotism. Until 2022, Russia was often considered a prime example of "electoral authoritarianism"—the most common form of dictatorship today. Unlike one-party leaders or military regimes of the past, modern-day dictators rely for their legitimacy on popular appeal demonstrated through electoral support (Matovski, 2021) rather on the promotion of some specific societal model or ideology. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Russia scores in the higher end of the range among autocracies in terms of democratic content. However, we also see Russia has an average score on patriotic content, reflecting the general trend among autocracies of promoting patriotism as a particularly convenient strategy that emphasizes citizen loyalty to the wider political community without the costs of more exclusionary, divisive objects of loyalty, like ethnicity or religion (Koesel, 2020). Finally, and perhaps surprisingly for observers, we see that Putin's Russia not only lags behind the former Soviet indoctrination potential, but scores low even compared to other autocracies. Of course, this seems less surprising if one takes into account the wider tendency under Putin to re-assert

Figure 4: Indoctrination Potential and Content in Russia Compared to Other Autocracies in 2021



Note: The figure plots the distribution of point estimates for each index. The indices vary between 0 (low values) and 1 (high values). High values mean more "democratic" indoctrination content, higher patriotism, and higher indoctrination potential. We use the V-Dem Regimes of the World classification to define autocracies as closed *and* electoral *autocracies (Coppedge et al., 2022).*

Source: V-Indoc Neundorf et al. (2023a,b).

regime control over spheres like the media and economy through indirect means rather than direct state ownership. In a similar way, by 2019 ownership and control over the production of school textbooks had been concentrated in the hands of Arkadii Rotenberg (Iakoreva 2019).

Conclusion

We have considered indoctrination as a multidimensional process that involves the delivery of content in line with regime principles as well as the potential for indoctrination. The evidence presented here suggests a gradual shift toward greater indoctrination efforts in Russia from the early 2000s onward, with school education becoming more politicized over time. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 coincided with some of the starker changes in Russian education, including greater emphasis on patriotic education, a clamping-down on freedom of expression in the classroom, and increased dismissals of teachers for political reasons (Neundorf, Nazrullaeva, Northmore-Ball, and Tertytchnaya, 2022). Even though in 2021, Russia appeared to be a typical autocracy in terms of its indoctrination potential and content, it was already demonstrating a marked emphasis on fostering patriotism through schools. These efforts reflect the regime's desire to mold future generations into more loyal patriotic citizens. To what extent these efforts are working—and will work going forward—remains an open question.

About the Authors

Dr. *Eugenia Nazrullaeva* is a postdoctoral fellow in the School of Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She holds a PhD in Political Science from UCLA (2020). Eugenia's research interests are in the areas of political economy and economic history. In her research, she studies the historical roots of political institutions, barriers to economic development, and tools of political control in authoritarian regimes.

Dr. *Ksenia Northmore-Ball* is a Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics at Queen Mary University of London. She holds a DPhil and MPhil from the University of Oxford (Nuffield College). She previously held a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship (2016–2019) at the University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on political behavior in new democracies and authoritarian regimes, with an emphasis on Eastern Europe and Russia. In her current projects, she studies voter habit formation in authoritarian elections, the influence of authoritarian legacies on left-right self-identification in new democracies, and the role of education content in preference formation in post-Communist countries.

Dr. *Katerina Tertytchnaya* is an Associate Professor in Comparative Politics at the University of Oxford and a Fellow in Politics at Brasenose College. Before joining Oxford, she was faculty at UCL. She holds a DPhil in Politics and an MPhil in Russian and Eastern European Studies from the University of Oxford. Her research interests include public opinion, protests, and authoritarian politics. Among others, she has published in the *American Political Science Review*, *World Politics*, and the *Journal of Politics*.

Dr. *Anja Neundorf* is a Professor of Politics and Research Methods at the University of Glasgow. She previously worked as an Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham (2013–2019) and a Postdoctoral Prize Research Fellow at Nuffield College, University of Oxford (2010–2012). She received her PhD from the University of Essex. Her research interests lie at the intersection of political behavior, research methods, and comparative politics. She is currently the principal investigator of the ERC-funded Consolidator Grant "Democracy under Threat: How Education can Save It."

Further Reading

- Aghion, Philippe, Xavier Jaravel, Torsten Persson, and Dorothée Rouzet. 2018. "Education and Military Rivalry." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 17 (2): 376–412.
- Amnesty International. 2023. "Ukraine/Russia: New History Textbook Is a Blatant Attempt to Unlawfully Indoctrinate School Children in Russia and Russian-Occupied Ukrainian Territories." September 1. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/ukraine-russia-new-history-textbook-is-a-blatant-attemptto-unlawfully-indoctrinate-school-children-in-russia-and-russian-occupied-ukrainian-territories/. Accessed December 15, 2023.
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Nazifa Alizada, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lina Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Nina Ilchenko, Katrin Kinzelbach, Joshua Krusell, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly M. McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefine Pernes, Oskar Ryden, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2022. "V-Dem Codebook v12." V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg.

- Edwards, Allyson S. 2021. "Russia on a Throne of Bayonets: Militarisation without the Military in Yeltsin's Russia, 1990—2000." PhD diss., Swansea University.
- Guriev, Sergey and Daniel Treisman. 2022. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Iakoreva, Anastasiia, ed. Konstantin Beniumov. 2019. " Textbooks Edited by Arkady Rotenberg. Almost 100% of the School Market Went to Structures Close to Putin's Friend. This Is How It Happened" (in Russian). *Meduza*, October 21. https://meduza.io/feature/2019/10/21/ministerstvo-prosveschenie. Accessed December 1, 2023.
- Koesel, Karrie. 2020. "Legitimacy, Resilience, and Political Education in Russia and China." In *Citizens and the State in Authoritarian Regimes: Comparing China and Russia*, ed. Karrie Koesel, Valerie Bunce, and Jessica Weiss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 250–278.
- Kravtsova, I. 2018. "An Oryol Teacher Writes Poems about Ukraine and Publishes Them on Social Networks. Five Criminal Cases Have Already Been Opened against Him." *Meduza*, April 3 (in Russian). https://meduza.io/feature/2018/04/03/orlovskiy-uchitel-pishet-stihi-pro-ukrainu-i-publikuet-ih-v-sotssetyahprotiv-nego-vozbudili-uzhe-pyat-ugolovnyh-del. Accessed September 15, 2023.
- Matovski, Aleksandar. 2021. *Popular Dictatorships: Crises, Mass Opinion, and the Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- National Concept. 2000. "National Concept (*Doctrine*) of Education Approved by the Government Decree N751 from October 4, 2000" (in Russian). https://base.garant.ru/6194474/. Accessed December 15, 2023.
- Neundorf, Anja, Eugenia Nazrullaeva, Ksenia Northmore-Ball, and Katerina Tertytchnaya. 2022. "The Invasion of Ukraine Has Upended Russian Education." *The Monkey Cage* (blog), September 14. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/09/14/russia-patriotic-education-reform/. Accessed December 15, 2023.
- Neundorf, Anja, Eugenia Nazrullaeva, Ksenia Northmore-Ball, Katerina Tertytchnaya, and Wooseok Kim. 2023a. "Varieties of Indoctrination (V-Indoc): Introducing a Global Dataset on the Politicization of Education and the Media." *V-Dem Working Paper* 136.
- Neundorf, Anja, Eugenia Nazrullaeva, Ksenia Northmore-Ball, Katerina Tertytchnaya, Wooseok Kim, Aaron Benavot, Patricia Bromley, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Philipp Lutscher, Kyle Marquardt, Agustina Paglayan, Dan Pemstein, Brigitte Seim, and Oskar Rydén. 2023b. "Varieties of Political Indoctrination in Education and the Media (V-Indoc) Dataset V1."
- Paglayan, Agustina S. 2022. "Education or Indoctrination? The Violent Origins of Public School Systems in an Era of State-Building." *American Political Science Review,* 1–16.
- President of Russia. 2003. "Official Transcript of Vladimir Putin's 'Opening Address at a Meeting with History Scholars' on November 27, 2003." http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22227. Accessed January 5, 2023.
- President of Russia. 2007. "Official Transcript of Vladimir Putin's Address to the 'All-Russian Conference of History and Social Science Teachers' on June 21, 2007." http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/comminity_meetings/24359. Accesssed November 27, 2023.
- Sitarov, V.A. 2019. "Istoriia obrazovaniia v Rossii: postsovetskoe vremia." *Problemy pedagogiki i psikhologii* (2): 201–216.
- Taylor, Rebecca M. 2017. "Indoctrination and Social Context: A System-Based Approach to Identifying the Threat of Indoctrination and the Responsibilities of Educators." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 51 (1): 38–58.
- The Moscow Times. 2016. "Putin Declares Patriotism Russia's Only National Idea." The Moscow Times, February 4. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/02/04/petition-posted-to-rename-moscow-street-after-downed-su-24-pilot-a51690.
- UNESCO. 2011. "World Data on Education 7th edition 2010–11: Russian Federation."
- Woods, Ronald and Robin Barrow. 2006. "Indoctrination." In *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*. London: Routledge, 71–83.
- Zajda, Joseph. 2017. *Globalisation and National Identity in History Textbooks: The Russian Federation*. Cham: Springer.

ANALYSIS

Designing the "Good Russian Patriot": Indoctrination, Education, and Youth in Russia

Allyson Edwards (Bath Spa University, Bath)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000657554

Abstract

A priority of the Russian state is to foster feelings of patriotism among its youth. Patriotism in this sense often entails not only inculcating a feeling of pride in the state, but also nurturing a love for the motherland so deep that a child would sacrifice themselves for it. More often than not, this sacrifice is often viewed within the context of war. Youth are indoctrinated across multiple domains: via formal education, popular culture, the physical landscape, media, and youth patriotic groups. This piece examines the youth indoctrination strategies of the state, centering the discussion on the-military youth patriotic group Yunarmiya. This includes examining the group's objectives and the ways in which the concept of a "good patriot" is folded into the group's everyday activities and presented to Russia's broader youth population as a desirable attribute. It finds that youth indoctrination continues to be a policy of the Putin regime and that the youth groups are vital to the state's efforts, as they not only allow the state to shape youth consciousness, but also enable youth to shape the minds of their peers.

On May 28, 2022, Yunarmiya celebrated the sixth anniversary of its creation. Nikita Nagorny, head of Yunarmiya, addressed its young members, telling them:

> "The most important task on your shoulders is to preserve and increase the traditions of patriotic education. I want to wish you to be curious, to become professionals in your field, to care and love your family, friends, and everything around [you]. Take care of nature, be useful to our motherland. This is real patriotism" (Yunarmiya 2022e).

Yunarmiya is one of many patriotic groups established for youth in Russia. Launched in 2016 by the Russian state and under the leadership of then-Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu as part of Russia's 2016–2020 project "Patriotic Education of Russian Citizens," the group mimics military activities like marching, dismantling, and reassembling guns and participates in military-commemoration events (Koshkin et al. 2020, p. 391; Kerntopf 2016, p. 4; Yunarmiya 2023). Membership is available to youth between the ages of 8 and 18 across the 89 regions recognized by Russia as its federal subjects; the group currently has a membership of 1.4 million youth. As an extracurricular activity, the group exists outside of, but adjacent to, Russia's education system; while participation is not compulsory, it employs the broader narratives of the Russian state. Indeed, Yunarmiya is valued just as highly as a formal educational setting for its power to socialize Russia's younger generation. Essentially (as the name suggests) a "Young Army," they are taught a very specific brand of patriotism that goes beyond the state's goal of fostering among young people a love for their country to promote the notion that they should also be willing to sacrifice themselves for it (Viroli, 1995, p.1; Anderson quoted in Goode, 2018, p. 259).

Sacrifice and commitment to the state can be defined in various ways, and youth groups in Russia often seek to mold youth in a particular direction. For Yunarmiya members, sacrifice for the state is typically understood as a willingness to enlist in the Russian army and go to war. While not all Yunarmiya members will progress to military careers, many participants leave the organization well placed to take that step. Meanwhile, members of other youth groups—like Victory Volunteers and Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard)—are prepared to take on more of a supporting role in achieving the state's military goals, whether by donating goods to the military or lending discursive support to the state's goals. Whatever the core purpose of a given youth group, its young members are trained—through a system of military-patriotic education that includes physical activity and indoctrination—to largely accept the primacy of the military in society, as well as to believe that a strong military is required to ensure Russia's security. The comprehensive nature of this system means that students have very little space to explore alternative narratives and positions.

Into What Ideology Are Russia's Youth Being Indoctrinated?

The aforementioned sacrificial "love for the motherland" is imparted to young people through Russia's education system, a well-known Kremlin tool of indoctrination. In my understanding of indoctrination, I follow Robert Sutherland's (1985) study of youth literature, which argued that state ideologies were embedded in

Soviet Russian youth literature with the aim of transferring these characteristics and beliefs to Russia's future generations. Utilizing Sutherland's schema for identifying indoctrination within literature to Russian education textbooks, Edwards (2021a) found that ideologies related specifically to militaristic patriotism have been present in Russian history textbooks since the 1990s, clearly demonstrating that school is a forum for instilling patriotism in Russia's youth. Russian school textbooks that predate the Putin era are built around Russia's military endeavors and acts of struggle that led to eventual victory. During his tenure, Putin has simply used educational initiatives to reframe patriotism and military glory as a central goal of the Russian state. In a recent press conference, held on 14 December, 2023, Putin told some Russian soldiers video calling from Ukraine: "They say wars are won, not by the fighters, but by schoolteachers and priests. That is correct. Educating people in the spirit of patriotism is critically important and we're already doing this" (Kremlin.ru 2023). The use of education to indoctrinate is certainly not a new phenomenon in Russia—or indeed beyond it (Mathers and Edwards 2022). Indoctrination is most often seen in a school's offering of civic studies, which are designed to impart specific ideals and values about the nation to the audience. Studies relating to indoctrination in education are also prominent in Asian countries and in North America. Studies relating to indoctrination in education are also prominent in Asian countries and in North America, where indoctrination manifests not in the teaching of values that are core to that country, but through training students to accept the actions of the state without question because failure to do so would make them unpatriotic (Yan Wing Leung 2004, p. 117).

Militaristic patriotism is one of the main ideologies of the Russian state—and indeed has a history dating back to Peter I (1672–1725). It is not enough simply to feel love for one's country; one must also sacrifice oneself for it. Russia's youth are told very early on that there will be instances in which they will be called upon to physically defend Russia. The state holds specific workshops for Yunarmiya members in which they aim to develop these young people's identities as defenders, among other things (Yunarmiya 2022d). This belief that youth must be prepared for Russia's next war is rooted in the "besieged fortress" mentality, which promotes the idea that Russia is a vulnerable country surrounded by hostile neighbors. This mindset is by no means a characteristic solely of the Putin regime; rather, it is in evident throughout Russian history (Edwards 2021b, p. 312).

Military-Patriotic Education in Russia

Developing a comprehensive patriotic education program in Russia has long been an objective of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has overseen several significant changes to the Russian education system since he first became president in 1999. In 2001, the Russian government began to fund patriotic education initiatives aimed at preparing citizens to serve the state in both peace and war (Goode 2016, p. 1; Khodzhaeva et al. 2017, p. 2) Ever since, history education has been a particular focus for Putin. He has set up commissions and projects to defend what he regards as the truth of Russia's past against those who would distort it. These include the initiative to create a textbook that would present a "single-track, unified version of Russian national history free from contradictions" (Brandenberger 2015, p. 192; Laruelle 2011). The Russian state revived this project in 2013, in the lead-up to Russia's annexation of Crimea the following year. In justifying the need for this book, the Russian state prioritized many of the discourses it is now using with regard to its war in Ukraine, particularly around claims that the West is trying to rewrite Russian history. The 2020 amendments to Russia's constitution include a "historical truth" clause that reinforces Putin's message and gives it legal force, namely: "The Russian Federation honors the memory of defenders of the Fatherland and protects historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the people's heroism in defending the Fatherland is not permitted" (The State Duma 2020). Such efforts to limit critical discussion of the Great Patriotic War are not a new phenomenon in Russia: calls in 1995 to reassess Stalin's leadership and actions during the war were decried as a purposeful "blackening" of memory of the Great Patriotic War by the new generation of historians (Edwards and Rabbia 2022, p. 76) Since then, various political leaders and societal groups, such as veterans' organizations, have called for the securitization of history in Russia to preserve the memory of those who sacrificed themselves during that time.

Most recently, in August 2023, Russia's Education Minister finally announced the publication of new history books for pupils in the final years of secondary school that include the official narrative about Russia's "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine (Faulconbridge 2023). The history textbooks, not yet rolled out in Russian schools for reasons of cost, were edited by the Chairman of the Interdepartmental Commission on Historical Education of Russia, Vladimir Medinsky, and represent the culmination of the effort to produce the "single-track" textbooks imagined a decade ago. A Reuters article from August 10, 2023, notes that the books "reflect Putin's historical view: pride at the achievements of the superpower Soviet Union, indignation at the humiliations of the Soviet collapse and acclaim for the 'rebirth' of Russia under the former KGB spy's rule which began on the last day of 1999" (Faulconbridge 2023). The article clearly highlights that

the state's goal is to use education to promote a unified narrative of Russia's history, excluding the possibility of engaging youth through critical thought and the discussion of competing narratives.

