

# Generational Change in Russia

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**F**or most of the 1990s, American foreign policymakers, analysts of Russia in the United States, and leaders of American nongovernmental organizations have pointed to generational change as the beacon of hope for Russia. Because it was believed that the transition from communism to capitalism and democracy would require a “short-term” decline in the well-being of Russian society—and that the older generations would suffer the most during the transitional period—all hope was placed on the young people. Unlike their grandparents and parents, the younger generation would enjoy the benefits of reform and therefore embrace the reforms advocated by the American policymakers and analysts.

Russia’s transition from communism has indeed been difficult and protracted. The Soviet empire is gone, the Russian economy is market based, and the political institutions that govern Russia today are at least partially democratic. Obtaining those limited gains, however, has been far more costly than most predicted. For the people of Russia, the economic costs of transforming the Soviet command economy into a market system have been particularly acute. Russia endured one of the most dramatic and prolonged economic recessions in modern history.<sup>1</sup> And just when the economy began to grow, Russians had to endure the August 1998 financial meltdown. Since the crash the economy has grown impressively. But only during summer 2002 did Russians reacquire the wages and purchasing power that they enjoyed before the crash.

Despite this difficult decade of economic hardship and disappointed expectations, the basic hypothesis about the new generation in Russia—defined in this article as those between eighteen and thirty-nine years of age today—has generally proven to be correct.<sup>2</sup> As I will discuss in section one of this article, the younger generation in Russia appears to be more promarket, prodemocratic, and pro-Western than all other age cohorts.

The origins of their attitudes are discussed in section two. They were formed in part by the group’s unique set of experiences in postcommunist Russia. Most

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important, this is the first generation since 1917 in Russia to come of age in (a) an independent Russia, (b) a capitalist economy, and (c) a “free” (albeit not altogether democratic) political system. The group has a set of preferences about the economy, the polity, and the world that are distinct from those of their parents—the cohort that has tried to be productive in two radically different systems—and very distinct from those of their grandparents, who worked mostly in the communist system.<sup>3</sup>

Discovering the existence of a unique set of preferences among Russia’s youth, however, tells us little about the shape of these attitudes twenty years from now. This age cohort will face some very daunting challenges as they assume responsibility for their country’s future. Birthrate declines, an AIDS epidemic, prolonged border disputes in the Caucasus, and sustained frustration with the slow pace of integration into the West constitute just a partial list of the *known* challenges that this group must tackle. Add to this list some unexpected disasters and setbacks that are bound to occur in the next twenty years, and the probability for volatility among these preferences seems high. In section three I speculate about the conditions under which this young generation’s attitudes about the market, democracy, and the West might change.

### **What Do Young Russian People Believe?**

#### **Capitalism**

The younger a person is in Russia, the more likely she or he is to support capitalism. The correlation between age and support for markets is robust.<sup>4</sup> Russia’s youth are also more likely to support deeper market reforms than are other age groups. When asked in December 1999 what was the best economic policy for Russia, a striking number of people under the age of forty—11 percent—believed that Russia should return to a socialist economy.<sup>5</sup> As discussed below, these people may be the voters that are helping to sustain the CPRF’s stable levels of support. Of this same cohort, 12 percent wanted to deepen and accelerate reforms, a much larger number than the 2 percent of those over sixty or the 3 percent of those over fifty who were interested in deepening and speeding reforms. The vast majority of those under thirty—59 percent—wanted to continue economic reforms, but less painfully.

Russia’s young people believe in the market and want to see Russia continue to pursue market reforms. At the same time, the cartoonization of young Russians as extreme capitalists—an image based on Russia’s oligarchs—is misleading. Regarding ownership issues, for instance, four times as many people under forty want to see the state own everything as want to see all property in private hands. The vast majority of people in this age cohort are proponents of a mixed system in which the state and private individuals own a proportionate share of economically productive property. They are still more supportive of private ownership than older generations in Russia, but not completely supportive. Strikingly, 51 percent of those polled under forty agreed that the state should limit the incomes of the rich, whereas only 16 percent disagreed with this policy.

On every question about the economy, the youngest people in Russia are

the most promarket. In answer to certain questions, there is even a significant difference in the intensity of promarket preferences between those over thirty and those under thirty. At the same time, enthusiasm for capitalism is not as deep or widespread across the country as many in the West assume. Every American traveler to Moscow has an anecdote to tell about an encounter with some amazing twenty-year-old millionaire who is making her fortune as an aggressive entrepreneur. These people can be found, especially in Moscow, and especially in the hotel lounge of the Marriott. But they are not average.

