

Demography and Democracy in Russia: Human Capital Challenges to Democratic Consolidation

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Two years after the exit of Boris Yeltsin, Russia appeared more stable politically and better off economically. The apparent consolidation of “managed democracy” under Vladimir Putin is applauded by many, both inside and outside Russia, who consider that the regime’s economic policies warrant downplaying shortcomings in domestic politics and human rights. Invoking examples such as Chile or Korea, optimists suggest that over time the Russian system will evolve into a competitive rather than a managed democracy.

There are (at least) two related flaws in the argument that Russia is now on an “indirect” but nevertheless inevitable path to democracy. Democracy does not develop automatically; it is achieved by contestation. Leaders and their cronies do not willingly give up political power and the economic opportunities that it offers. They must be constrained by other political forces. Yet Russia’s demographic, health, and human capital situation portends political issues that will make it dauntingly difficult to advance an agenda of democracy, liberal politics (as opposed to economics), or human rights. More likely, the demographic challenge will encourage Russia’s leaders to do what they are inclined to do anyway—continue to try to manage the nation’s political life, while adhering to an extreme version of *laissez faire* where social welfare is concerned. This prospect offers the chimera of short-term stability at an enormous cost to long-term development.

One of the important lessons of the first decade of the post-Soviet experience was that although education was crucial for the “East Asian miracle,” high levels of literacy and millions of engineers are not sufficient to ensure economic development or democracy. A key lesson of the second decade is likely to be that human capital issues present gargantuan challenges that create economic problems while making it more difficult for a political system to evolve in a more

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democratic direction. In this essay, I provide a brief summary of Russia's demographic and human capital crisis and then turn to an explication of some of the potential political consequences.¹ Prognostication is always a dangerous endeavor; in this instance, the projections are made in the sincere hope that Russia's leaders adopt policies that will make the forecasts offered here appear foolish a decade from now.

Is Demography Russia's Destiny?

Russia's human capital crisis begins with but is hardly limited to demography. The challenges are both quantitative and qualitative. The fundamental quantitative issue is that the number of Russians is declining. The Soviet Union experienced the "demographic revolution" following World War II, a process accompanying urbanization that entails reduced family size. It thus far has not been reversed in the societies where it has occurred. In the Soviet case, the declining birth rates accompanying high levels of urbanization and education were magnified by other negative population phenomena. Beginning in the 1970s, infant mortality increased and adult life expectancy began to decline. Both trends were so anomalous that they provoked intense debate. Not only Soviet but also many Western specialists rejected the data as counter to what should be expected in "advanced" societies. It eventually became quite clear that the USSR was experiencing unusual levels of infant mortality because of defects in the health care system and poor health practices, including substance abuse and excessive use of abortion as a means of birth control. Although infant mortality was higher among non-Slavic groups in the USSR, declining adult life expectancy, particularly for males, clearly affected the Slavic and minority populations.

Following the demise of the USSR, the negative demographic trends became more acute. Throughout the former Soviet bloc illness and mortality rates increased as economies atrophied and social welfare systems evaporated. The extent of the tragedy may be explained in large part by economic upheaval and extremely rapid social mobility, both upward and downward: extreme movement in either direction can be tremendously disruptive psychologically. In the nations of the former Soviet Union, the population shock has been more than a temporary cost of the transition. Russians are dying at rates unprecedented for a nation at Russia's level of development; births are well below replacement levels; and immigration is not sufficient to maintain population size.

Despite an effort by some Russian scholars to offer a positive gloss by invoking Lenin's famous slogan, "better fewer, but better," the shrinking numbers have not been accompanied by an overall improvement in quality. Rather, the Russian population is not only smaller,² but also older, more fragile, and despite unprecedented enrollments in higher education, overall less well educated. A smaller and physically less fit working-age population faces the burdens of staffing the military and security services while also supporting a growing proportion of non-workers. Education and medical care are rapidly being stratified into private systems serving those with means or connections and distinctly

inferior public systems for the rest of the population. The extensive Soviet system of scientific and technical activity is gone and will never reappear on its former scale.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Russia will experience the following:

- Continued low adult life expectancy, especially among males, due largely to cardiovascular disease and alcohol-related causes that are not easily reversible
 - Increased mortality from AIDS and TB
 - A declining birth rate, with fewer healthy women and fewer women in the cohorts of childbearing age, while most families will continue to limit family size
 - An aging and increasingly fragile population that will put strains on the medical system and the economy (see table 1)
 - (Relative) population increases among non-Russian, non-Slavic and non-Orthodox groups