The Russian state's promotion of this "single-track, unified version of Russian national history" goes well beyond the use of textbooks. While textbooks are excellent tools for communicating state ideals, pupils can find them rather boring and repetitive (Volunteers of Victory 2022). Classroom education is therefore complemented by more "exciting" and interactive educational activities that are intended to convert students into active members of Russian society, preferably in roles that protect and strengthen the state. Schools facilitate visits from veterans to schools, as well as visits to veterans' homes; clean war memorials; participate in military-style sport games; and contribute to current conflicts by writing letters and providing care packages to soldiers on the front. In 2014, the Russian Military Historical Society, alongside Russia's federal tourism agency—also headed by Vladimir Medinsky—offered history tours for youth to make learning Russian history more immersive and exciting (McGlynn 2023, p. 148). Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, twice as many military-patriotic events were held in May 2022 as in May 2021 (RE: Russia 2023).

When Russia's educational system emphasizes the transfer of particular state-supportive values to society, it has a very practical, material aim: ensuring the future supply of manpower to the military (Yunarmiya 2022c). Physical fitness oriented toward militarily useful skills is increasingly a focus of attention. An example of young people being trained in such skills comes from the Russian Orthodox Church association "Followers of Dmitry Donskoi" in Nizhny Novgorod, members of which participate in such activities as crawling through the snow carrying "dummy" machine guns (Ostorozhno Novosti 2022). The militarized physical training of Russia's youth was rolled out across schools in September 2023, with the introduction to the curriculum of a compulsory "basic military training" program (Meduza 2023). Patriotism in Russia's education system is therefore imparted through a variety of storytelling in the formal educational landscape and the co-opting of youth in particular roles that allow them to embody and practice certain roles that a "good patriot" would most often be found performing.

The growth of youth patriotic groups during Putin's tenure is a phenomenon in itself. While created and funded by the state, groups like Yunarmiya, Victory Volunteers, Molodaya Gvardiya, and the now defunct Nashi (Ours) present themselves as a youthful attachment of the Russian state. The youth are the ones who are primarily shown in photos taken of the groups and are positioned as the ones who came up with the numerous state-sanctioned activities in which they participate, creating the illusion of massive youth support for the Kremlin's initiatives.

It is also important to note that many of these groups were created in response to political or military issues that Russia was facing. Nashi, for example, was established in response to Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, with the aim of organizing against anti-government action. Meanwhile, Victory Volunteers, while originally established to bring together those supporters of veterans who played a role in organizing events commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War, was created in 2015, a year after Russia's annexation of Crimea. Members of all these groups are portrayed as role models for Russia's youth and depicted as "good patriots." A Yunarmiya press release from April 8, 2022, on the topic of support letters sent to soldiers fighting in Ukraine, notes: "Yunarmiya [members] are persistent guys. These are the teenagers who can be called the pride of the country," followed by a list of qualities they showcase in their actions (Yunarmiya 2022a).

These groups and the prominent image of youth in state discourses on military-patriotism show that the indoctrination of military-patriotic values in Russia's formal educational system is only one part of Russia's military-patriotic puzzle. What is possibly more important is the exposure of Russia's youth to relatable young role models who are seen buying into the state's narratives. Ekaterina Chizhikova, Deputy Chief of Yunarmiya's General Staff, aptly demonstrates this, noting that Yunarmiya members have performed heroic actions that "their peers throughout the country can be equal to" (Yunarmiya 2022b). She gives several examples of "heroic" behavior, including a Yunarmiya detachment working on a "Memory of Generations" project in which they restore burial places of Great Patriotic War soldiers and conduct archival research on relatives of the heroes.

Conclusion

The notion that Russia's educational system serves to indoctrinate its youth population with military-patriotic ideals is not new but has proven to be important to the Russian state because of its success in ensuring the survival of discourses relating to Russian militarism over time. The process of indoctrination is not evident solely in formal educative practices, though a major feature is certainly the efforts of the Russian state to limit critical thought around particular topics in history. It is also, and possibly more importantly, present in extracurricular activities and youth groups such as Yunarmiya, which seek to make military-patriotism a fun game that can be played and performed. In both their formal education and extracurricular activities, youth are told what characteristics and ventures contribute to making someone a good patriot, which

is seen as a desired goal. They are exposed to examples of good patriots through youth-group activities, which see them meet and greet veterans and send supportive letters and parcels to Russian soldiers on the front in Ukraine. Arguably the most important role models for this particular brand of patriotism are the youth themselves: young people are often recruited to participate in military-patriotic activities, making them more attractive to other youth and leading to greater uptake, with the result that it appears as though these activities are an initiative of the youth themselves. Russia's multifaceted educational landscape means that the state has plenty of opportunities to indoctrinate the youth with military-patriotic ideals. This strongly implies that militarism and patriotism will remain core markers of Russian identity for a long time to come.

About the Author

Dr. *Allyson Edwards* is a lecturer in Global Histories and International Relations at Bath Spa University, UK. She is a specialist on matters relating to Russian militarism, youth militarization, and the patriotic education system. She is currently in the process of writing a book on Russian militarism in the 1990s for McGill Queen University Press and is working on a broader project relating to Russian youth militarization with Dr. Jennifer G. Mathers of Aberystwyth University.

Further Reading

- Brandenberger, D., 2015. Promotion of a Usable Past: Official Efforts to Rewrite Russo-Soviet History, 2000–2014. *Remembrance, History, and Justice: Coming to Terms with Traumatic Pasts in Democratic Societies*, pp. 191–212.
- Edwards, Allyson. 2021a. "A Vulnerable Russia: Militarisation Through Anxiety in 1990s Russian Historical Textbooks." Political Crossroads. Vol. 25, No. 1. Pp. 5–24.
- Edwards, Allyson. 2021b. "Russia on a Throne of Bayonets: Militarisation without the Military in Yeltsin's Russia, 1990–2000." Doctoral Thesis. Swansea University. https://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa58694.
- Edwards, Allyson and Jennifer G. Mathers. 2022. "Russia: Programme of 'Patriotic Education' aims to create next generation of Putin faithful." The Conversation, April 21. Available at https://theconversation.com/russia-programme-of-patriotic-education-aims-to-create-next-generation-of-putin-faithful-181511.
- Edwards, Allyson and Roberto Rabbia. 2022. "The 'Wild nineties': Youth Engagement, Memory and Continuities between Yeltsin's and Putin's Russia." In Youth and Memory in Europe: Defining the Past, shaping the future. Ed. by Félix Krawatzek and Nina Friess. Berlin. De Gruyter. Part 1: Chapter 4. Pp. 75–84.
- Faulconbridge, Guy. 2023. "Kremlin aide rewrites Russian history for a society at war" Reuters, 11 August. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-aide-rewrites-russian-history-society-war-2023-08-10/.
- Goode, Paul J. 2016 "Everyday Patriotism and Putin's Foreign Policy." PONARS Eurasia: New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia. Memo No. 432. Pp. 1–7. Available at https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Pepm432_Goode_July2016%282%29_2.pdf.
- Goode, Paul J. 2018. "Everyday Patriotism and Ethnicity in Today's Russia." in *Russia before and after Crimea: Nationalism and Identity*, 2010–17. Ed. By Paul Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Chapter 11, pp. 258–281.
- Kerntopf, Martin .2016. Russia's Contemporary Hegemonic Turn and Change in Collective Memory, Lund Conference 2016: The Collapse of Memory—Memory of Collapse, Conference paper, pp. 1–8, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martin-Kerntopf/publication/309429456_Russia's_Contemporary_Hegemonic_Turn_and_Change_in_Collective_Memory/links/58109f2508aef2ef97b28f57/Russias-Contemporary-Hegemonic-Turn-and-Change-in-Collective-Memory.pdf.
- Khodzhaeva, Ekaterina and Irina Meyer. 2017. "Mobilising Patriotism in Russia: Federal Programs of Patriotic Education. Russian Analytical Digest. No. 207. Pp. 2–6.
- Koshkin, Andrey, Egor Moroz, Aleksandr Yankilevich, and Daria Andreeva. 2020. "Russian experience of patriotic education: generalisation tendencies of the consensus around militarism." Proceedings of the VIII International Scientific and Practical Conference "current problems of social and labour relations" *Advances in social science, education and humanities research*, vol. 527. Pp. 390–393.
- Kremlin.ru. 2023. "Results of the Year with Vladimir Putin." December 14. Available at http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72994.
- Laruelle, Marlene. 2011. "Negotiating history: Memory wars in the enar abroad and pro-Kremlin youth movements." Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization. 19(3) 223–252.
- Leung, Yan Wing. 2004. "Nationalistic Education and Indoctrination." Citizenship, Social and Economics Education. Vol. 6, No. 2. Pp. 116–130.

- Meduza. 2023. "Federation Council says Russian students will learn basics of combat drone use in school", July 21. Available at https://meduza.io/en/news/2023/07/21/federation-council-says-russian-students-will-learn-basics-of-combat-drone-use-in-school.
- McGlynn, Jade. 2023. *Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia*. London. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ostorozhno Novosti. 2022. "In Nizhny Novgorod oblast the Russian Orthodox club 'educates patriots' with the help of prayers, coaches, replica automatic weapons and games of laser tag." January 30. Available at https://t.me/ostorozhno_novosti/14007.
- RE: Russia. 2023. "The War of Patriotism: Russia's Extensive Campaign of School Militarism is Designed to Suppress the Modern Attitudes of Russian Youth." July 4. Available at https://re-russia.net/en/review/321/.
- Sutherland, Robert (1985) "Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children," *Children's Literature in Education* 16, No. 3. Pp. 143–157.
- The State Duma. 2020. "What changes will be in the constitution of the Russian Federation?" March 12. Available at http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/48039/.
- Viroli, Maurizio (1995) *For Love of Country: An Essay of Patriotism and Nationalism*. Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press.
- Volunteers of Victory. 2022. "Maria Vasilieva—Volunteer of Victory of Voronezh oblast." June 6. Available at https://xn--90abhd2amfbbjkx2jf6f.xn--p1ai/news/id/5560.
- Yunarmiya. 2022a. "The Power of Writing." Yunarmiya Press Release, April 8. Available at https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/sila-pisma/.
- Yunarmiya. 2022b. "Ekaterina Chizhikova: The Guys in Yunarmiya form Basic Values." Yunarmiya Press Release, May 12. Available at https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/ekaterina-chizhikova-u-rebyat-v-yunarmii-formiruyutsya-bazovye-tsennosti/
- Yunarmiya. 2022c. "Awards to 2022 'Warm Hearts' prize winners were presented in Moscow." Yunarmiya Press Release, May 19. Available at https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/nagrazhdenie-laureatov-goryachee-serdtse-2022-proshlo-v-moskve/.
- Yunarmiya. 2022d. "Yunarmiya Members of the country will visit the All-Russia thematic forum 'Yunarmiya ZA'." Yunarmiya Press Release, May 26. Available at https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/yunarmeytsy-strany-posetyat-vserossiyskiy-tematicheskiy-forum-yunarmiya-za/.
- Yunarmiya. 2022e. "Yunarmiya's birthday began with the visit of honoured guests." Yunarmiya Press Release, May 28. Available at https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/den-rozhdeniya-yunarmii-nachalsya-vizitom-pochetnykh-gostey/.
- Yunarmiya. 2023. "About the movement Yunarmiya." Available at https://yunarmy.ru/headquarters/about/.

INTERVIEW

An Interview with Former Vice Rector Andrei Yakovlev on the Post-Soviet History of the Higher School of Economics

Andrei Yakovlev (Davis Center, Harvard University; Hanse Wissenschaftskolleg, Delmenhorst)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000657554

The following is an edited and condensed version of Andrei Yakovlev's interview with T-Invariant, published on October 7, 2023, which can be found here: https://www.t-invariant.org/2023/10/andrej-yakovlev-po-linii-fsb-vyshku-peredali/. *The Russian Analytical Digest is grateful to Andrei Yakovlev and Olga Orlova for permission to republish the interview.*

T-invariant: In the first half of the 1990s, several unique new universities were created in Russia. These are Shaninka—the Moscow School of Higher Social and Economic Sciences; the European University at St. Petersburg; NES—the Russian Economic School; and the Higher School of Economics. The task of these universities was to produce new personnel and new knowledge in the social sciences and the humanities. But each of these projects was

created according to its own model. Almost 30 years have passed, and now they are all in a difficult situation. Does this mean the decline of generally strong universities with a focus on social sciences and the humanities in Russia?

Andrei Yakovlev: Indeed, these universities were created at about the same time, but now the situations at the Higher School of Economics and the other universities you mentioned are different. Yes, all four institutions are experiencing serious problems because they were focused on introducing new educational standards to Russia and on close cooperation with foreign partners, including integration into global academic networks, which is now either very limited or completely impossible. In the case of the Higher School of Economics, however, this pullback from its original tasks is felt much more strongly.

T-invariant: Why? Because the HSE, as your colleague Igor Lipsits put it, has "turned into a silent university"?

Andrei Yakovlev: No, that's not why. Something similar can be said about NES, and about the European University, and about Shaninka. Well, especially about Shaninka, after all the criminal cases against former rector Sergei Zuev.

T-invariant: Then why?

Andrei Yakovlev: Because we have not yet seen a single professor from the European University, NES, or Shaninka call for nuclear strikes on Europe. And there is such a person at the Higher School of Economics, and we all know him.

Moreover, the Ethics Committee of the HSE Academic Council has even issued an official decision that there is no problem with such statements. Before that, however, the very same ethics committee, on the basis of much louder expressions of personal views by other professors, had come to the exact opposite conclusion. Let us also note that the leaders of Shaninka, the European University, and the NES do not travel to the Donbas. And, as far as I know from colleagues at these universities, they maintain a fairly high degree of academic self-governance, which was one of the fundamental features of these new universities at the time of their creation.

T-invariant: For people unfamiliar with the Russian university system, it is difficult to explain the public interest in HSE and its current state. Sometimes there is even confusion: "OK, so a big university is deteriorating, but why so much concern?! Take Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration—the situation there is not improving either, so why is there no such reaction?" If you were talking to an American, how would you explain it? "Imagine that in America, suddenly, in a year and a half, things have changed completely…"

Andrei Yakovlev: Good question! Actually, there is no analogue, because the importance of the Higher School of Economics over the last, well, at least twenty years was rooted in the fact that it was not only a university, but also one of the largest analytical centers working for the government and society as a whole. That is quite important. In this sense, the U.S. educational environment is structured differently: there are many strong universities that are comparable and compete with each other. And so the gap that was felt in Russia between the HSE and other universities, at least in the social sciences and humanities, is largely absent from the US, or Germany, or France. In the US and Western Europe, the differences among universities are not of such orders of magnitude.

At the same time, when it comes to providing analysis to the government or society, it is not the universities themselves that do this in the United States and Europe, but so-called think tanks—compact and autonomous centers of analysis.

T-invariant: But you are now in one of these centers at Harvard?

Andrei Yakovlev: Yes, the Davis Centre, where I now work, specializes in research on Russia and the former Soviet Union. This is an interdisciplinary academic center that houses philologists, historians, cultural scientists, and political scientists, but almost no economists. But this is not even close to comparable with the institutes that existed and continue to exist at HSE, such as the Institute of Education, the Institute of State and Municipal Administration, the Institute of Social Policy, and the Institute of Economics of Knowledge and Statistical Research, which between them employ several hundred experts and implement dozens of large projects every year. What made the Higher School of Economics unique was that, for a long time, it combined a university with academic values and a kind of state committee for all kinds of reforms. I don't know of similar examples.

T-invariant: Back to these four new universities. The HSE began as a small institution. How did the HSE come to be what it is today, both an analytical center and a traditional research university? How did it all start?

Andrei Yakovlev: Initially, all four universities focused on bringing normal standards of education in the social sciences to Russia. It was necessary to overcome the legacy of the Soviet period. Social sciences in the Soviet Union were prevented from developing by ideological blinders and the need to study Marxist-Leninist political economy and Scientific Communism. What became real social science in the West in the last hundred years could, at best, be studied in a Spetskhran special storage facility, if the scholar had access.

This catastrophic state of the social sciences largely predetermined the collapse of the Soviet Union, because even those people who sincerely wanted to change something in the country did not understand what was happening around them. The new universities arose due to an acute shortage of people with a normal education and normal qualifications, who were in demand in government and business. A market economy began to take shape, and a need arose for economists, managers, lawyers, and sociologists. Demand for such specialists came from the economy and from public administration. With all due respect to the honest, not-at-all-corrupt officials who worked in the Soviet Gosplan system and who ended up in the Russian Ministry of Economy in the early 1990s, it was impossible to expect them, having grown up in a different reality, to effectively manage the new economy.

Therefore, the first task of all four universities was to try to bring the standards of normal education in the social sciences and economics to Russia. At the same time, however, all of these universities had broader ambitions: they sought not only to educate students, but also to produce new ideas for society and the state. This happened in different ways. During the period when Sergei Guriev was rector of NES, it was a fairly influential center, producing ideas that were in demand in President Dmitrii Medvedev's circle. Traditionally, the European University worked quite a lot with various people from St. Petersburg who later ended up in the federal government. For example, in 2016–17, the European University worked very actively with Aleksei Kudrin within the framework of the Centre for Strategic Research. Then such partners on the side of the state apparatus helped the university when there were political attacks on it from the security bloc. Shaninka has done a lot of important things in the field of social research. And the position of its founder, Theodor Shanin, was precisely that the university should not just teach students, but also bring a new understanding of social processes to Russian society.