### **Democracy**

As in most other developing countries, attachment to democratic values in Russia generally rises with factors of social modernization. Individuals who are better educated, have higher incomes, work in higher-status occupations, and live in more urbanized environments are appreciably more likely to favor a democratic regime than the poorly educated, the lower-paid, blue-collar workers, and the residents of villages and small towns. But our surveys revealed that the strongest correlation with a demographic characteristic that is not, strictly speaking, part and parcel of modernization is age. The younger one is in Russia, the more likely one is to embrace democratic ideas.

A perfect illustration is preference with regard to regime type. Amazingly, in all age groups, the most appealing political system for Russians is either a reformed Soviet system or, for those seventy and older, an unreconstructed Soviet-style regime. Beyond that conservative center of gravity, there are significant gradations by generation. Nearly half of men and women over the age of sixty-nine in 1999 preferred an unreformed Soviet political system; among those younger than thirty, that proportion was 10 percent. Almost 40 percent of survey respondents between eighteen and twenty-nine favored either a Western democracy or the current political system; this fraction declined to 12 percent among individuals in their seventies and eighties. To put it simply, the longer a Russian lived with the Soviet dictatorship, the more likely he or she is to cling to Soviet political values. A seventy-year-old in Russia was born before the Great Patriotic War (World War II), came of age under Stalin, and never saw more liberal politics in action until the verge of retirement. A twenty-five-year-old was born in the 1970s, encountered the Gorbachev opening in his grade school years, and was an adolescent when Yeltsin swept away the rule of the Communist Party at the beginning of the 1990s. The differing beliefs of those prototypical individuals reflect different life experiences.

Regarding general questions about democracy, Russia's youth are also firmly prodemocratic, but not dramatically more so than the rest of society. Seventy-one percent of those between eighteen and thirty-nine polled in 1999–2000 supported the idea of democracy, while only 15 percent were against the idea. By contrast, among those over sixty, 54 percent supported the idea of democracy and 28 percent did not.

The generational factor appears especially strong with respect to opinions concerning individual liberties. Older Russians are less likely to adopt a permissive

attitude toward every aspect of liberties. The steepest gradient is on foreign travel, something few older Russians ever had the chance to do: 62 percent of persons aged eighteen to twenty-nine would object to curtailment of that right, as opposed to 29 percent of those in their seventies and eighties. On one political question (censorship), the divergence between the oldest and the youngest voters is quite large (28 percentage points); but on banning suspect parties and invoking a state of emergency it is less pronounced (9 percentage points and 18 percentage points between the extremes, respectively).

Generally speaking, democratic ideas are actually more widely supported among the Russian population as a whole and among Russia's youth in particular than market ideas. As I discuss below, this is a real paradox, since the behavior of Russia's youth seems to be much more influenced by market ideals than by democratic ideas.

### **The West**

The age cohort that will come to power in the next two decades is pro-Western and pro-American, but not overly optimistic or naïve about relations with the West. The group expresses clearly more pro-American opinions than their elders. When asked in May 2001 by the Foundation for Public Opinion about their general attitude toward the United States, 40 percent of this age group had a favorable response, compared to only 23 percent of respondents over fifty.<sup>6</sup> After 11 September, this age group, like all of Russia, adopted an even more favorable attitude toward the United States.

Russia's youth are pro-Western, but not gaga about the West. In our polls, only 2 percent of eighteen- to thirty-nine-year-olds believed that Russia should entirely follow the experience of the West in forging Russia's path of development. The majority—58 percent—believed that Russia should borrow from the West only what suits it. And a significant portion—39 percent—of this cohort recommended that Russia should follow its own unique path of development without reference to the West. This number for Russia's youth is significantly lower than the 62 percent of those over sixty who thought the same, but it is strikingly high just the same.

Given changing international events over the last decade, it is difficult to predict the stability of those preferences about the West. Because they mean so little in terms of actual life experiences for most Russians, they are probably more volatile (and less important) than preferences about the economy and the regime. Today, after 11 September, the alliance between Russia and the United States to fight terrorism has created a new sense of Russia's "Western-ness." Just a few short years ago, however, Russia's youth seemed to be much more suspicious of the West. When asked in January 1999—before the NATO intervention against Serbia—by the Foundation for Public Opinion if Russia followed an independent foreign policy or a policy too dependent on Western countries, an astonishing 76 percent of respondents eighteen to thirty-five years of age believed that Russia was too dependent on the West.<sup>7</sup> After the war, American popularity in Russia plummeted even further. There were even student demonstrations in Russia

against the war. Whether the current euphoria about the West and the United States is a new trend or a temporary hiccup is difficult to know.