What made HSE different in this sense? First, Iaroslav Kuzminov was much more ambitious. From the very beginning, Kuzminov wanted to create not just a new university, but a large and influential one. Yes, HSE began as a small institution called a "college"—this is exactly how it was described in an application for a grant from the European Commission, from which the Higher School of Economics emerged—but Kuzminov wanted much more from the start.

I well remember the situation in the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, when there was talk of his possibly joining the government. At a certain point, however, Kuzminov did not want to leave the university because, as rector of the Higher School of Economics, he was more influential than some ministers. As a minister, he would be directly responsible for the results of the ministry's activities, whereas in the role of a high-ranking advisor—influencing decisions but not implementing them—he was in a much more advantageous position. And he understood this very well. As far as I know, Sergei Guriev's position was somewhat similar for a certain period of time. By contrast, to the best of my knowledge, the leaders of the European University and Shaninka had no such political ambitions.

The second major difference between HSE and similar projects is its focus on a larger scale. Perhaps this is why, unlike other new universities, HSE was established as a state organization. This status imposed limitations on it but also provided additional opportunities for growth. In many ways, this bet on scale had significant consequences. I think that the European University, NES, and Shaninka were able to maintain a specific, fairly free academic microclimate precisely because they remained small organizations.

This microclimate also existed at the Higher School of Economics in the 1990s. Characteristically, there were no significant differences between HSE, as a state organization, and NES, the European University, and Shaninka, as non-state universities. There was no distance between employees, and everyone—from senior lecturer to rector—could communicate freely with everyone else. But when a university has tens of thousands of students and thousands of employees, it inevitably develops the bureaucratic hierarchy characteristic of large organizations. And since HSE quickly became a large organization, it is more accurate to compare it with other large Russian universities, such as Moscow State University, MGIMO (the Moscow State Institute of International Relations), and the Financial Academy. The fundamental difference was that Kuzminov was never afraid to invite strong people to join his team. He tried to bring together at HSE unconventional thinkers, some of whom had been arguing with him for a long time. This may have been less true in recent years, but at least for the first 15–20 years there were active discussions both in the Rec-

tor's office and in the Academic Council. In other words, there was real academic self-governance in a large structure, which was completely atypical for universities with a Soviet legacy.

This model has resulted in a wide range of educational innovations. These include the International Institute of Economics and Finance (ICEF), a very successful double degree program with the University of London, with which the HSE began the process of recruiting lecturers on the international job market; the process of admitting applicants strictly on the basis of formalized tests, which began at the HSE long before the introduction of the Unified State Exam; international laboratories, scientific and educational laboratories, dissertation councils with dissertation defense committees, and the whole process of reproduction of academic staff; the internal incentive and evaluation system for lecturers and researchers; the system of affiliated preparatory schools and interaction with them; and the model of HSE branches, which was fundamentally different from that of other universities and allowed HSE regional campuses to become full-fledged competitors of traditional local universities.

Albeit that Kuzminov always had an element of authoritarianism in his management style, he invited people to HSE who were able to object to him. And even if such people, for various reasons, were later relegated to less visible positions, they remained at the university. Kuzminov remained loyal to his employees for a long time, even if those employees did not agree with him.

T-invariant: Quite recently, one of the people most emblematic of HSE, Evgenii Grigorievich Yasin, passed away. What was his role?

Andrei Yakovlev: As far as I can recall from the words of those directly involved, the original idea of the HSE (which was later formulated in the application for the first European grant) was born from a direct exchange between Kuzminov and Yasin. Then, in the early and mid-1990s, Yasin helped to attract external grants for the development of the HSE, as well as for the transfer of the buildings of the Economics Academy and the Institute of Microeconomics (the former State Planning Research Institute) to the HSE. In the 2000s, however, Yasin's role became much greater: it was largely through his efforts that the public liberal image of the Higher School of Economics was created. In this regard, one HSE graduate commented on the post about Yasin's death: "Evgenii Grigorievich is one of the people who made me decide to go to HSE. And then, already studying at HSE, I went to Pokrovka as a free listener to his brilliant and incredibly fascinating lectures on the history of Russian reforms. Evgenii Grigorievich is the face of Russia as I would like to see it—kind, peaceful, bright, open, free, striving for the most important ideals and values, striving to change Russia and its people for the better."

T-invariant: Tell us how HSE got rich. You have already said that it began as a college with grant money from the European Union. Where did the money come from to turn it into a prestigious, wealthy university? One of the persistent myths around HSE is that financial resources for its development were provided thanks to the Kuzminov-Nabiullina family tandem. Moreover, until 2008, the HSE was subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, and in 2008 it came under the Government of the Russian Federation. But you oversaw HSE's finances for quite a long time and saw how it all began. What is the real story?

Andrei Yakovlev: Yes, I also heard such conversations, but this has nothing to do with reality. To better understand the context: from the fall of 1993, for fifteen years, I interacted with Kuzminov almost on a daily basis. I also knew Nabiullina for a long time—from the time I studied at Moscow State University (she started studying two years before me and was a graduate student with Yasin when I wrote my diploma thesis under his supervision). Then we met at the Expert Institute and at the Ministry of Economy, which she joined when Yasin became minister. As her career progressed, there were fewer interactions, but what I know about Nabiullina is that she is an exceptionally scrupulous person. And it was from the moment of her appointment as minister in 2007 (when she had the opportunity to really influence the flow of significant financial resources) that serious internal discussions began at the Higher School of Economics about how to leave the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economic Development—because due to Nabiullina's character, it was obvious to HSE's top managers that they would now have to work twice as hard to provide expert analyses without any additional funding. Largely due to this circumstance, the university came under the wing of the government.

T-invariant: Was it necessary to avoid a direct conflict of interest?

Andrei Yakovlev: Yes, but not only that. The fact is that Kuzminov had already developed a financial strategy that would have been impossible to implement with the arrival of Nabiullina. Kuzminov relied on advanced development, i.e., he constantly invested in attracting strong lecturers, launching new programs and projects, and creating new departments. For this purpose, the financial plan included an item called "Rector's Reserve," and on an annual basis expenditures were balanced with income. However, the commitments made were long-term, so there was inevitably a shortage of funds beyond the year. So Kuzminov kept asking for additional funds from the federal budget, promising new results but at the same time covering old commitments with new funds. This approach created a kind of "pyramid," which was impossible to continue under Nabiullina. Her determination in such matters is well known. By the way, I think that this, together with her personal competence, is the reason why Nabiullina is still in the system. None of the security officials who might be unhappy with what she is doing as head of the Central Bank can blame her for anything. In my opinion, the visible pressure on Kuzminov from 2019 was to a large extent not even pressure on the Higher School of Economics, but pressure on Nabiullina—because she had already become a more prominent political player than Kuzminov.
[…]

T-invariant: You have already explained that Nabiullina was not the key to HSE's financial well-being. So what and who exactly are the keys to HSE's success story?

Andrei Yakovlev: First of all, the personal qualities of Iaroslav Ivanovich Kuzminov, associated with his ability to find financial resources and to convince the owners of these resources that allocating them to the Higher School of Economics is justified. Kuzminov belongs to the rare type of public entrepreneurs. This is unusual in the Russian academic environment.

The Higher School of Economics was already a financially successful organization in the 1990s, because a large European grant was allocated for the creation of the Higher School of Economics. Then there was a second grant for the dissemination of new standards of economic education in the Russian regions. Yasin played a crucial role in this. Both projects were implemented in cooperation with the University of Rotterdam. These grants were spent on technical assistance in the form of purchases of equipment and literature—and, most importantly, they included an internship system for HSE lecturers in the Netherlands, France, and the UK. At that time, against the backdrop of domestic chaos, young Candidate of Science graduates were faced with a choice: go into business, go abroad for PhD programs, or remain in Russian academia. And HSE was already able to offer these people normal financial conditions—not in the form of a guaranteed salary from the budget of the then-Ministry of Education, but in the form of scholarships paid as part of these European internships.

But just as important as money was vision, a vision of the future and a strategy. This came largely from Kuzminov himself. Moreover, HSE did not adopt a formal document guiding its strategy until the early 2000s. Until then, this sense of future emerged from personal communications with Kuzminov within the informal and very comfortable academic microclimate that existed at the HSE.

T-invariant: When did HSE's financial model change?

Andrei Yakovlev: The first such turnaround occurred in the early 2000s, when there were fewer scholarships and many more students. If I'm not mistaken, five new faculties were opened in 2002 alone—and the budget more than doubled. With such rapid development, it was necessary to hire many new lecturers in a short period of time. There was a danger that the quality of education would suffer. HSE had been the cream of the Russian academic market. By the early 2000s, this resource was largely exhausted.

But at the same time, HSE began to receive commercial income: from teaching students, from students in MBA and second-degree programs, from schoolchildren in preparatory courses. There were also research contracts from various departments. In other words, there was a balance of different sources of funding, including budget funds (including funds for building maintenance and capital investments), grants, and money from the market.

And it was then that we agreed that we would start to invest some of the commercial income from the market into academic development ourselves. This led to the creation of the Scientific Fund, which provides internal grants, and a system of academic allowances. Kuzminov's position was always to increase the salaries of lecturers equally regardless of the department in which they worked: economics, history or mathematics. But it was clear to me, as the vice-rector in charge of science and finance at the time, that the market situation for economists and historians was not the same.

The academic bonus mechanism was created to provide incentives to retain strong lecturers at HSE. At the same time, the presence of publications was seen as a measurable indicator of participation in research, which in turn was

seen as an important criterion for assessing the level of lecturers. The bonuses applied only to lecturers but were also available to researchers with a decent publication record who taught for at least a quarter of their workload. This created incentives to involve researchers in the educational process.

T-invariant: How has the HSE model changed since 2008, when the university was taken over by the government?

Andrei Yakovlev: That was the second fork in the road. And it was not just the conflict of interests between Nabiullina and Kuzminov, which I mentioned earlier, but also the fact that Kuzminov continued to focus on further expansion, on further growth, for which he did not have enough of his own resources. And it was necessary either to slow down this growth or to look for other non-commercial solutions. Therefore, during this period I had regular disputes with Kuzminov, which led first to my refusal to supervise the finances and then to my resignation from the position of vice-rector.

The turning point for me was the Academic Council at the end of 2007, when we discussed both the financial plan for the next year and a request to the government for additional funds. The justification for this request was that we were actively investing in academic development, including academic bonuses funded by the HSE. It was announced that academic bonuses would be increased further and would now exceed lecturers' basic salaries. But in the same request to the government, it was indicated that in addition to increased funding for research, equipment, building maintenance, and capital investments, we needed money for the salaries of our cleaners and plumbers, as they were being paid half of the going rate in Moscow.

T-invariant: Did you ultimately part ways with Kuzminov over the issue of plumbers and cleaners?

Andrei Yakovlev: That was a specific example, but basically the discussion was about whether it was right to tie the development of a university so closely to state funding. This discussion lasted more than an hour in the presence of the entire Academic Council, and shortly afterwards I wrote a letter of resignation from the post of Vice Rector because the Academic Council did not support me. The majority supported Kuzminov, and it was the decision of the team to go to the state and ask for further funding for the development of the university. Thus, at the end of the 2000s, a change in the model occurred: the emphasis came to be placed on accelerating the attraction of state funding through various initiatives to support leading universities, from the Research Universities Program to the 5-100 Program. It should be emphasized that the HSE, represented by Kuzminov, actively lobbied for the creation of such government programs. As a result, not only the HSE, but also several dozen other leading universities received significant financial resources for development. At the same time, however, the universities were tied to the state. In particular, this period saw a shift from the election of rectors to the appointment of rectors.

T-invariant: Was this a fatal decision? Did you immediately understand that HSE would become a state university not only in terms of funding, but also in terms of ideology?

Andrei Yakovlev: Discussions with Kuzminov on these issues began in the early 2000s. The turning point was the Yukos case, after which contacts between universities and big companies not sanctioned by the Kremlin began to raise suspicions. And before that, at the HSE April Conferences, at Yasin's invitation, we had many people from the business world, including Mikhail Khodorkovskii. I still believe that it is normal for a large university to have contacts simultaneously with various stakeholders, including the state, business, and important public figures. This is exactly the model I advocated. But Kuzminov had a much more statist view from the beginning. In the 2000s, Yasin was the most active in communicating with business, and Kuzminov began to seriously communicate with business through the HSE Supervisory Board, which was chaired first by Viacheslav Volodin and then by Sergei Kirienko. Engagement with business was primarily done through the Kremlin. And Kuzminov perceived autonomous communication with business as a risk.

T-invariant: Are you saying that Kuzminov was more afraid of business than of the state, and that this determined the HSE's future trajectory?

Andrei Yakovlev: Rather, it was a combination of two factors. The first is reliance on the state budget as the main source of funding—mainly because it is easier to be accountable to the state than to private companies for funds received. And the second is steady expansion. When we created more and more new faculties and increased the number of students in the old ones, this was a way of attracting additional resources from the state budget. But this strategy increasingly tied HSE to the state.

T-invariant: So, a bet on government money and a bet on scale. What was the next crossroads?

Andrei Yakovlev: I'll start from a distance. In December 2008, the "March of Dissent" took place, during which HSE students were detained. In January 2009, the HSE received a letter from the Moscow City Internal Affairs Directorate demanding that action be taken against these students. As far as I know, other universities also received such letters, after which such students were expelled. And Kuzminov then gave an official reply in the spirit that people have the right to express their opinions, and if it is proven in court that they have actually committed some kind of crime or offence, then we are ready to discuss it; otherwise, we would have to expel every student who crossed the road at a red light. At the time, such a response from the HSE was still possible. But at that time we had a different president…

T-invariant: A president for whom "freedom is better than unfreedom" …

Andrei Yakovlev: Yes, yes, absolutely right. Later, in March 2011, a public discussion between Kuzminov and Navalnyi took place in the hall of the Academic Council of the Higher School of Economics, moderated by Evgenii Grigorievich Yasin. All of this actually happened…

T-invariant: Could Evgenii Grigorievich Yasin influence Kuzminov's decision-making? And did he want to?

Andrei Yakovlev: As for Yasin's influence on Kuzminov's decisions, I can only say that after he left the government and joined HSE, Yasin acted exclusively as an advisor. He could express his opinion, but he always left the right to make decisions to Kuzminov as rector. Nevertheless, it was Yasin who largely shaped the image of HSE in the 2000s, attracting both strong lecturers and motivated students to the university. Despite the changes taking place at HSE today, I am confident that Yasin's spirit will remain part of HSE graduates' identity, and I hope that in time HSE will bear the name of Evgenii Grigorievich Yasin.

T-invariant: At what point did the era of solidarity with state ideology begin?

Andrei Yakovlev: In my opinion, the situation became irreversible in 2012–2014. In 2014, Kuzminov took part in the elections to the Moscow City Duma. From what I've heard, he didn't really want to. But he was urgently asked to do so because Navalnyi had won almost 30 percent of the vote in the previous mayoral elections and it was necessary to support Sobianin, stabilize the situation, and fill the Moscow City Duma with people from science, culture, and education, people who do business and are not involved in politics. Kuzminov agreed. And he actually started working as a deputy, going from house to house, communicating with people. Valeria Kasamara, who later became vice principal, actively supported him.

Against the backdrop of his participation in the Moscow City Duma, the Moscow City government commissioned various research projects from the Higher School of Economics. At the same time, after the 2012 presidential elections, the HSE, which had been working for various state bodies dealing with economic issues, refocused on the presidential administration and, in particular, began to monitor the implementation of the "May Decrees." And in 2014, Volodin (who was the deputy head of the presidential administration and responsible for domestic policy) became the chairman of the HSE's supervisory board.

The process continued. Kuzminov did not stand in the next elections to the Moscow City Duma in 2019. He always had a strong intuition and sent Kasamara in his place. I don't think it was a coincidence. Many remember the scandalous episodes of that election campaign.

At the same time, dismissals for political reasons began to become widespread at the HSE. In 2018, the Transparency International laboratory headed by Elena Panfilova was closed. In 2019, a number of well-known political scientists left HSE as part of the reorganization of the Department of Political Science and its merger with the Department of Public Administration. In 2020, the Department of Constitutional Law was liquidated, with the dismissal of a large group of leading professors who opposed the constitutional amendments.

T-invariant: You have described a paradoxical process in which Iaroslav Kuzminov's ambitions for the development of HSE—both in terms of the scale of its tasks and the number of faculties and students—on the one hand led to the flourishing of HSE and its development into a leading university, but on the other hand destroyed the university.

Andrei Yakovlev: There is nothing paradoxical about this. It is no coincidence that I described Kuzminov as a public entrepreneur. Corporate behavior and corporate governance are my main areas of research interest. Stories of a start-

up being created; developing successfully; becoming a medium-sized company, then a large company, then a giant holding company; and finally going bankrupt are quite typical in business.

I'm not saying that HSE is a business organization. That would be wrong. But certain analogies are possible. Looking back, we can see that at some stage in its development, the HSE exceeded the scale that had allowed it to maintain the academic culture that had become the basis of the HSE's reputation in society and in the country.

And in a way, its transformation into an ordinary large university that trains personnel is quite natural. Frankly speaking, contemporary Russia, the Russia of the last decade, no longer needed the Higher School of Economics, which was created in the 1990s and became a vibrant and outstanding institution in the 2000s.

Now it is an educational institution that can train economists, managers, lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, IT specialists, physicists, and mathematicians on a large scale. And the demand is certainly there, whereas all sorts of new ideas it had produced, especially in terms of integration with global partners, were no longer needed. In fact, this was already true a decade ago, but amazingly movement in that direction continued. In my view, this was because there was the 5-100 program, with approved funding and the bureaucratic apparatus needed to account for its implementation.

T-invariant: Kuzminov's shocking resignation in 2021—was it a special operation?

Andrei Yakovlev: There were indeed elements of a special operation. Because formally, Kuzminov was reappointed to the position of rector in 2019 for another five years. He was supposed to work until 2024. Of course, his reappointment was not easy. Since the end of 2018, there had been an ongoing public relations campaign against the HSE on issues related to education. Before that, there were isolated comments by certain individuals, because many of the initiatives of the HSE in the field of education met with opposition. This was not yet a campaign. But what happened in the fall of 2018 was precisely a campaign. Then, at the beginning of 2019, the oversight of the Higher School of Economics by the Russian domestic security service FSB was transferred internally from the FSB's Economic Security Service to the FSB's Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order and the Fight against Terrorism. And I remember how in the spring of 2019, at a meeting dedicated to a new Concept for the development of the university, Kuzminov introduced three people who had been sitting on the sidelines the entire time by saying: additional employees were seconded to us who will primarily deal with students, but may also come to the departments, so be ready to talk to our new colleagues.

T-invariant: What was the rationale behind this decision?

Andrei Yakovlev: The political situation was becoming more complicated, so the leadership of the Higher School of Economics asked the FSB to expand cooperation. This is how it was explained to us. However, despite the deterioration of the overall political situation, Kuzminov, who in March 2019 presented a new Concept for the development of the university at a meeting of all HSE employees, continued to rely on maintaining international relations, developing cooperation, hiring lecturers on the international job market, and admitting foreign students. And after presenting such a Concept, he was reappointed as rector.

But this didn't mean that the situation wasn't changing. It seems to me that the turning point—not for the HSE, but for the country as a whole—was 2018. Before the presidential election, there were still hopes that domestic politics would change. But after those elections, a "new, old government" was appointed, headed by the very same Medvedev. At the same time, the exhaustion of the "Crimean consensus" began to be felt in society, and this is understandable, because people cannot be mobilized indefinitely—especially when they see that the elite has not been particularly mobilized and that no significant changes are occurring.

At the same time, protests began across the country—in Arkhangelsk, Shiyes, Yekaterinburg, Bashkortostan, Khabarovsk…

Therefore, I think that Kuzminov's dismissal was due to the fact that by 2021 the risks had increased too much and such a large and influential organization as the Higher School of Economics had to be brought under control. But it should be emphasized that similar processes were going on at RANEPA, where there began a series of criminal cases that ended with the resignation of the rector, Vladimir Mau.

T-invariant: Ultimately, Kuzminov's resignation was Putin's decision?

Andrei Yakovlev: Absolutely. The position of the rector of HSE, like the position of the rector of RANEPA, of Moscow State University, or of St. Petersburg State University, is the prerogative of the President.

T-invariant: If Iaroslav Kuzminov were somehow still rector today, would this have affected the current state of the HSE during the war? Or wouldn't it have changed anything?

Andrei Yakovlev: I think that in the current situation, it would hardly affect anything. For example, I remember the situation in 2019 with the arrest of HSE student Egor Zhukov. Then, university lecturers wrote a letter in his defense. Kuzminov called members of the Academic Council and was very emotional.

T-invariant: Did he ring you up, as well?

Andrei Yakovlev: No, he didn't call me again. Having known me for so long, he probably understood that there was no point in trying to persuade me to withdraw my signature. But I had a conversation with another colleague—a member of the Academic Council—to whom Kuzminov explained that signing such letters was very dangerous for the university: "There will be a crackdown on the HSE, and another rector will be appointed."

We must also consider the factor of too long a tenure, when even the most talented and creative people begin to change. In my opinion, for Kuzminov in the early 2020s, maintaining his own place among the elite, involvement in decision-making, and access to people who make decisions at the highest level was already more important than maintaining the university in its previous form. Based on our last long personal conversation in December 2021, I had the impression that the post of Chairman of the Council of Experts in the Government was much more important to him than the position of Scientific Director at HSE, in which he found himself after resigning from the post of Rector.

And Kuzminov's behavior after the outbreak of the war was also, in my opinion, quite telling, especially in comparison with Nabiullina, who was responsible for economic policymaking and had obligations to many people whom she brought with her. Kuzminov had no such obligations; he was no longer rector. And he certainly had the opportunity to step aside and at least say nothing.

But as far as I know from my colleagues, Kuzminov is quite active. He is demanding that representatives of other universities be included in the work of the government's Council of Experts. On his initiative, the HSE closed IGITI (Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities) and the Budnitsky Centre. At official meetings with bureaucrats, he regularly makes patriotic speeches, although they are not really expected of him, as they want practical advice. Taking all this into account, I think that even if Kuzminov had remained rector, it is unlikely that anything would have changed.

T-invariant: Then the question arises: Why, in spite of everything you've just said, did you not want to leave HSE? You left against your will, and in your farewell letter you wrote that you hoped to return to HSE—although you may be aware that one of your colleagues described that letter as an "optimistic obituary." What is the reason for your optimism, in this sense?

Andrei Yakovlev: I do not see my article as an obituary for the Higher School of Economics. The Higher School of Economics continues its work and teaches students. Yes, a number of researchers and lecturers have left, and this will have an impact over time, but the core programs are still being taught in the same format and with roughly the same content as they were three years ago. The education system in general is inert.

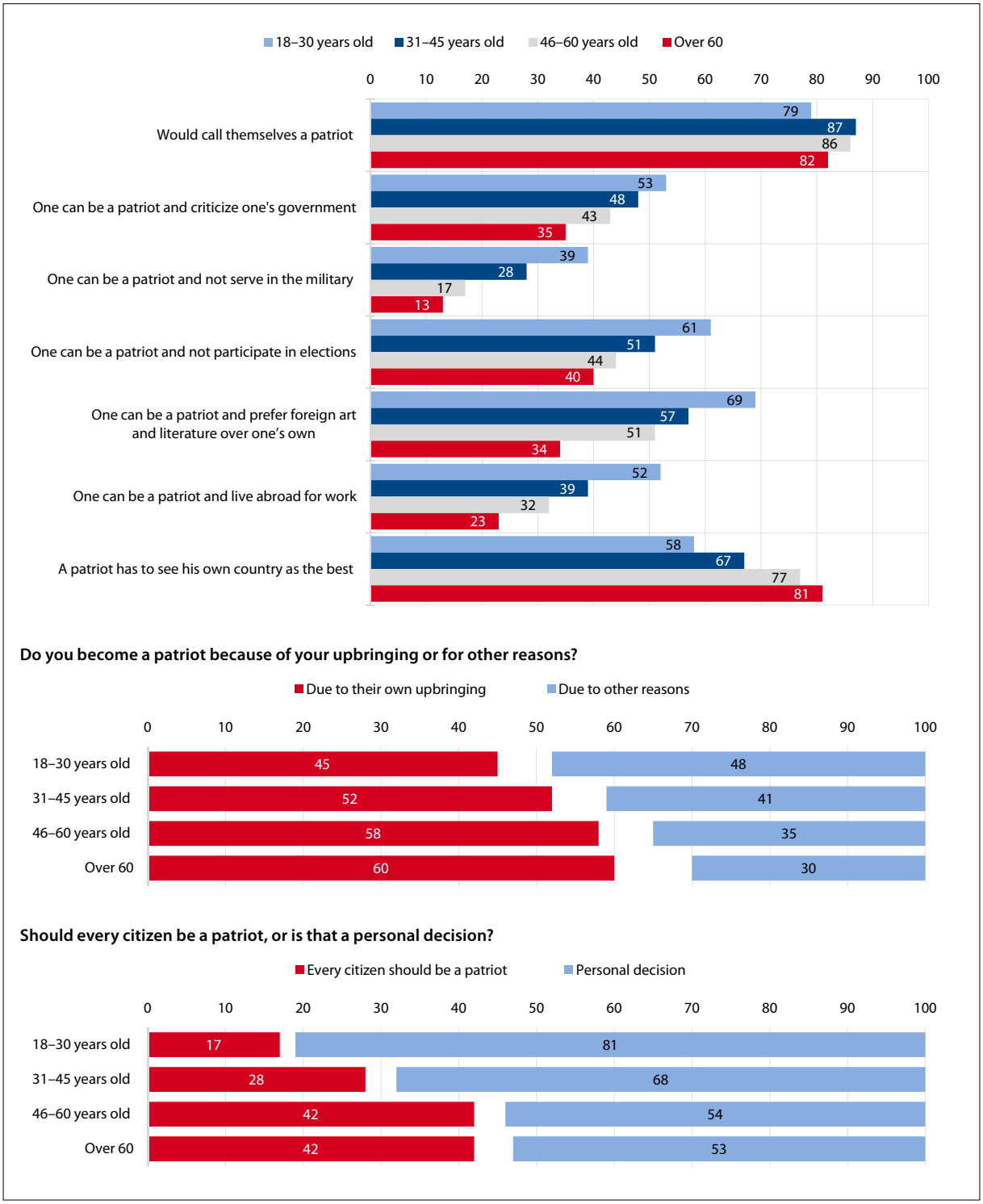
So this is not an obituary. Yes, the HSE has changed, but it hasn't disappeared. And that is where my optimism comes in. I believe that the Higher School of Economics will survive the current political regime, which does not have long to live. I assume that the "dark present" will soon come to an end and that Russia will have to be restored. This will be done primarily by people who are in Russia. That is why it is important for me to interact with colleagues and to understand what is happening in the country through contacts with them.
[…]

About the Interviewee
Prof. Dr. *Andrei Yakovlev* worked at the HSE from September 1993 to August 2023, where he was Vice Rector responsible for applied and academic research, finance, development strategy and the organization of the HSE International April Conference from 1993 to 2012. His research interests include state-business relations, corporate governance, industrial policy, public procurement and incentives in the state apparatus. Since October 2022, Yakovlev has been a visiting scholar at the Davis Center at Harvard University. He is currently a Society Fellow at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg in Delmenhorst.

DOCUMENTATION

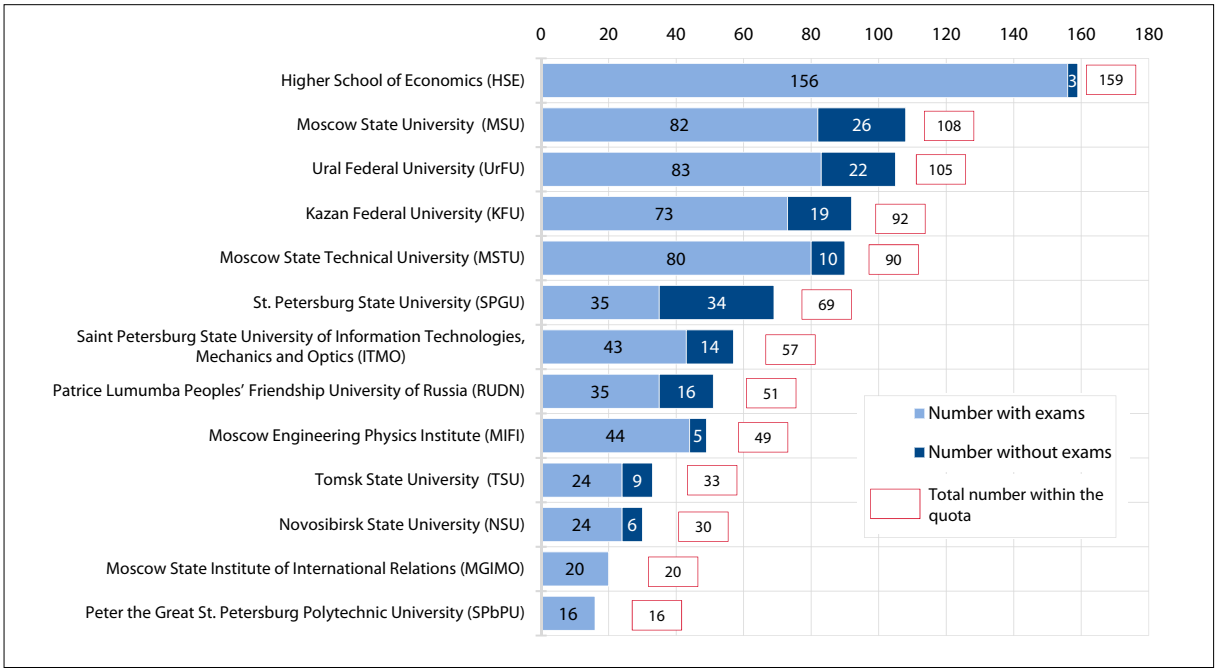
Data on Patriotism and Indoctrination

Figure 1: Russians' Attitudes toward Patriotism, 2023, % of Respondents



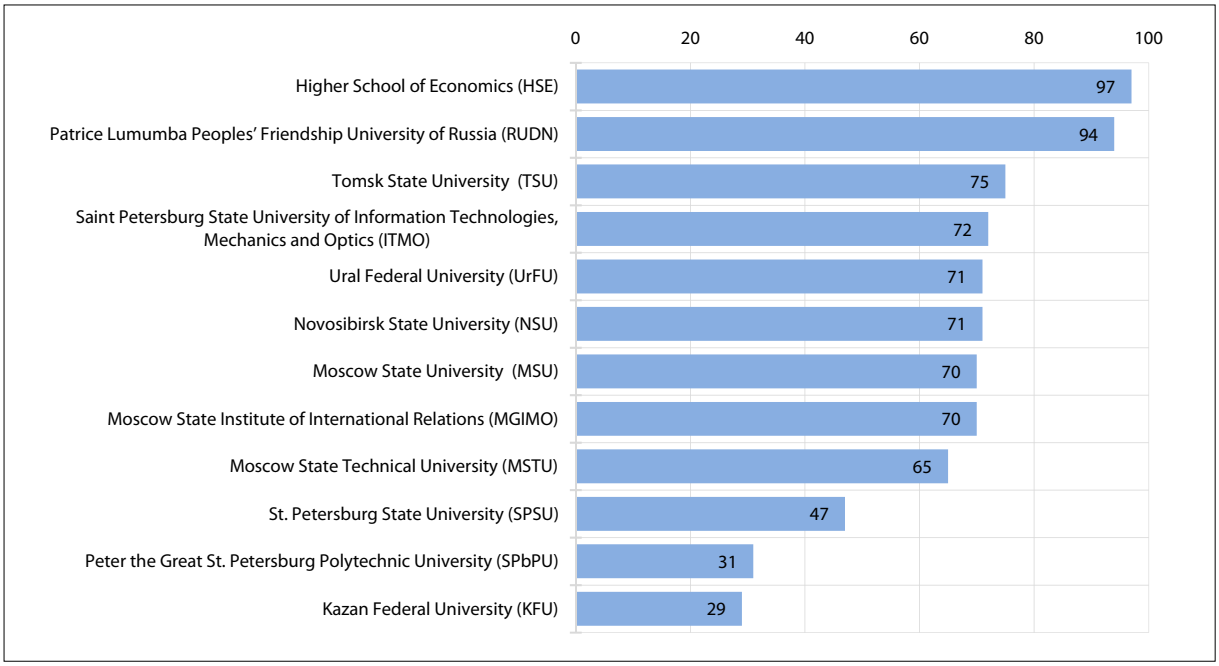
Quelle: Re:Russia (2023). The War of Patriotism: Russia's extensive campaign of school militarism is designed to suppress the modern attitudes of Russian youth. https://re-russia.net/en/review/321/

Figure 2 More Than 800 People Were Admitted to the Best Russian Universities as Part of Quotas for Participation in the War in Ukraine
Number of people enrolled through the "separate quota" at the best Russian universities