### Why Do They Believe What They Do?

#### Capitalism Is Good for the Capitalists

It may sound like a cliché to assert that young Russians are more pro-market than their parents and grandparents because they have lived under the market and benefited from its development in Russia. To believe that it is a statement of fact, however, implies a sense of permanence to the causal relationship and an inevitability of Russia's embrace with market principles. "As soon as the communist electorate dies off," the argument goes, "then Russia will become 100 percent procapitalist." Although there is evidence to support such a thesis, it is nonetheless a thesis. Under a different set of conditions, as discussed below, the attitudes of the young—especially when they are not so young—toward the market may change.

So far, however, the experience of growing up in the market economy does seem to have made this young generation more pro-market than other age cohorts in Russia, including the "revolutionary cohort"—the age group now between forty and fifty—that introduced capitalism into their country. Several factors combined to produce these attitudes. First, market ideas were part of their educational training. A decade ago, books about property rights, the relationship between price and demand, or how to start your own business were just being introduced into Russia. Those currently in power had to *relearn* economics, since the economic education they received was no longer relevant. This younger generation learned about markets from the very beginning of their exposure to the discipline. Moreover, enrollments in business schools and economic departments throughout the country—including very expensive programs—suggest that young people value this economics education. Programs in economics and business are the only profitable sector of the educational system in Russia today.<sup>8</sup>

Second, market practices, however imperfect, were already in place by the time this generation began to obtain economic autonomy. As teenagers, their parents never experienced inflation, unemployment, or property rights. The younger cohort grew up dealing with those practices, albeit with varying degrees of interaction. Market competition is another fact of life for this younger generation, one to which their parents have had to adjust. Those who came into the workplace after the collapse of communism also understand that they are responsible for their own economic well-being. They have very low expectations of the state. This set of real-life experiences has helped to condition this cohort into becoming market practitioners.

Third, Russia's youth like the market because they have benefited from it disproportionately, compared with other age cohorts. In Russia, the gap between the rich and poor has widened immensely over the last decade.<sup>9</sup> In parallel to Russia's rising genie coefficient, the younger are getting richer as the older are getting poorer. Most of the CEOs of Russia's wealthiest companies are not more than forty. With some notable exceptions, such as those in charge at Lukhoil of Surgut,

the richest people in Russia—the oligarchs—are young. And their deputies and CFOs are even younger. Likewise, young people run the most vibrant small businesses in major urban areas, especially in the new (and still tiny) economy.

Fourth, those people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine are still risk-takers. They can fail, as many in Moscow did in August 1998, and still make another go of it. Comparatively speaking, their liabilities and responsibilities are still minimal. Many in this cohort in Russia are still living at home and do not have children. Moreover, the newness of everything and the lack of institutionalization make it easy to be an optimist about the future.<sup>10</sup>

There was nothing inevitable about the formation of these preferences for the market. On closer reflection, this embrace of the market outcome should be more surprising to us. Even though the young are relatively better off in postcommunist Russia than the rest of society, they still are not very well off. They too have endured one of the longest and sharpest economic depressions in modern history. They too have had to experience the uncertainties and inefficiencies of Russia's particular brand of market economics. Earlier in the decade, some predicted that Russia's youth, especially in the more depressed regions of Russia, would drift toward nationalist leaders and organizations. Young, uneducated males in medium-sized cities in the most depressed areas of Russia, in Siberia and the Far East, were largely responsible for Zhirinovskiy's splash in December 1993. What is striking about the rest of the decade is how other attempts to mobilize this young, male, urban protest vote—be it Barkashov's in the mid-1990s, Lebed's in 1996, or even Unity's in 1999—have failed.