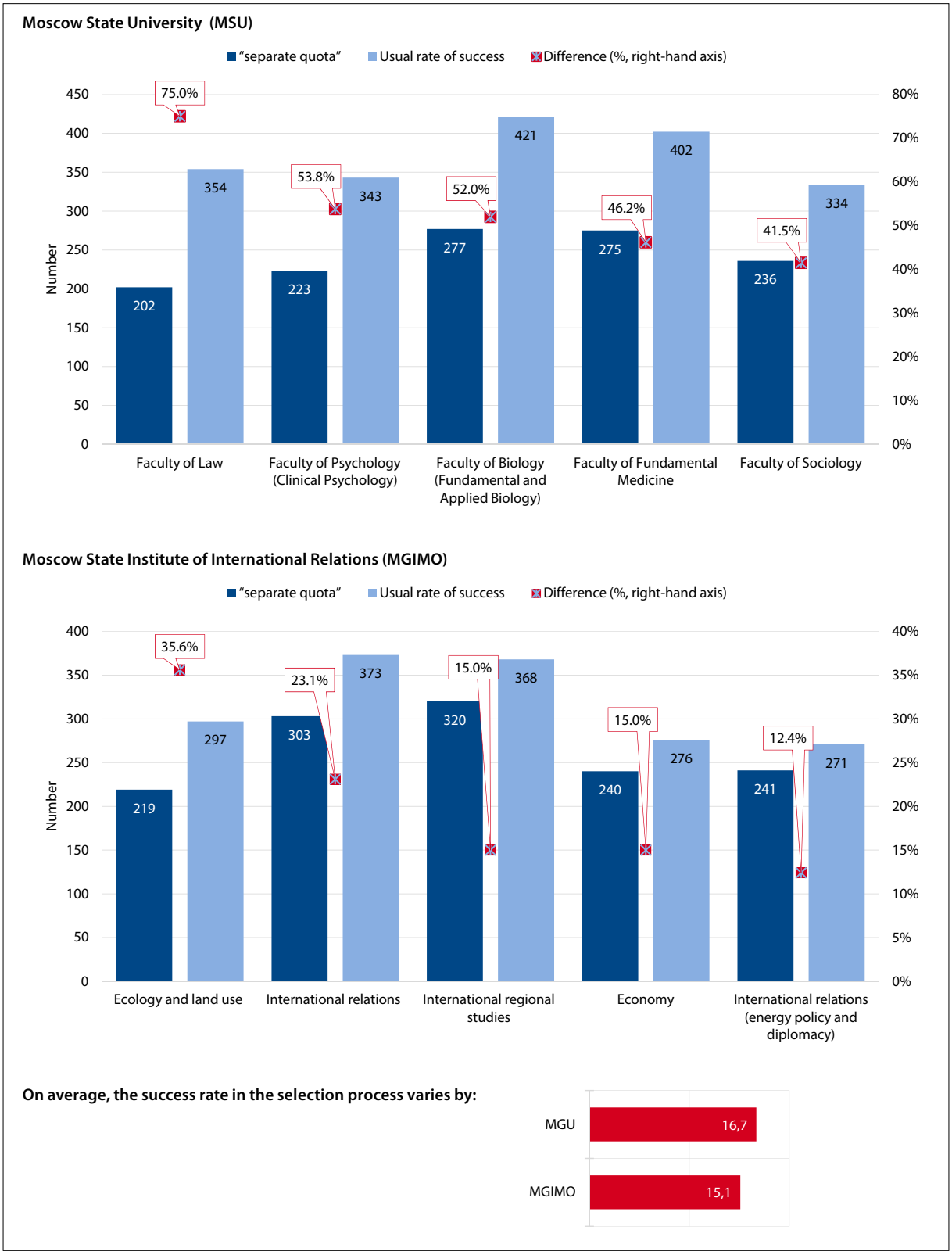
Source: Vazhnye Istorii (2023). Participants of the war in Ukraine and their children who failed the Unified State Exam or did not take it at all will study free of tuition at Russia's most prestigious universities. https://istories.media/stories/2023/08/09/v-samikh-prestizhnikh-vuzakh-rossii-besplatno-budut-uchitsya-uchastniki-voini-v-ukraine-i-ikh-deti-kotorie-zavalili-yege-ili-voobshche-yego-ne-sdavali/

Figure 3: Most of Those Enrolled in the Best Universities under the Quota for War Veterans and Their Children Did Not Pass the USE [Unified State Exam]
Proportion of those who were admitted under the "separate quota" and whose USE results did not meet the hurdle for the study programs



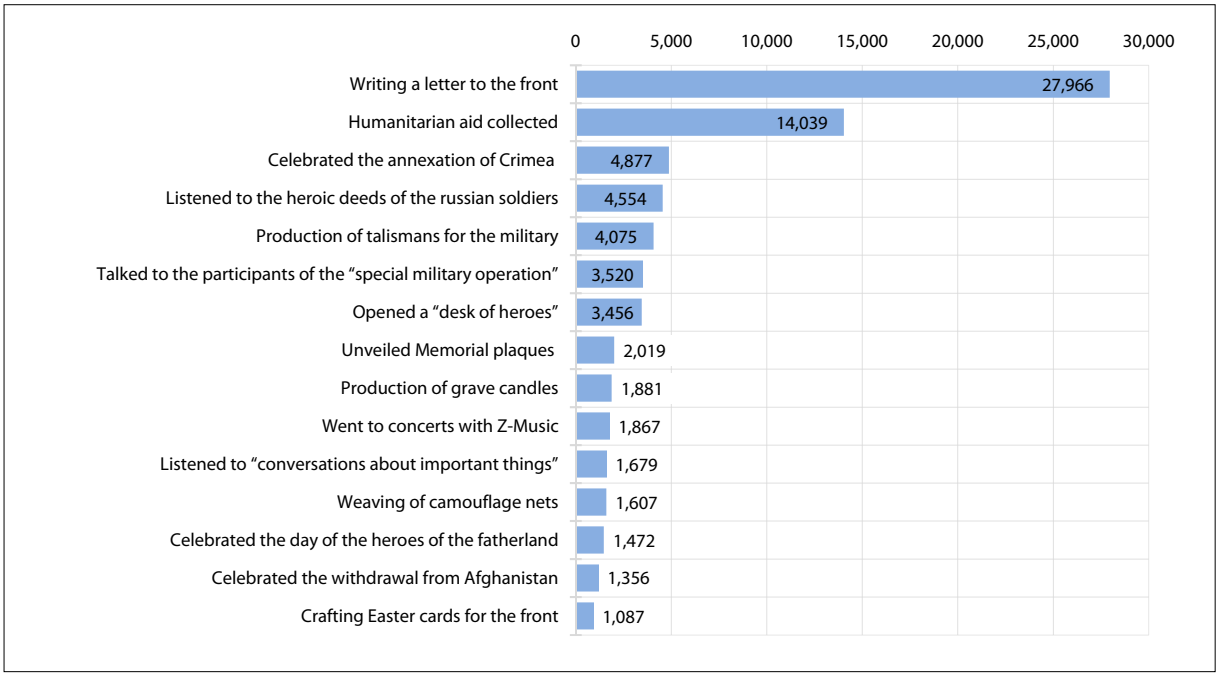
Source: Vazhnye Istorii (2023). Participants of the war in Ukraine and their children who failed the Unified State Exam [necessary for admission to university] or did not take it at all will study free of tuition at Russia's most prestigious universities. https://istories.media/stories/2023/08/09/v-samikh-prestizhnikh-vuzakh-rossii-besplatno-budut-uchitsya-uchastniki-voini-v-ukraine-i-ikh-deti-kotorie-zavalili-yege-ili-voobshche-yego-ne-sdavali/

Figure 4: Where MSU and MGIMO Showed the Largest Gap between the Competition Result and the "Separate Quota" for War Veterans



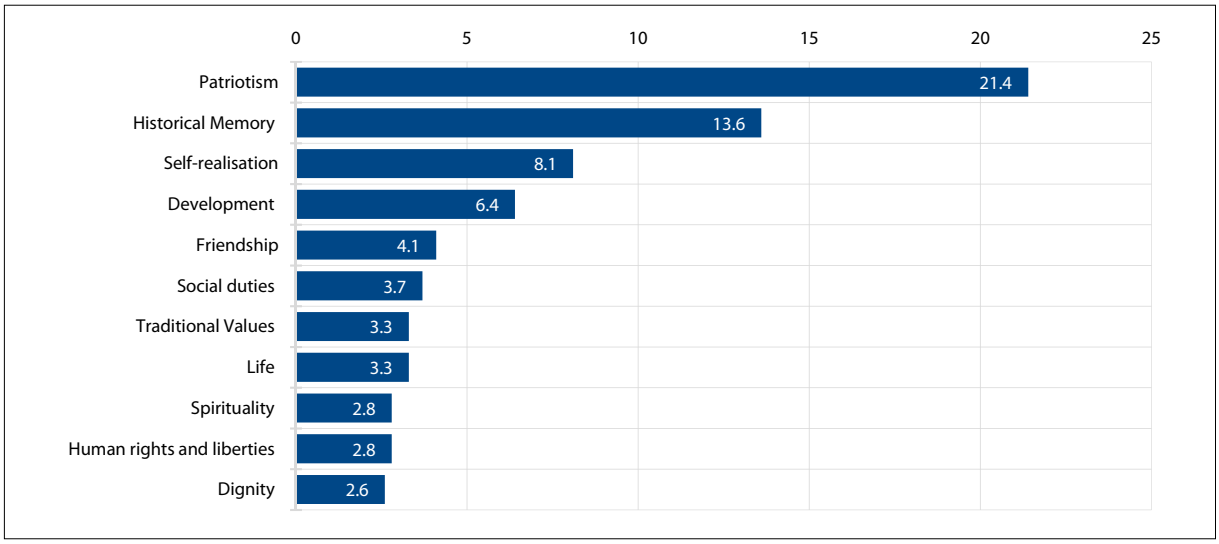
Source: Agentstvo Novosti (2023). At some faculties of MSU, the passing score on the general enrollment competition was up to 75% higher than on the "military quota", https://t.me/agentstvonews/3929.

Figure 5: What Did Russian Children Do to Support the War?
Number of activities carried out by educational institutions since the beginning of the invasion



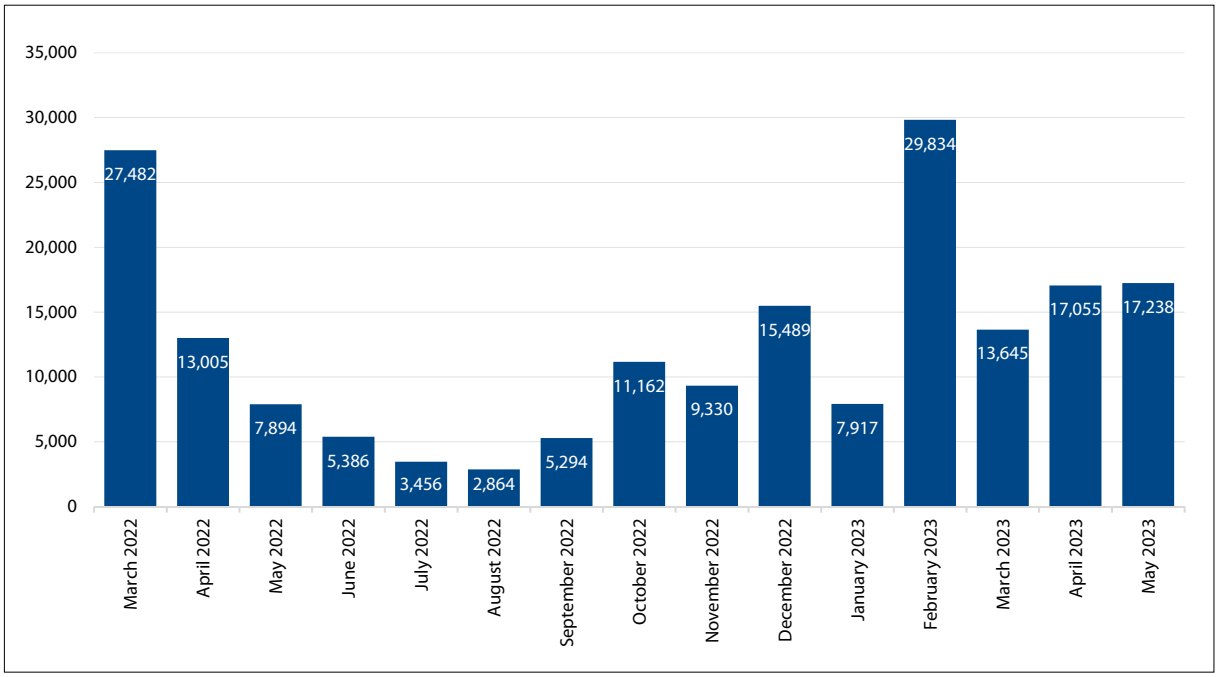
Souce: Daria Talanova (2023). The boy and the girl carry 200 grams of explosives each. Novaya Gazeta Evropa. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/06/23/i-v-malchishke-i-v-devchonke-est-po-200-gramm-vzryvchatki

Figure 6: What Is Addressed in "Conversations about Important Things"?
Proportion of the various topics in the 35 lessons planned



Souce: Daria Talanova (2023). The boy and the girl carry 200 grams of explosives each. Novaya Gazeta Evropa. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/06/23/i-v-malchishke-i-v-devchonke-est-po-200-gramm-vzryvchatki

Figure 7: Number of School-Related Events on the Topic of "War in Ukraine"



Souce: Daria Talanova (2023). The boy and the girl carry 200 grams of explosives each. Novaya Gazeta Evropa. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/06/23/i-v-malchishke-i-v-devchonke-est-po-200-gramm-vzryvchatki

ANALYSIS

Life of Russian Academic "Relocants"

Nikolay Petrov (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000657554

Abstract

This article provides a collective portrait of Russian academic relocants, offering an analysis of the situation and recommendations for improving it. The article is based on the results of a survey conducted in the summer of 2023 among Russian researchers who moved to Germany and other countries after the start of Russia's war in Ukraine. The main conclusion is that the philanthropic efforts to aid those affected by the ongoing war, traditionally handled by Western countries, have been significantly prolonged due to the continuation of the war. It is now imperative to shift approaches and build toward mutually beneficial collaboration. Instead of merely providing financial aid, there should be a focus on establishing infrastructure and maximizing the potential of arriving academics.

General Situation and Prospects for Its Development

Since the onset of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of Russian citizens have left the country. Re: Russia, analyzing the data available to date from recipient countries, estimates the number of people who have left Russia since February 24, 2022, to be between 820,000 and 920,000 ("Begstvo ot voiny" 2023).

According to Eurostat data, around 100,000 to 105,000 of them have settled in the European Union. This is slightly more than the usual influx of Russians into Europe, which has been around 70,000 per year in recent years. However, it should be noted that the standard flow of Russians obtaining permanent residence permits had been expected to

decrease sharply in 2022 due to the interruption of various scientific and educational exchange programs. Therefore, experts estimate the "war-related" influx of migrants not at between 30,000 and 35,000, but rather at over 50,000 (Escape from War, 2023).

That being said, there is also a reverse flow of Russians who left various international locations after the start of the war and returned to Russia. Based on a survey of 5,000 "war-related" relocators, experts at the European University Institute (EUI) estimate their number at approximately 15% of relocants, or around 120,000 people, of whom 7,000–8,000 had previously been resident in the European Union.

The scale of departure from Russia of representatives of the academic sphere is significant, but it should not be exaggerated. This exodus primarily occurred in the capitals, Moscow and St. Petersburg, where the country's leading universities and academic institutions are located. Scholars at these institutions are actively involved in international cooperation and, as a result, have more connections with foreign colleagues and more opportunities to leave.

The flow of academics from Russia had two peaks: with the onset of the war in February 2022 and with the announcement of mobilization in September of that year. It has not completely dried up, but in the absence of additional "push" factors (such as a new mobilization or a wave of repression), it will continue as a small stream, mainly consisting of those who could not leave immediately, whether because they were still seeking a place in foreign universities, were obtaining visas, or were dealing with family issues.

Among those who have already moved, many of them initially utilized short-term assistance programs. Now, a year or two on, even if the programs have been extended, they are coming to an end. For a relocant, the question arises of what to do next. This is a matter not just of financial support, but also of legal status and the ability to stay in the country of residence. Meanwhile, in many cases, returning to Russia is not an option due to the high risk that an individual not only would not be able to lead a normal life, but would also be robbed of his or her freedom. Some individuals have already applied for political asylum and are awaiting decisions, but they have no certainty of success. In the event of rejection, there is the option of moving to a visa-free country, as mentioned by one respondent to our study who was denied a visa extension and applied for political asylum.

Methodology

For this study, Nikolay Petrov and Nikita Sokolov conducted 48 in-depth interviews with individuals from the academic community who left Russia after February 2022. The goal was not to achieve a representative sample; rather, the selected interviewees form an extended focus group composed of respondents who were previously known to and identified by the interviewers. The advantage of this approach to sample formation was the confidential nature of the interviews and the ability to reach respondents who might have been reluctant to engage with an unfamiliar interviewer. The survey, which used a specially designed questionnaire, was conducted in the format of individual interviews via Zoom. The average interview duration was 30–50 minutes.

Relocants: General Characteristics and Types

A total of 48 people were surveyed—38 men and 10 women. The largest cohort was respondents in their forties, followed by those in their thirties, and then those in their fifties. The youngest respondent was 27 years old and the oldest was 73. The distribution of relocators by country of residence is as follows: Germany (25), the US (6), Israel (3), Armenia (2), Latvia (2), Lithuania (2), Austria, the UK, Georgia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Finland (one each). In terms of their academic specialization, respondents are distributed as follows: history (15), political science (9), sociology (8), economics (4), international relations (4), communications (2), linguistics (2), and other (4). Twenty-eight respondents have a Russian candidate of science (first postgraduate academic degree), five have doctorates (second postgraduate academic degree), one is an academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, four individuals hold a PhD, and 10 do not have an academic degree.

Despite the relatively small size of our sample, several distinct types of relocants are discernible, primarily linked to age and the phase of their academic careers:

I. **Young Cosmopolitans** (6 people): Young individuals at the early stages of their academic careers, including PhD students and recent PhD graduates. They secure positions as PhD students or engage in post-doctoral studies, often obtaining grants. Their relocation is generally less challenging for several reasons: they are usually unburdened by family responsibilities or at least children; they do not face language issues, in terms both of daily life and scientific inquiry; and they are integrated into the global scientific community, easily trainable, and adaptable in terms of research subjects, which do not necessarily have to be related to Russia.

II. **Juniors in Exile** (10 people): Another category of young academics comprises those who left hastily following the announcement of mobilization in September 2022 and the risk of border closures. With no time to conduct a thor-

ough search for positions or wait for visa processing, they often moved to "visa-free" countries such as Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Montenegro, from which they conducted searches for a permanent relocation place. Many of them, unable to secure long-term positions, have been navigating between short-term grants, in the process changing not only cities but also countries.

III. **Renowned Academics** (15 people): Mid-career researchers who have accumulated some scientific capital and have connections with colleagues in Western universities and research centers. Colleagues extended a helping hand, but in many cases, this turned out to be an opportunity to get by for six months to a year with no prospect of extension. The challenging situation facing these relocants is exacerbated by the fact that 1) they are not willing to start from scratch and want to leverage their accumulated capital, narrowing the range of employment opportunities; and 2) most of them have families and children who must be settled into each new place.

IV. **Seniors in Exile** (5 people). This category includes politically active academics who faced administrative pressure in their homeland, leading to dismissal from their jobs and the risk of criminal prosecution. For them, departure is more of an escape than a planned move to a prepared environment. They have connections and colleagues willing to help them, but those who worked in NGOs, as is usually the case, cannot restart their university careers or fully engage in the work of Western NGOs.

V. **Team Members** (7 people). Another group consists of researchers of different ages who largely worked in think tanks and NGOs that have been declared undesirable or closed by the authorities. These include "Memorial," where many distinguished individuals are of pre-pension and pension age; the Sakharov Center; the Carnegie Moscow Center; and Transparency International. Thanks to mass relocation, they have managed to preserve the core of their teams and even institutional frameworks. A prominent example here is the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (Shaninka): former employees are establishing a college in Montenegro.

VI. **Westerners** (4 people). Some researchers were abroad at the beginning of the war, whether participating in internships or working on short- or medium-term contracts. They did not have to leave the country; they simply did not return to Russia, which eased the problems associated with departure and initial adaptation and put them a step ahead of the "renowned academics" when their initial contract ended and they urgently needed to find something new.

Main Challenges Associated with Relocation

The primary challenge encountered by most expatriates, in one way or another, revolves around their **legal status**. This encompasses difficulties obtaining entry visas, a process that is often accompanied by long waiting periods, and challenges renewing/extending visas and residence permits—or obtaining new ones—upon the expiration of the existing ones. This is particularly painful for those in Germany on short-term grants, as transitioning from one grant to another may require scholars to leave the country while a new visa is processed. The overarching problem is uncertainty regarding the prospects of long-term residency in the country.

The second most commonly mentioned issue relates to **housing rentals**. It involves the complexities of finding accommodation, which is especially challenging in Berlin, and negotiating with landlords in a context of uncertainty regarding registration, Russian passports, bank accounts, work contracts, and more. Many respondents managed to secure housing through unconventional means, such as personal connections and the assistance of German colleagues.

A significant portion of respondents have encountered challenges in finding **employment**, with nearly a quarter of them currently positioning themselves as "independent researchers." This essentially means a lack of permanent employment, which forces individuals to navigate between various one-time projects. This situation may be associated with objective issues, such as a limited command of the language, and is often linked to German colleagues, who, having provided significant help in the initial stages, have now exhausted the limited resources of their institutions. Centralized relocation assistance programs are also insufficient.

Rare was the respondent in Germany who did not express difficulties with the **German bureaucracy**, which is perceived as unfamiliar and unconventional by many. Assistance from colleagues, both Germans and fellow expatriates who arrived earlier, has proven invaluable. German public organizations, especially those assisting political migrants, also often extend a helping hand.

Opening a bank account is another challenge that almost everyone faces. There are rules—both general and specific to certain banks—that make it extremely difficult or nearly impossible to open an account in a German bank with a Russian passport. While this is not pleasant, it is somewhat understandable. What is harder to grasp is that existing restrictions can somehow be circumvented and bank accounts opened, each time relying on personal connections and acquaintances.

The difficulties of opening an account in a German bank are compounded by the fact that payment systems have blocked **credit cards** from Russian banks. As a result, individuals who have escaped the Russian regime—or even suffered at its hands—find themselves practically without means of subsistence. Their savings, if any, remain in Russia. This becomes particularly painful when individuals arrive in the new country: even if they have a contract, they need substantial funds to address various relocation issues—renting accommodation, furnishing their living space, and simply sustaining themselves until the first paycheck.

In addition to the challenges of adapting to their new life, some respondents, when discussing problems, mentioned a sense of "**mission loss**" that had given meaning to their work in Russia. Beyond the practical, everyday problems faced by any migrant, it is important to remember that many of those who have moved were—when they were in Russia working in their professional field—driven by considerations of working for the future of the country. Today, in addition to the basic necessities of food and shelter, they need to find meaning in their professional lives. This sentiment was expressed in nearly identical words by three respondents (aged 44, 53, and 59), all belonging to the category of "Renowned Academics": "We have lost the opportunity to think strategically and patriotically about the future. Our efforts have been devalued. We have lost our mission."

Relocants' Situation and Their Self-Perception

Any migration, especially when it is urgent, is usually associated with a decline in status. Our respondents are no exception. An aggregated assessment of their status in the academic system on a five-point scale, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, can be summarized as follows in Table 1. In sum, in terms of their academic status, Russian scholars have generally gone down by one level.

Table 1: Self-Perception of Academic Status of Russian Academics before and after Relocation (n=48).

Perceived Status	1 (lowest)	2	3	4	5 (highest)	Outside of Academia
In Russia before departure	1	12	29	2	0	4 (resignation before departure)
After relocation	7	23	10	0	0	8

Their self-assessment of their current situation—on a scale from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied)—is as follows:

- 1–6 people
- 2–11 people
- 3–12 people
- 4–6 people
- 5–11 people

It can be assumed that this self-assessment is overly optimistic, as people tend to compare their current situation with what they were running away from.

Comparing their current situation (on various indicators) with what it was before departure, 13 respondents considered their situation to be better, 23 worse, and 12 the same. In terms of finances, 11 noted improvement and 5 deterioration, while for the majority (31), the situation remained unchanged. The same pattern emerges when assessing social status: 10 indicated that their social status had improved and 7 that it had deteriorated, while 30 said it remained unchanged. A more even distribution is observed when evaluating the professional environment and opportunities: 10–19–18. Meanwhile, in terms of moral-psychological well-being, the distribution is particularly stark: 35 respondents indicated improvement, 5 deterioration, and 7 no change.

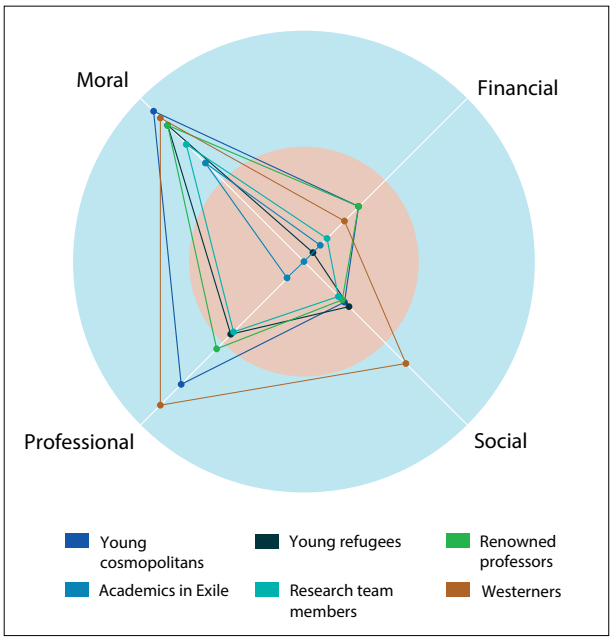
At the same time, as a respondent in the category of "Team Members" put it, civil and political freedoms more than compensate for the decrease in comfort. Figure 1 illustrates the self-evaluation of changes by respondent type.

Westerners (VI) and Young Cosmopolitans (I) have experienced the greatest gains and the least losses from relocation, although only Westerners consider their social connections to have improved. Westerners' self-assessment of their professional status is the highest among all types, while their self-assessment of moral-psychological well-being is a close second to that of the Young Cosmopolitans. Financially, Renowned Academics (III) and Young Cosmopolitans reported having incurred fewer losses than others, while Academics in Exile (IV) experienced the greatest financial setbacks. Indeed, on all aspects, the latter assess their situation post-relocation as sharply inferior to what it was in Russia.

The most significant differences between the self-assessments of different groups relate to the professional component: Westerners (VI), Young Cosmopolitans (I), and Renowned Academics (III) assess this positively, while the remaining groups consider their current situation inferior to pre-move. The least differentiation is found in respondents' assessments of their moral-psychological well-being, where everyone feels they have gained since relocation, and of the social environment, where five out of six groups feel they have lost almost equally, while the sixth group feels it has gained.

Overall, expatriates in Germany and elsewhere evaluate their financial status and social environment as worse but their moral-psychological well-being and professional opportunities as noticeably better.

Figure 1: Self-Evaluation of Changes in Personal Position



Note: The figure visualizes relocants' assessment of the changes in their position that occurred after the move along four axes: financial situation; social connections; professional self-realization; and moral condition. Changes were measured on a scale from 1 (sharp worsening) to 5 (sharp improvement). The center of the circle corresponds to a sharp worsening, the rim of the circle to a sharp improvement. The red zone corresponds to deterioration and the blue zone to improvement.

Preserving/Rebuilding the Scientific Community

Relocation disrupts established connections in one scientific community and, in principle, contributes to building them in another. However, the process of integrating relocants into a new scientific community is much more prolonged than that of breaking away from the old one. Connections with those who have stayed are generally maintained, but in a significantly reduced form. When communicating with colleagues who remained in Russia, our respondents display increased restraint and caution, avoiding the topic of the war. For one thing, they try not to harm those who stay in Russia in a context of tightly controlled social networks; for another, the topic is uncomfortable, dangerous, and suppressed in public communications within Russia itself. In some cases, previously initiated joint projects, including preparations to publish a text, continue. Several respondents have retained their affiliation with Russian institutions: they may conduct online lectures or retain leadership roles in scientific centers.

Interactions among the relocants themselves are more intense, involving not only friendly connections, but also collaborative projects. Some projects in which multiple respondents are participating somewhat resemble startups, among them the creation of a college in Montenegro by those who were formerly employed at the Moscow-based "Shaninka." There is also a complex project on the future of Russia based on one of the informal seminars at HSE. "Loners don't survive," said one of the respondents when discussing collaboration with relocated colleagues. And indeed, there are various forms of network self-organization among relocants. Those mentioned in our interviews included "Scholars Without Borders" (https://scholarswithoutborders.humboldt.edu/)—"I keep an eye on them but don't actively participate; they conduct training, meetings on neutral ground, and distribute microgrants"—and Academic Bridges (http://www.academicbridges.sbs/, https://www.youtube.com/@academic_bridges)—"We've been working since January 2023; it all started with a conference, and then a core group of six people formed from a few dozen participants (two in Germany, two in Armenia, three in Russia), to which a seventh person joined, also in Germany; we've already conducted 6–7 seminars."

Outlook for the Future and Intention to Return

The majority of respondents, when asked about their plans to return, indicated that this would require not just a change in regime, but the normalization of the entire situation in the country, which does not seem likely in the near future. Many scholars, especially the younger ones, indicated that they are settling in the West and plan to stay for at least 10 years to integrate, obtain citizenship, and educate their children.

A respondent under the age of 60 from the category of Renowned Academics (III) put it as follows: "Return? If you count on it, you'll be disappointed. To plow the land with your nose, you have to live as if you're not coming back."

Meanwhile, a 37-year-old Young Cosmopolitan (I) respondent stated, "I can see the prospect of returning in principle, but it's unclear when. I am investing in integration: learning the language instead of writing articles. I am exploring options to leave academia, where everything is overcrowded, though it's unclear where to go."

For older respondents whose careers are not primarily in academia, the situation is different; they have their "bubble without much integration into local life." A 48-year-old Team Member (V) respondent said, "You need to be prepared for the long term, but there is hope, and we've decided not to sell our Moscow apartment. I mainly work with my compatriots; if I wanted to integrate into Germany with the language, etc., I would have to leave all our projects, and I don't want to do that."

However, the current situation is acceptable or mainly satisfactory to slightly more than one-third of respondents, while an equal third are either somewhat or entirely dissatisfied.

The experience of the 2000s, when Russia emphasized the return of successful compatriots in science from abroad and those who returned often faced unfavorable reactions from colleagues who had endured difficult times in Russia, suggests that current relocants' plans to return are quite elusive and may not be realized at all.

Outlook and Policy Recommendations

The protracted nature of Russia's war against Ukraine, which may persist indefinitely, necessitates a reevaluation of the West's strategy, both toward Russia as a whole and toward Russians who have left the country.

The philanthropic efforts to assist those affected by the ongoing war, traditionally handled by Western countries, have been significantly prolonged as the war has continued. It is now imperative to shift approaches and build toward mutually beneficial collaboration. Instead of merely providing financial aid, the West should focus on establishing infrastructure, maximizing the potential of arriving academics. One potential solution is to preserve networks and leverage economies of scale, concentrating researchers who have migrated from Russia, particularly those from large scientific collectives like "Shaninka" or the International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (ICSID) at HSE. It would be worth considering that the German federal government should allocate several hundred stipends to Bundesländer to form new research centers and strengthen existing ones by employing Russians who have moved to Germany. To alleviate the financial burden on the German budget, Russian oligarchs could be involved in financing these centers, potentially in exchange for an easing of the personal sanctions currently imposed on them.

Establishing a network of research centers would help address the issue of expertise on Russia, which is becoming increasingly acute. It should be acknowledged that there is a diminishing pool of capable analysts in Russia (a resource that was traditionally tapped into by Western experts), while those analysts who have left Russia are not in high demand in the West. Russia is undergoing rapid changes, and the expert-analytical support for decisions made by Western policymakers relies on pre-war knowledge that is quickly becoming outdated. Without conducting research, the experts themselves are becoming mere commentators. It is essential to initiate various research projects, including networked ones, covering areas such as economics, social spheres, domestic political developments, political elites, socio-economic and political processes in regions, center-region relations, and local governance, among others.

The situation with departures from Russia has, in a sense, stabilized. The majority of those who were ready to leave have already done so. A new wave of emigration will only occur in response to a sudden change in conditions internally (mobilization, repression, exhaustion of the base for work) and/or externally. The latter would include the launch of more transparent long-term programs that would allow individuals without significant savings or a foundation in the form of an established reputation and connections abroad to build a new life.

So far, we have witnessed a "push" model of emigration: it was those who could not endure and had a place to go who left. It is now necessary to build a "pull" model, attracting strong, capable, and driven individuals who can simultaneously enhance the quality of expertise on Russia and weaken the Putin regime, depriving it of a future.

In Germany, a particular issue is extending the stays of those who arrived under "short-term" programs and have been unable to find long-term employment. This problem has been exacerbated by the fact that competitions for grant programs have a fairly lengthy cycle, and if a researcher with a valid visa or residence permit doesn't fit within that timeframe, they have to leave the country and wait for a response in a destination for which Russians do not need a visa. Additionally, when their residence permit expires, their German bank account is closed. Special long-term programs for Russians are needed to facilitate their integration into the German academic community, including by eliminating the current direct competition with Ukrainians, whose prioritization is understandable and fair.

In transitioning from reactive tactics to a proactive strategy, it is important to consider the growing issue of the legal status of Russians in Germany. Due to the increasing political repression in Russia, many who arrive in Germany are unable to return to Russia to renew their documents, primarily passports, upon the expiration of their existing ones.

It is worth noting that while it is difficult to make the German bureaucracy, which respondents widely consider unwieldy and strict, more efficient, many expatriates find ways to bypass it. Relocants are often able to obtain an earlier visa appointment, as well as set up a bank account and arrange an apartment rental, through acquaintances. That being said, a critical analysis of the existing norms and rules applied to Russians accepted by Germany—and a reconsideration thereof—is necessary.

Many of those surveyed emphasized the significant role played by various volunteers and structures within German society in helping them adapt and integrate into this new and unfamiliar environment. As such, state support for existing civil society organizations that have already proven themselves effective might be a better approach than expanding state involvement.

Shifting perceptions of the duration of the confrontation between Russia and the West, along with a different time horizon, point to the need to transition from initial programs aimed at assisting those who left to wait out the nightmare, which have come to an end, to new, more long-term initiatives that benefit Germany.