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That said, it must also be observed that Russia's youth is probably not as pro-market as outside observers had predicted or hoped a decade ago. There is no correlation between the mortality rates of Russia's oldest cohort and the decline of electoral support for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. On the contrary, old people in Russia continue to die, but electoral support for the CPRF has remained stable. CPRF officials explain this stability as a function of the new, young people that vote for the CPRF. They also claim that the party's membership did not decline over the 1990s, but even grew slightly as the result of new memberships from young people (not newly middle-aged people). Communist leaders believe that they are poised to follow their comrades in Eastern Europe and increase their share of the electorate dramatically once the party undergoes a leadership change at the top—that is, once a young person replaces Zyuganov.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the liberal vote also has not increased appreciably in the last ten years. Yabloko has maintained its share of the electorate since it entered the

electoral fray in 1993. The Union of Right Forces (SPS), the liberal bloc formed in 1999 to compete in parliamentary elections that same year, did make significant gains over the performance of Democratic Choice of Russia in 1995, capturing nearly 9 percent of the vote. Their 1999 campaign explicitly targeted the youth vote, especially the educated and wealthy youth vote. And their electorate was younger than Yabloko's supporters, suggesting a brighter future for SPS, which aims to capture 20 percent of the vote in the 2003 parliamentary elections.<sup>12</sup> The party's young leader, Boris Nemtsov, then plans to run for president in 2004 as a stepping stone to actually winning the 2008 election. In their view, this will be the moment when Russia's postcommunist generation finally comes to power. They still have a long way to go. It is disturbing, especially compared to other postcommunist countries such as Hungary or even Ukraine, that the main pro-market, pro-Western, youth-oriented party in Russia can win only 10 percent of the vote almost a decade after the collapse of Soviet communism.

### Passive Democrats

The reasons why Russia's youth have embraced democratic ideals are similar to why they have embraced market ideals. This generation became politically aware during a unique period in Russian history—an age of democratization. By the time most people in this cohort first went to the polls, competitive elections were no longer novel. The group also has enjoyed unparalleled access to different sources of media and to multiple viewpoints expressed by the media. The rich and urban in the cohort also enjoy access to the Web and its immediate window into the West. Perhaps most important, they also grew up with very few limitations on their right to travel, their right to hold dollars, or their right to practice the religion of their choice. They do not appear to value other liberties, such as the freedom of assembly or the freedom to join political and social organizations. When it comes to individual rights and liberties, however, they just assume that these are part of the *Russian* way of life.

In contrast to the stimulating effect that promarket attitudes appear to have had on this generation, the embrace of democratic values has not influenced behavior in proportion to what we might expect from the polls. Russia's youth value the ideals of democracy. But like the rest of society, they do not believe that their democratic system works very effectively and therefore are unwilling to invest much time or effort into the democratic enterprise. In fact, Russia's youth appear to be even less engaged in the political process than any other age cohort in Russia. They vote with less frequency. They join groups less often. They are extremely inactive in social and political organizations, with less than 8 percent reporting a membership in a civic group. They have weak partisan affiliations. Even university students do not identify firmly with Russia's ideological parties.

Russia's young elite seem as uninterested in politics as Russia's young generation as a whole. All postcommunist societies have experienced lower participation rates than their Western neighbors.<sup>13</sup> Russian activism appears to be rather average for the region.

Russia's youth, however, seem especially less engaged. The Communist Party

still has its Komsomol; the pro-government Unity party has provided funds to stimulate the formation of a youth wing; and nongovernmental organizations close to the Kremlin have bankrolled the emergence of a pro-Putin youth group. Yet there are no national youth groups of any size that have sprouted independently. In contrast to Ukraine or even Belarus, students in the Russian Republic played almost no role in the overthrow of the Soviet ancien régime. Anecdotally, this passivity seems to have persisted, as there are very few young people in leadership roles in nongovernmental organizations, which tend in Russia to be dominated still by the older generation of activists from the Soviet era.<sup>14</sup> As already mentioned, young leaders do run SPS, but no other party boasts young cadres in senior positions. Needless to say, there is nothing even close to Serbia's Otpor (though obviously the demand for an Otpor-like group in Russia is much less than it was in Serbia). Yet Russia does not even have an equivalent to the election watchdog group in Ukraine, the Committee of Ukrainian Voters (CVU), which was organized and developed by young democratic activists.