*This article is based on the findings of the project "Russian Forced Emigration from the Academic Sphere," carried out from May to October 2023, initiated by Team Russia, Emergency Office Science-at-Risk By Akademisches Netzwerk Osteuropa e.V., Berlin (*https://web.archive.org/web/20240123210559/https://science-at-risk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SAR-Monitoring-Report_Russia-Dec-2023-1.pdf*). The author would like to express gratitude—both his own and on behalf of the respondents—to Germany, its government, and its citizens for the support they have provided to us during this challenging time for us and for all of democratic Russia.*

About the Author

Nikolay Petrov is a visiting researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin, and a consulting fellow at Chatham House, London, focused on Russian domestic politics and its impact on foreign policy, on the political regime in Russia, and on elites and decision making. Between 2013 and 2021, he was a professor and head of the Laboratory for Regional Development Assessment Methods at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

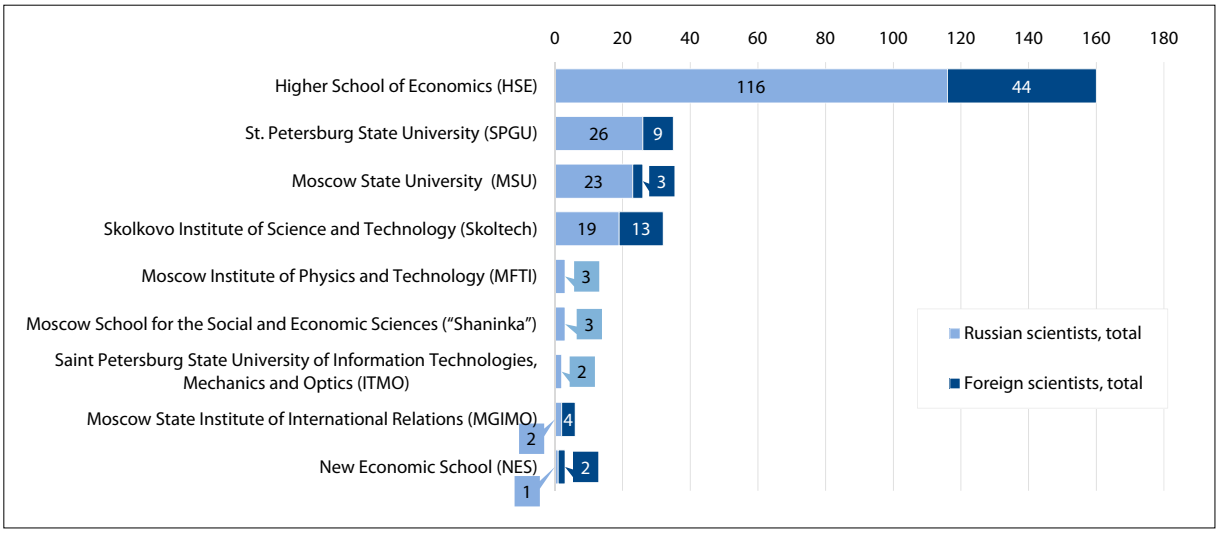
Further Reading

- "Begstvo ot voiny: novye dannye pozvolyaiut otsenit' chislo uekhavshikh rossiian v bolee chem 800 tysiach chelovek" (Escape from War: New Data Allows Assessing the Number of Russians Who Left to Over 800 Thousand People), 28.07.2023, https://re-russia.net/review/347/

DOCUMENTATION

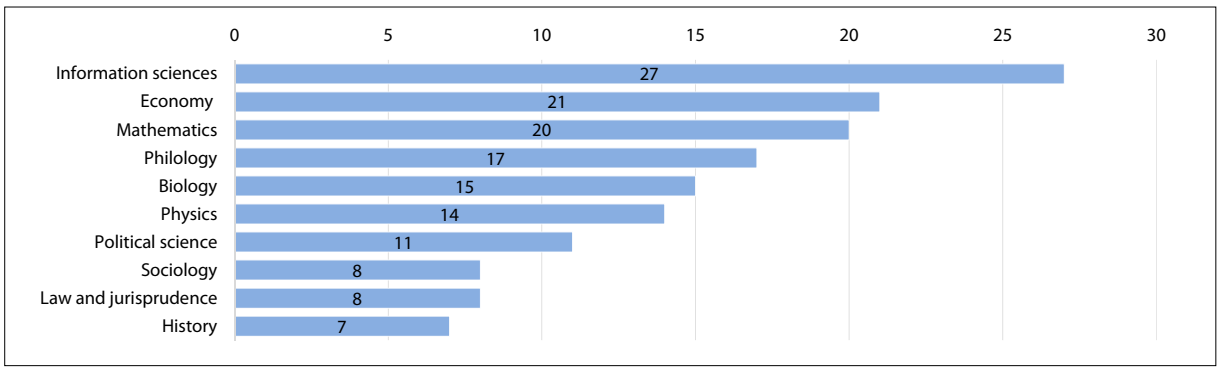
Russia's Brain Drain

Figure 1: After the Start of the War, 195 Russian and 75 Foreign Scientists Left the Country. The outflow came primarily from the Higher School of Economics.



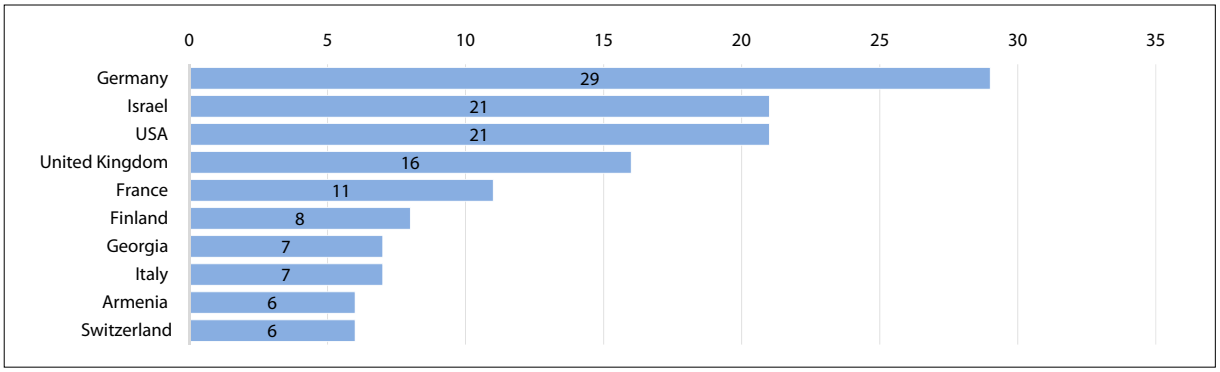
Source: Daria Talanova, "Sledite za ukhodom mysli" [Follow the Brain Drain], Novaya Gazeta Evropa, August 17, 2023, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/08/17/sledite-za-ukhodom-mysli

Figure 2: Which Departments Are Losing the Most Scientists?



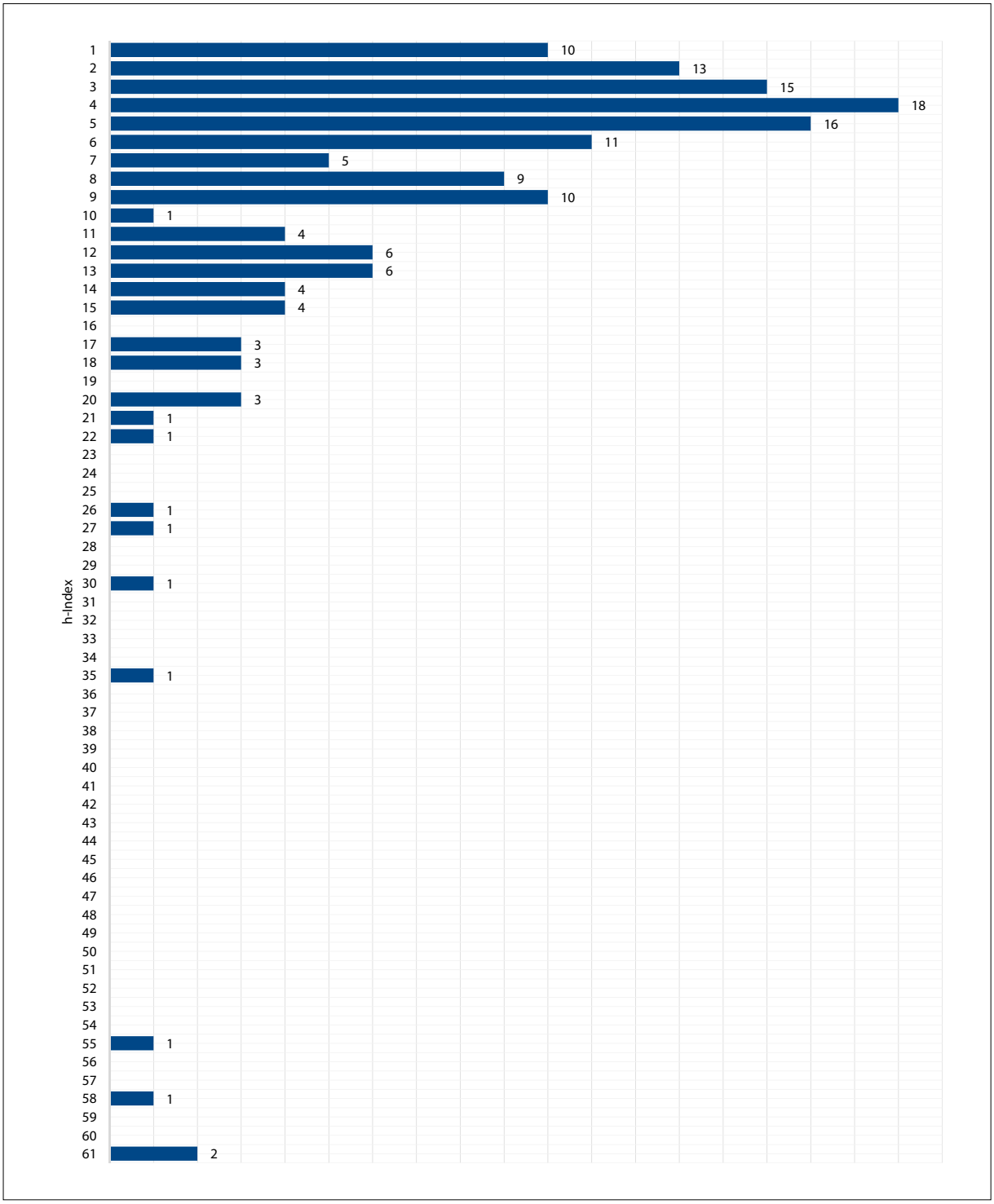
Source: Daria Talanova (2023). Follow the Brain Drain [Sledite sa ukhodom mysli]. Novaya Gazeta Evropa. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/08/17/sledite-za-ukhodom-mysli

Figure 3: Where Russian Scientists Emigrated to Germany, the USA and Israel are the most popular destinations for scientific emigration



Source: Daria Talanova (2023). Follow the Brain Drain [Sledite sa ukhodom mysli]. Novaya Gazeta Evropa. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/08/17/sledite-za-ukhodom-mysli

Figure 4: The Most Sought-After Scientists Leaving Russia
45 scientists who have left have a citation index of 10 or higher

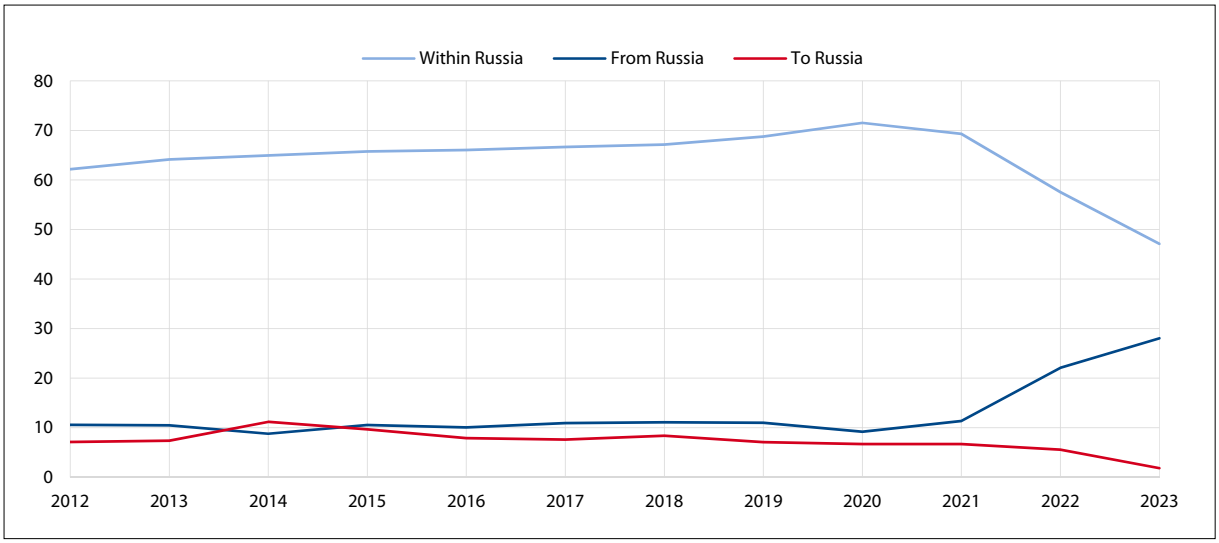


Source: Daria Talanova (2023). Follow the Brain Drain [Sledite sa ukhodom mysli]. Novaya Gazeta Evropa. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/08/17/sledite-za-ukhodom-mysli

DOCUMENTATION

Academic Emigration

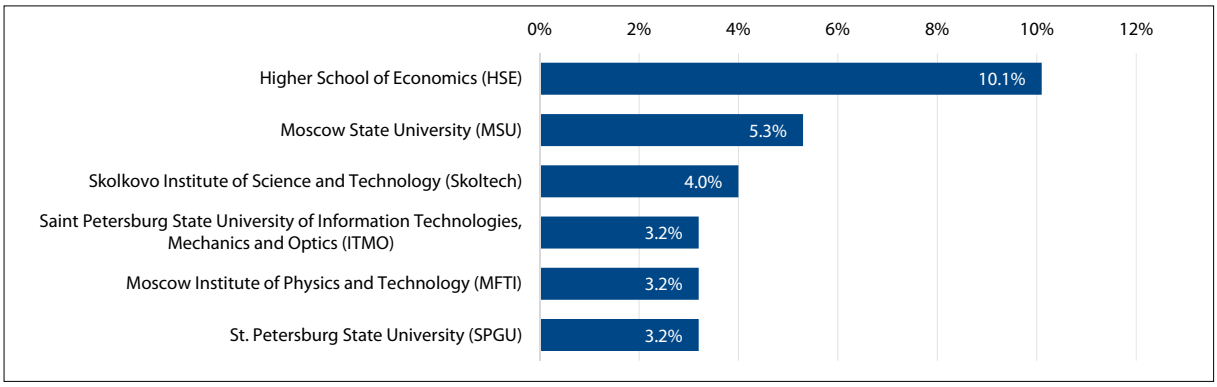
Figure 1: Directions of Migration of University Staff (%)



Year	Within Russia	From Russia	To Russia
2012	62.17	10.57	7.12
2013	64.14	10.49	7.37
2014	64.94	8.78	11.18
2015	65.76	10.54	9.67
2016	66.05	10.06	7.88
2017	66.65	10.92	7.61
2018	67.15	11.08	8.39
2019	68.75	10.98	7.08
2020	71.52	9.19	6.71
2021	69.31	11.35	6.7
2022	57.54	22.08	5.58
2023	47.1	28.05	1.83

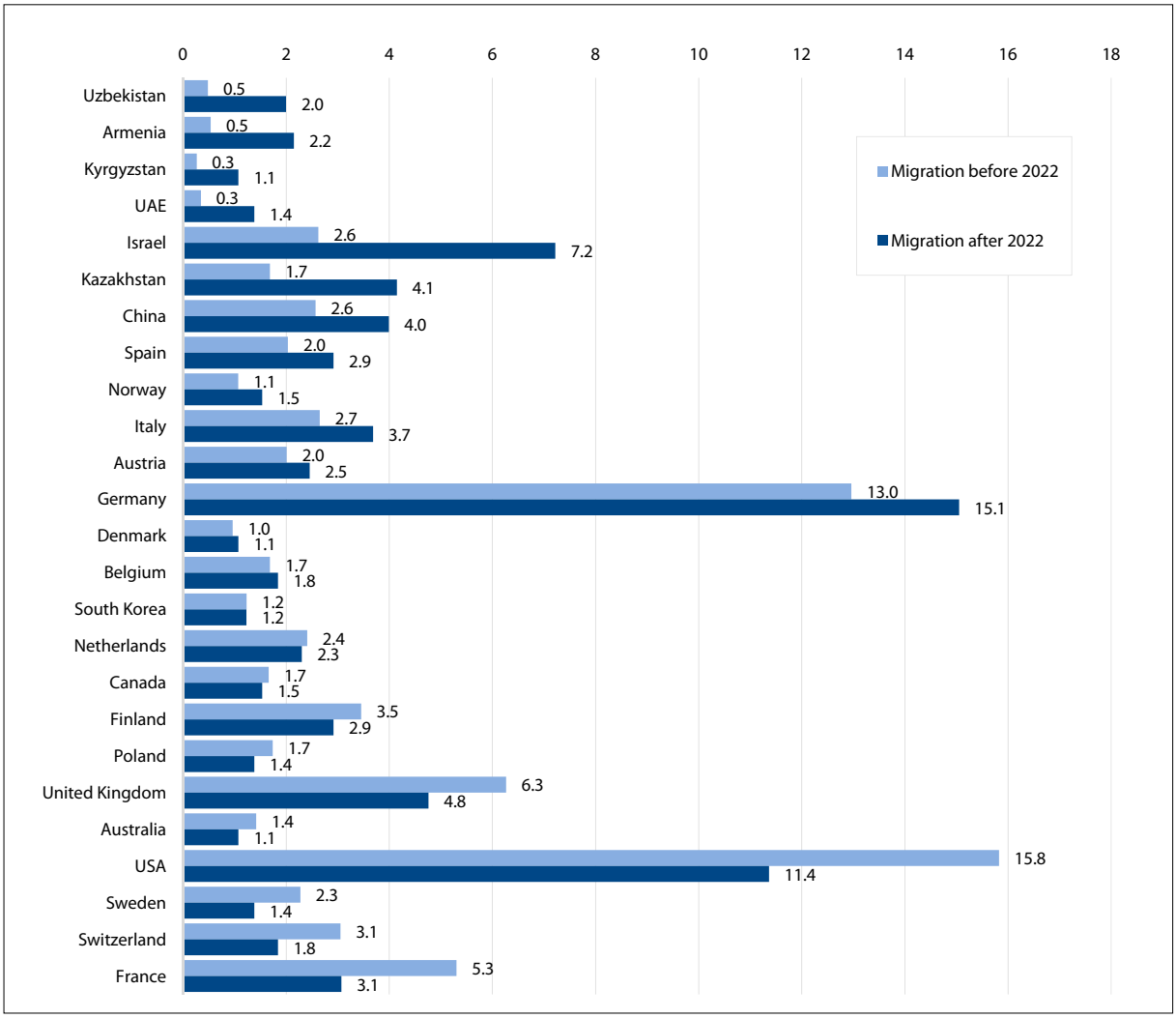
Source: "High-Level Drain," Novaya Gazeta Europe, January 18, 2024, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/01/18/utechka-vysokoi-stepeni.