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The differences in behavior shaped by market ideas and democratic ideas are very logical. The payoff of understanding how to write a business plan is tangible and direct, whereas the payoff for understanding the differences between parliamentary and presidential systems is much less clear. There are not thousands of public schools or political science programs sprouting throughout the country because the demand for those kinds of education is not anything commensurate to the demand for education and accreditation in the fields of economics, business, or accounting. Of course, it is wrong to assume that Russian entrepreneurs do not need rule of law, checks and balances, and a transparent electoral process to succeed in the long run. One of the greatest surprises of the postcommunist reform experience over the last decade has been the strong correlation between the development of market practices and democratic institutions.<sup>15</sup> But democratic institutions are public goods. Russia's youth want a free ride on the work of others to enjoy the benefits of democracy. Unfortunately for Russia, no other age cohort is investing seriously in the development of democracy.

There is anecdotal evidence that Russia's oligarchs (who are also young) are beginning to understand that they need to invest in democracy to protect their fortunes. For instance, Mikhail Khordokovsky of Yukos has given \$1.3 million to the Eurasia Foundation and has established his own foundation to foster the emergence of civil society. Many of Russia's richest businessmen joined together to buy TV-6, now called TVS, as a way to maintain some degree of pluralism in



Russian television. As one oligarch quipped privately, “When the Kremlin takes me away, I at least want someone to know about it.” Quietly, those same oligarchs are making investments in Russia’s two leading liberal parties. Allegedly, Khorodkovsky has decided to replace Gusinsky as Yabloko’s leading financier, whereas SPS enjoys its traditional support from oligarchs who have been close to the party leadership for years. And Boris Berezovsky, the exiled oligarch, has established his own foundation to promote civil society (based in New York, not Moscow). He also is financing his own political party, headed by two former SPS leaders, and has allegedly promised tens of millions for the start-up for the 2003 elections.

### **The Coke Generation in Russia and the Kournikova Generation in the West**

Young people in Russia have generally positive attitudes toward the West because they like Western things. They never had the romantic attachment to things Western that many in their parents’ generation held. They, therefore, have not felt the same degree of disappointment with the West that the older generation felt after the transition. They are a more cynical, materialistic lot. They take for granted their access to Western music, films, and television. Even for those who are not so well off, travel to the West is a must. For the wealthy, education in the West is an aspiration. There has been no decline in applicants to American educational programs that bring Russians to the United States. There are very few Russian students queuing to receive scholarships to study in Beijing or Baghdad.

For Russia’s youth, the divide between the West and Russia is also not as stark as it was for their parents and grandparents. Russian youth listen to American hip-hop and watch MTV Europe, but they also listen to Russian hip-hop and watch Russian MTV. Be it through higher education, Silicon Valley, beauty contests, hockey, or tennis, a handful of young Russians also have penetrated the West and succeeded abroad without abandoning their Russian roots.<sup>16</sup> Though data is scarce, these new immigrants/travelers/students/temporary employees appear to hold a fundamentally different set of beliefs about Russia and the West than immigrants from the Soviet Union. They want to work, live, and travel in the West, but they also want to see their own country prosper. Russians—especially young Russians—in turn have become less foreign to Westerners. Moving in the opposite direction, tens of thousands of young Americans now call Russia their home. After 11 September, Russia suddenly looks like a more reliable source of oil and gas than Saudi Arabia, a fact that could do wonders to improve Russia’s image in the West.<sup>17</sup> The impact of these transnational economic, cultural, and athletic migrations needs to be studied further, but the anecdotal eye sees “integration” occurring at the societal level—and at the youngest level of society—faster than at the state-to-state level.

### **Factors That Could Change Their Beliefs**

Social scientists have a poor track record when trying to predict the future. Social science theories are designed to explain regular patterns or phenomena of equi-

librium. By contrast, our theories of change are underdeveloped. No field, of course, better knows the bitter experience of failing to predict dramatic change than the Soviet field. With all of these cautions on the table, let us dare to speculate about the future anyway.

The most powerful potential source for preference change among Russia's young generation will be disappointed expectations. Today, as argued above, Russia's young people are more promarket, prodemocracy, and pro-Western than their parents because they grew up in these systems and lived in a country whose leadership was, for the most part, Western oriented. This age group is also prospective, not retrospective, in its thinking. They are still focused on the future and remain, for the most part, optimistic about its potential. Their optimism is rational. Russia in 2002 looks a lot better than Russia did in 1992.

Nonetheless, Russia's transition from communism is far from complete. And in addition to potential problems from the "transition" are more maladies (many inherited from the Soviet era) that do not seem so temporary. If Russia's "transitional" problems are not resolved soon, and Russia's young generation finds it increasingly difficult to overcome these structural legacies, then despair or disillusion could set in. Despair or disillusion among this age cohort, however, will be a lot more dangerous than disillusion among Russia's present-day pensioners. Unlike today's pensioners, those between eighteen and thirty-nine today will have significant financial resources and political power twenty years from now.