Figure 2: Top 6 Universities by Share of University Employees* Who Have Left Russia: 23% of All Those Who Have Left Came from Moscow Universities (Percentage of academics who have emigrated)



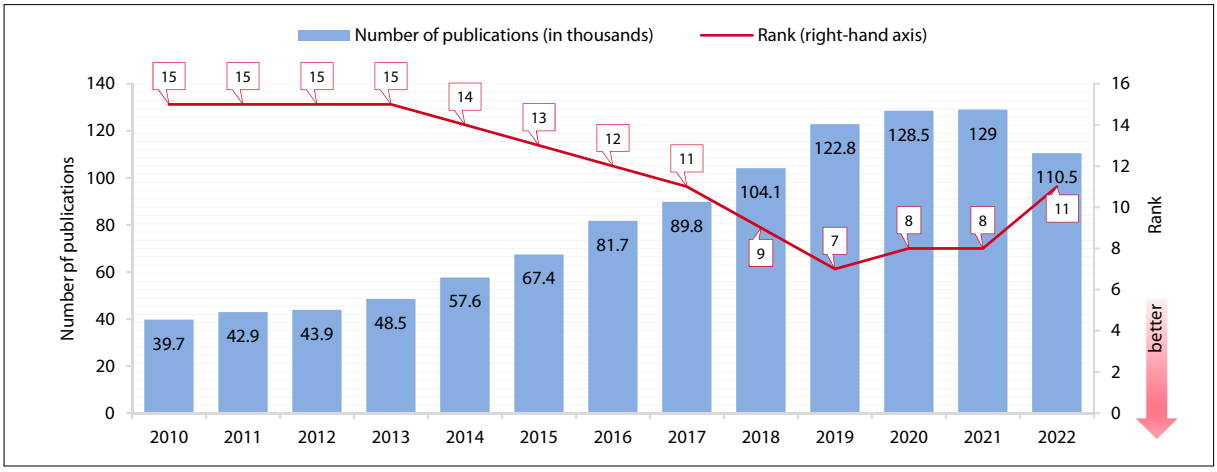
** Only those scientists who have explicitly indicated a new place of work in their ORCiD profile are counted.*
Source: "High-Level Drain," Novaya Gazeta Europe, January 18, 2024, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/01/18/utechka-vysokoi-stepeni.

Figure 3: How Migration of Scientists from Russia to Other Countries Has Changed
Average share of migration to that country in the 10 years before 2022 and after 2022 (until September 2023) (%)



Source: "High-Level Drain," Novaya Gazeta Europe, January 18, 2024, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/01/18/utechka-vysokoi-stepeni.

Figure 4: Russia's Ranking in Terms of the Number of International Publications



Source: "High-Level Drain," Novaya Gazeta Europe, January 18, 2024, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/01/18/utechka-vysokoi-stepeni.

ANALYSIS

Not Such a Great Power: Forces Driving Change in the Russian Political System

Anna Korppoo (Fridtjof Nansen Institute), Jussi Lassila (Finnish Institute of International Affairs), and Katri Pynnöniemi (University of Helsinki)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000657554

Abstract

The war has marginalized Russia in world politics, revealed the domestic and international overestimation of Russia's military power, and cut domestic standards of living. Accepting the loss of Russia's previous imperial status could enable Russian society to see the country's future in more realistic terms. War in Ukraine, President Putin's leadership, the government's highly qualified economists, the Kremlin's management of domestic events, and China's passive support currently stabilize the regime. The end of Putin's leadership, victory in or loss of the war, a nuclear strike by Russia, and the loss of the alliance with China could each trigger change. The escalation of war, full-scale mobilization, amongst other things, could contribute to crumbling the resilience of the Russian political system. Regardless, further Russian aggression and isolation are possible, particularly if political changes in the US and the EU undermine support for Ukraine. This article sums up an expert discussion convened at the Bank of Finland on November 20, 2023.

Setting the Scene

The future of the Russian political system under President Putin has been discussed in the international media daily since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Putin's political power was contested internally by Prigozhin and his Wagner Group's march toward Moscow in June 2023 but has apparently remained intact despite economic pressure and Russia's lack of success in the war. Moreover, the tightening political control over Russian society and elites, followed by narrowing freedom of speech, make it difficult to imagine likely futures for the Russian political system—both under President Putin and beyond.

Understanding the current situation requires grasping the impact of the Western sanctions, the status of the war, and the current dynamics of the Russian political system itself. Thus far, the economic sanctions imposed by the West have had limited impact, even if they show signs of causing longer-term deterioration of the Russian economy. The deadlock in the war shows that Rus-

sia has failed to achieve its original goals in Ukraine, but the military has managed to maintain its positions to the extent that the front line has not moved significantly since November 2022. Meanwhile, Putin's consolidated authoritarian regime has succeeded in tightening its grip on domestic elites and the public since February 2022. The rebellion led by Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner Group, may initially have raised questions about the regime's grip on power when openly challenged. However, Prigozhin's subsequent elimination has made the risks, as well as the dubious gains, of a rebellion clear to the elites, who now seem to focus on competing to demonstrate the greatest loyalty to Putin and his war policy.

Near Future

The presidential elections to be managed by the Kremlin in 2024 will be important for the political leadership because, however successfully it has controlled the domestic front thus far, the Russian system is an electoral autocracy. Therefore, gaining a popular mandate—even when it is clear to all that the elections are not free and fair—is expected to add to Putin's room for maneuver. Moving successfully into his next term may enable Putin to declare a full mobilization, as well as to orchestrate further repression and re-Sovietization of the political system, such as purging the more liberal technocrats in the state administration. Externally, a perceived stronger public mandate may encourage the Kremlin to pursue the radicalization of the war and even further nuclear blackmail.

Nevertheless, a coup d'état seems unlikely, as it is hard to imagine that any faction in the elite would have more to gain than to lose from an attempt to overthrow Putin—as illustrated by Prigozhin's treatment. The elites also face collective action problems. While parts of the public have expressed disappointment over the war and the Western sanctions, the widespread political apathy and the lack of organization for mobilizing those opposed to the regime make a public uprising unlikely. Nor are there signs of territorial disintegration in terms of regions envisioning breaking away.

Instead, there are several factors that appear to be stabilizing the current regime. The ongoing war under Putin's leadership helps to uphold the status quo, as there is for now no need to justify the costs incurred to achieve the gains made in Ukraine. The lack of civil society, and by extension the means to mobilize crowds, contributes to keeping the Putin administration in power by making rebellion difficult. Moreover, Putin's leadership can itself be considered a stabilizing factor: an end to his era would raise questions about future directions, most likely triggering a power struggle within the elite. The Kremlin's ability to manage problems and unexpected events is required in order to keep domestic criticism and protests at bay. Finally, China's passive support has allowed Russia to reorient its foreign trade to avoid Western sanctions, maintaining—for now—the domestic illusion that Russia remains a major power that can challenge the world order and has options beyond cooperation with the West.

Drivers of Change

Although it is difficult to identify specific future paths for Russia, the potential drivers for various paths can be discussed in order to analyze a range of possible future developments. It is useful to recognize such drivers even though political changes may occur unexpectedly and as a result of a seemingly minor development: drivers facilitating particular development paths prior to the triggering event can be identified, at least with hindsight.

A single influential event or a number of less significant events that put pressure on the resilience of the political system could, over time, change the development trajectory thereof. In the latter case, these individual events in isolation could not cause such an outcome but their concurrence might initiate developments that then lead to change. Such events could be caused by developments or actions occurring within or outside Russia.

The obvious single event that would force the Russian political system onto a new path would be the death or resignation of President Putin. In this situation, the elite would have to re-establish their power relations and consider which problems might be buried alongside Putin. That might offer a way out of the war in Ukraine, as most of the elite could claim to have had both no say in political decisions since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and no realistic option to challenge Putin's power. A significant share of the elite is unlikely to share the worldview of Putin and his closest allies to the extent that they would opt for further isolation of the country in order to continue to pursue it. Even many of Putin's closest allies would be unlikely to choose the anti-Western ideology if it jeopardized their ability to remain in power. Indeed, President Putin himself might find it a hard choice to make: he might plausibly announce that "the goals set for the war" have been achieved in order to ensure that he would remain in power.

According to recent opinion polls, declaring an end to the war per se does not seem to pose a risk to Putin's power: both the public and elites would probably support it—and propaganda can explain a great deal. However, withdrawing from the occupied Ukrainian territories (in particular from Crimea), let alone sending Russian war criminals to the International Criminal Court, could spark opposition domestically.

A clear defeat, a victory, or using a nuclear strike are all single events that might trigger change. Especially in the event of a loss or a staged victory in Ukraine, or if Western sanctions were not lifted even though the war was over, the benefits of the war might have to be explained domestically.

Finally, the loss of a key ally like China could be a game-changing single event. Beijing has a history of making quick moves—for instance, putting trade relations on hold for political reasons—and such moves might come in response to a nuclear threat or action. As the Chinese leadership is unlikely to support any policies or actions that are not advantageous to China, Moscow should not expect strategic support that might jeopardize China's reputation or interests.

Even among experts, there is no clear consensus on the factors that might contribute to increasing the pressure on the political system to the point that its resilience breaks. Radicalization of the war, full mobilization or nuclear blackmail may seem unlikely to lead to domestic unrest, but this cannot be ruled out.

In addition to some anti-war voices early on, the major critics of the war have been those who have been advocating for a stronger and more efficient war effort. Such radical voices might react negatively to a peace agreement not dictated by Russia. Of course, they can also be neutralized if necessary.

What some experts call the "social contract" between the state and the public might dwindle further if the political leadership ceases to provide the security and stability people expect in their everyday lives. A diminished status for Putin as a result of health issues or failure to manage societal problems could also contribute to this.

Over time, the deteriorating economy, as a result of the Western sanctions as well as the costs of war , is likely to add to the pressures for change. Uncertainty will hinder Russian private investments, while lack of access to technology will impede development. Demographic decline is another serious concern. The inefficiency of the administration increases internal risks on several fronts, as facts-based internal criticism (also voiced by Prigozhin) cannot be ignored indefinitely.

Internationally, Western (in)action might set off a chain of events that changes the political system. International support is crucial to Ukraine's fight for independence. Political changes in the EU and the US could undermine the current level of support, thereby delivering a victory to Russia. Moscow would be likely to interpret this as a green light for further aggression in the future.

Marginalized Russia: An Ordinary Country

Attacking Ukraine may be seen as a last-ditch attempt by the current political leadership to act on the resentment caused by the political and economic collapse of the USSR. In fact, however, the war has led to Russia's marginalization in the world rather than breaking Western hegemony, which Putin has announced as a major goal for Russia. The initial failure of the invasion showed that Russia's military power had been overestimated—not only in the West, but also domestically. The loss of export income has gradually led to a decline in the standard of living in Russia, and the risks of partnering with Russia are reducing Moscow's influence elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Russia is not, however, completely isolated, even if direct foreign support for the war is rare. Large parts of the "Global South" have chosen to remain neutral, maintaining their ties and trade with Russia.

Domestic recognition of this change of status is crucial when it comes to the possibility and permanence of change. As long as Russia—its leadership and also perhaps parts of the public—continues to see Russia as a Great Power (a status it has clearly lost, based on the indicators outlined above), it is hard to see how it could give up its historical role as an imperialistic state. Defeat in the Ukraine war and the arrival of Putin's imperialist policy at a strategic impasse could create an opening for Russia to accept the change in its status from an imperial power to a normal country. This, in turn, might help Russian society to see the country's future in more realistic terms. The generation below the current Soviet-born leadership has more experience of other countries and international cooperation, as well as of the standard of living that the Western approach can offer. As a result, their worldview is likely to differ from that of the current leadership. When one of the aforementioned triggers finally topples Putin's imperial house of cards, we will be able to see whether this generational gap will facilitate Russia's turn down the path toward international cooperation—or lead to further inward-looking isolation.

About the Authors

Dr *Anna Korppoo* is a Research Professor at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Oslo, Norway. She has published widely on Russian energy and climate policies, including energy transitions in Russian fossil fuel sectors. Since February 2022, she has been evaluating the impact of Western sanctions on Russian fossil fuels, in particular coal.

Dr *Jussi Lassila* is a Senior Research Fellow in the Russia, EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and Eurasia research programme at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. He has published widely on issues related to Russian domestic politics, in particular identity politics, nationalism, populism, and political communication.

Dr *Katri Pynnöniemi* is an associate professor and holds the Mannerheim Chair of Russian Security Studies at the University of Helsinki and the National Defence University of Finland. Her research focuses on the change in Russia's strategic thinking, Russia's war rhetoric, and how Russian military analysts explain Russia's war against Ukraine.

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Fabian Burkhardt, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder

The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de), the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), the Center for Eastern European Studies at the University of Zurich (http://www.cees.uzh.ch), the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at The George Washington University (https://ieres.elliott.gwu.edu), and the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language Russland-Analysen (www.laender-analysen.de/russland), and the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html). The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

To subscribe or unsubscribe to the Russian Analytical Digest, please visit our web page at http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html

Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen
Founded in 1982, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to the interdisciplinary analysis of socialist and post-socialist developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The major focus is on the role of dissent, opposition and civil society in their historic, political, sociological and cultural dimensions.
With a unique archive on dissident culture under socialism and with an extensive collection of publications on Central and Eastern Europe, the Research Centre regularly hosts visiting scholars from all over the world.
One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular e-mail newsletters covering current developments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich
The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is a center of competence for Swiss and international security policy. It offers security policy expertise in research, teaching, and consultancy. The CSS promotes understanding of security policy challenges as a contribution to a more peaceful world. Its work is independent, practice-relevant, and based on a sound academic footing.
The CSS combines research and policy consultancy and, as such, functions as a bridge between academia and practice. It trains highly qualified junior researchers and serves as a point of contact and information for the interested public.

The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, The Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University
The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies is home to a Master's program in European and Eurasian Studies, faculty members from political science, history, economics, sociology, anthropology, language and literature, and other fields, visiting scholars from around the world, research associates, graduate student fellows, and a rich assortment of brown bag lunches, seminars, public lectures, and conferences.

The Center for Eastern European Studies (CEES) at the University of Zurich
The Center for Eastern European Studies (CEES) at the University of Zurich is a center of excellence for Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian studies. It offers expertise in research, teaching and consultancy. The CEES is the University's hub for interdisciplinary and contemporary studies of a vast region, comprising the former socialist states of Eastern Europe and the countries of the post-Soviet space. As an independent academic institution, the CEES provides expertise for decision makers in politics and in the field of the economy. It serves as a link between academia and practitioners and as a point of contact and reference for the media and the wider public.

Responsible editor for this issue: Fabian Burkhardt
Editorial assistant: Maximilian Härtl
Language editing: Ellen Powell
Layout: Marin Dziallas, Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann, Michael Clemens
ISSN 1863-0421 © 2024 by Forschungsstelle Osteuropavder Universität Bremen, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich
Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen • Country Analytical Digests • Klagenfurter Str. 8 • 28359 Bremen •Germany
Phone: +49 421-218-69600 • Telefax: +49 421-218-69607 • e-mail: laender-analysen@uni-bremen.de • Internet: www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html