Some problems of the future for this generation are already known: Chechnya, the poor health of Russian society, and the difficult process of Western integration. Two other possible crises—dictatorship or another economic collapse—are also worth considering.

### **Chechnya**

Chechnya is slowly becoming Russia's Vietnam. Because of the state's control of the media, news about casualties travels imperfectly. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that the effects of the war are already reverberating throughout Russia's young generation. Since spring 2000, support for the war has steadily declined. Polls now show that as many people support a peaceful solution to the war as support its continuation.<sup>18</sup> If the Russian government reacts to these changing preferences and ends the war, then the Chechnya issue will disappear or at least be postponed. If the government continues the war for years and years, however, the war could stimulate political activism within the young age cohort.

The most probable response to Chechnya will be a positive one for Russian democracy. Antiwar activism would mostly likely spur a prodemocracy movement as well. Again, because this group has more economic power than previously active groups in the postcommunist era, the potential for positive change is high. Such a movement will not coalesce overnight. At the moment, political indifference among the cohort is very high. If the war hinders individual opportunity, however, the group will someday rebel. Passive opposition, such as higher draftee absenteeism, is already growing.

## **Dictatorship**

Russia is unlikely to become a full-blown dictatorship. If it does, however, Russia's youth might mobilize eventually to resist it. Mobilization would not be immediate. Most would hope to get on with their economic lives without becoming politically involved. Over time, however, a Russian dictatorship would have negative consequences for the Russian economy and especially negative consequences for the economic well-being of those between eighteen and thirty-nine, who will own and run the bulk of the Russian economy two decades from now. In response, this cohort would likely push for greater political liberalization. Russian dictatorship could last a long time. Remember how long General Jaruzelski maintained power in Poland even though a quarter of the country—ten million people—claimed to be members of Solidarity at the moment of the crack-down. Eventually, however, an opposition movement fueled by the generation that is now between eighteen and thirty-nine would emerge, in a pattern similar to democratization movements in South Korea or Spain.

## **Future Economic Meltdowns**

Russia is likely to experience more zigs and zags in its economic performance over the next two decades. The simple fact that Russia exports so much oil exposes the entire economy to the volatile swings of world markets. If a handful of oligarchs continue to dominate the economy, a trajectory that has continued under Putin, then Russia will be more susceptible to the corrupt business-state ties that brought down many Asian economies in the last decade.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Russia has poorly functioning institutions that might help to blunt the impact of these swings.<sup>20</sup> The combination of these factors means that another financial crisis on the scale and scope of August 1998 is likely in the next twenty years.

The response is difficult to predict. As happened in the last crash, those now between eighteen and thirty-nine are likely to be the hit the hardest by a future economic meltdown. They may be more resilient the next time around, having survived the last crisis. Or they could become more despondent, having only just barely survived the last crash. A future crash also would occur at a time in their lives when they have accepted more financial and personal responsibilities, making the fallout more difficult to bear.

## **The Demographic Weight of the Past**

The probabilities of a decade-long war in Chechnya or a military coup are impossible to calculate. The continuation of Russia's health crisis for the next two decades is a much greater certainty. Russia is midstream in one of the most dramatic declines in national health ever recorded in modern history.<sup>21</sup> Even war-torn societies such as Germany and Japan after World War II did not experience the kind of long-term increases in mortality rates that Russia is now enduring. Combined with falling fertility levels, Russian deaths are exceeding births by an amazing seven hundred thousand per year.<sup>22</sup> The causes of these trends—which really began as many as four decades ago under the Soviet Union—are poorly understood but are generally believed to be associated with extraordinary rates of

heart disease and high levels of alcohol consumption. Theoretically, a massive education campaign to battle alcoholism might have some positive effects. A growing economy will most certainly help. The high rates of heart disease are much more difficult to reverse, even over a generation or two. As Nicholas Eberstadt has concluded,

[S]imply re-attaining within the next 20 years the health levels Russian “enjoyed” in the 1960s will be no mean feat; indeed, it will require far-reaching changes in both lifestyles and environment for the country as a whole. The 50-year-olds in Russia 20 years hence are the 30-year-olds of Russia today—and by many indications, these particular 30-year-olds are strikingly less healthy than their predecessors a few decades earlier.<sup>23</sup>

The specter of an AIDS epidemic also haunts Russia, though the trajectory and long-term economic and social consequences of such an epidemic are still poorly understood.

The combination of a sick and aging society is likely to produce a tremendous burden on the Russian economy. Just when those between eighteen and thirty-nine today are reaching their highest earnings potential, they will be faced with financing and caring for a very large segment of the population who will be totally unproductive, many of whom will come from their own age cohort. There are many creative responses. Immigration into Russia is one obvious countermeasure. How the ruling class responds to this crisis two decades from now—and how the rest of society responds to their response—is likely to be the key socioeconomic and political issue of this generation’s era.

### **Integration into the West**

The current positive atmosphere in U.S.–Russian relations has fueled high expectations in Russia about the pace and payoffs of integration into Western institutions. With American backing, Putin’s government is pushing hard to meet the requirements for World Trade Organization membership. NATO, they believe, is next. Only a few years ago, Russian leaders protested NATO expansion. Now, the prospect of Russian membership in this military alliance is seen in Moscow as inevitable. Some even speculate about Russian membership in the European Union.

Perhaps Russia will join all of these clubs at a pace agreeable to Russian society. The more likely scenario, however, is that Russia never joins NATO or the EU and that the pace of integration into other Western institutions is much slower than most in Russia desire. The rising ambivalence in Poland about EU membership is a good indicator of things to come for Russia.

How will Russia’s pro-Western young respond when they discover that the West is eager to have their talented hockey players and tennis stars, but not so eager to subsidize their farmers? How will Russia’s new leaders react when the EU dissolves just as they are ready to submit their application for membership?

### **Conclusion**

Russia’s youth is a passive group. Political policies that they dislike, such as a prolonged war in Chechnya or dictatorship, will eventually wake them from their

political slumber. Because they will have financial and political resources, they will be able to act on their preferences. Attempts to restrain their political freedoms are likely in the long run to produce greater democratization.

Paradoxically, constraints on their economic well-being are likely to produce the opposite effect: greater discontent with the poorly performing political regime that is now identified as a democracy. In surveys conducted by Colton and McFaul in 1999–2000, there was a strong correlation among all voters between individual contentment and attitudes toward democratization and regime type.<sup>24</sup> Interest in more democratic and liberal political arrangements was strongly associated with personal experience with the results of reform—mainly economic reform. Among Russians who feel they have won or mostly won because of reforms, about 60 percent empathize with either the current political system or with Western democracy; only 6 percent of them want a return to Soviet rule, and about one-third would prefer a humanized Soviet system. When we look at Russians at the bottom end of the welfare yardstick, the relationships are reversed: about 70 percent prefer either a neo-Soviet regime or a reformed Soviet regime, and support for the current system or Western democracy slides to 15 or 20 percent.

A decline in the economic fortunes of the eighteen- to thirty-nine-year-old cohort—either gradually over time as the result of the demographic crisis or growing oligarchic power, or suddenly and unexpectedly as the result of another financial meltdown—is the most likely trigger of a dramatic change in attitudes about the market, democracy, and the West. To date, no one has articulated a viable alternative “ideology of opposition” that might capture the imaginations of this cohort, which, after all, is cynical and apolitical. A serious economic downturn parallel to a slow process of integration into the West could fuel the search for such an ideology of opposition. Candidates are likely to come from the nationalist, xenophobic right, since communist ideas have still not resonated with a significant portion of this age cohort.

The probability of such a scenario occurring is low. But the consequences if it did happen could be extremely dangerous for Russia and the West, for the simple reason that this cohort will have resources. Some of the world’s greatest (and most tragic) revolutions occurred when a long period of economic growth was followed by a sudden economic downturn.<sup>25</sup> In those situations, it was never the poor that led the opposition challenge. It was always the rising middle classes. However unlikely it may be, this is the scenario that should most concern analysts of Russia’s future.

## NOTES

1. Blanko Milanovic, *Income, Inequality, and Poverty during the Transition from Planned to Market Economy* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998).

2. The age group between eighteen and thirty-nine will be used in reference to the surveys done by Colton and McFaul. For Foundation for Public Opinion and VTsIOM polls, the bracket is usually eighteen to thirty-eight.

3. In his work on postcommunist societies in transition, Richard Rose has discussed the voting preferences and attitudes of this unique category of people who have lived under two socioeconomic and political systems. Such a “data set” is rare in the modern

that most people live in one system all of their lives, rendering preferences about other systems mere speculations (and usually utopian speculations). The generation in question here, however, is different from Rose's populations in that they have not lived under socialism.

4. Unless otherwise specified, the survey data reported on in this article come from a three-wave panel survey conducted during the 1999–2000 electoral cycle in Russia. A total of 1,919 voters were interviewed between 13 November and 13 December, and 1,842 of them were reinterviewed after the Duma election, between 25 December and 31 January. A third wave, reinterviewing 1,748 first- and second-wave respondents, was completed in April–May 2000, soon after the March 2000 presidential election. Respondents were selected in a multistage area-probability sample of the voting-age population, with sampling units in thirty-three regions of the Russian Federation. Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul designed the questionnaires and commissioned the polls. The surveys were carried out by the Demoscope group at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, headed by Polina Kozyreva and Mikhail Kosolapov, and were funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research. All statistics in the article are weighted by household size, to correct for the under-representation of persons in small households yielded by the sampling method. Some of the results of the surveys of relevance to this article have been reported in Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 18, no. 2 (April–June 2002): 91–121; and Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, "Reinventing Russia's Party of Power: Unity and the 1999 Duma Election," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 16, no. 3 (summer 2000): 201–24.

5. On this question, however, the breakdown between those over and under thirty was also interesting. Fifteen percent of those in their thirties wanted to return to a socialist economy, compared to only 7 percent of those younger than thirty.

6. Fond "Obshchestvennoe Mnenie," *Amerika: Vzglad iz Rossii do is posle 11 sentyabrya* (Moscow: FOM, 2001): 249.

7. See <<http://classic.fom.ru>>.

8. Vladimir Mau, rector of the Academy of the National Economy, interview with author, July 2002.

9. Milanovic, *Income, Inequality, and Poverty*.

10. A very successful Silicon Valley businessman, who travels frequently to Russia, shared this observation. In his view, the Russian economy has much more in common with the Silicon Valley economy than it does with the economies of Europe or even the East Coast of the United States. Of course, this comparison suggests that Russia too will experience big booms and busts. Currently, unemployment in the Silicon Valley is over 7 percent, much higher than the national average. Two years ago, the same set of counties that constitute the Silicon Valley had the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

11. Advocates of this strategy propose a generational jump. They believe that the next leader of the CPRF should be in his or her thirties. To date, Zyuganov and those close to him have not embraced this strategy of renewal.

12. Author's conversations with SPS campaign officials, July 2002.

13. Marc Morjé Howard, "Postcommunist Civil Society in Comparative Perspective," *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 2 (summer 2002): 285–305.

14. In June of that year, I spent two weeks meeting with NGO leaders in Ukraine, and I was struck by how much younger the leaders of these NGOs were. Of course, many of them were veterans of the student hunger strikes in 1991. They also played a mobilizing role in the anti-Kuchma demonstrations that gripped downtown Kiev in 2001.

15. Joel Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1998): 203–34.

16. Of course, there are some very negative transnational groups crossing in and out of Russia, including those engaged in the trafficking of women and the drug trade.

17. For contrasting views, see Edward Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Ener-

gy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 2 (March/April 2002): 16–31; and Fiona Hill and Florence Fee, "Fueling the Future: The Prospects for Russian Oil and Gas," *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 4 (fall 2002).

18. Our polls showed this division in Russian society even in spring 2000, but most Russian polling firms reported different findings, in part because they asked different questions. For the figures from our surveys as well as further discussion of their meaning, see Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?" especially table 18.

19. This argument has been made recently by Dmitri Vasiliev, director of the Institute of Corporate Law and Corporate Governance, and Yevgeny Gavrilokov, chief economist of Troika Dialog.

20. For instance, the inadequacies of the social safety net were starkly exposed after August 1998. See Michael Kokshin and Martin Ravallion, "Welfare Impacts of the 1998 Financial Crisis in Russia and the Response of the Public Sector Safety Net," *Economics in Transition* 8 (2000): 269–95.

21. Murray Feshbach, "Russia's Population Meltdown," *Wilson Quarterly* 15 (winter 2001): 15–21.

22. Nicholas Eberstadt, "Russia: Too Sick to Matter?" *Policy Review* 95 (June–July 1999): 6.

23. *Ibid.*, 15.

24. The paragraph is drawn from: Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?"

25. James Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review* 6, no. 1 (1962): 5–19.