TABLE 1. Russian Population by Age Cohort as of 1 January 2001

Age	Total	Males	Females
under 4	6,393,259	3,237,075	3,066,184
5-9	7,639,114	3,916,059	3,723,055
10-14	11,523,877	5,883,668	5,640,208
15-19	11,945,733	6,061,805	5,883,928
20-24	10,848,502	5,471,016	5,377,486
25-29	10,316,045	5,242,487	5,073,558
30-34	9,487,228	4,834,015	4,653,213
35-39	11,229,825	5,587,291	5,642,534
40-44	12,589,305	6,145,435	6,443,870
45-49	11,500,639	5,490,844	6,009,795
50-54	9,385,217	4,355,629	5,029,588
55-59	4,955,170	2,165,087	2,790,083
60-64	8,807,929	3,630,693	5,177,236
65-69	5,865,692	2,251,085	3,614,607
70-74	6,175,774	2,083,752	4,092,022
75-79	3,386,113	831,215	2,554,898
80-84	1,501,308	328,978	1,172,330
85-89	974,168	182,948	791,220
90-94	283,588	56,481	227,107
95-99	83,126	17,856	62,270
100+	17,487	6,226	11,261

Source: *Chislennost' naseleniia rossiiskoi federatsii po polu i vozrastu na 1 ianvaria 2001 goda* (Moscow: Goskomstat, 2001), 5-7.

- Increased immigration, both legal and illegal, overwhelmingly from countries with quite different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and predominantly with lower educational levels
- Increasing economic differentiation, accompanied by continued stratification in provision of educational and medical services
- A continuing trend for the most talented individuals, particularly in science and technology, to join the global labor market and spend at least part of their working lives outside Russia
- Intense competition among the military, the education system, and employers for the declining number of healthy working-age people

The young people who will turn seventeen—the threshold age for military service, higher education, or marriage—in the coming fifteen years have already been born. The numbers are daunting (see table 1).

The challenges facing Russia are complex and intricately interrelated. The declining number of Russians has encouraged pro-natalist policies. Such programs are rarely effective, but to the extent they do succeed they tend to keep women out of the labor force, increasing the need for immigrant labor. Immigration creates enormous social problems, and in a highly competitive global market Russia is likely to attract large numbers of migrants from regions quite different from Russia itself—China, Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Slavic immigrants on average are not likely to be younger or more healthy than Russians, and immigrants everywhere place special burdens on education and health care systems. If Russia succeeds in adding to the population, this is likely to represent a net decline in intellectual capital. Increased diversity exacerbates social tensions, as young people without good employment prospects take out their resentments on “foreigners.” Poor children’s health has an adverse impact on education, children who are hungry or sick do not do well in school, and children of immigrants often have special needs.

The list could be expanded. In particular, the detrimental effect of income disparities on health and education deserves more attention. A growing body of data suggests that beyond a basic minimum level of economic development, a nation’s overall wealth is less important than the distribution of that wealth for people’s physical and psychological well-being. In Russia, where the Soviet regime maintained at least the rhetoric of equality, the psychological reaction to marked economic disparities is a particular concern.

Political Implications

The political ramifications of the demographic disaster are potentially damaging to democracy. It may help to think about ten of the ways these complex, interrelated, and multifaceted issues are likely to have an impact on Russian politics. The challenges are *not* unique to Russia or to postcommunism, but they may be more serious impediments to consolidation in new democracies. That the problems are shared by Europe and a growing number of Asian countries may provide some common experience in dealing with the adverse effects, but it also

means there is intense competition not only for skilled people but for people who can cope with the challenges.

Immigration/Migration and Diversity

The magnitude of the demographic challenges facing Russia combined with the leadership's desire to play a major role in world affairs makes Russia unique. Many European countries now have birth rates below replacement levels, but in most the population decline can be compensated by moderate levels of immigration. Estimates are that Russia's population will decline from 144.6 million in 2002 to between 126 million (optimistic estimate) and 77 million (pessimistic estimate) by 2050. The working-age population will decline by as much as 15 percent between 2005 and 2015. The evidence from countries experiencing far less pronounced population decline, aging, immigration, and stratification than Russia suggests that the political impact is often to strengthen right-wing, chauvinist, and antidemocratic tendencies. The June 2002 meeting of European leaders focused largely on immigration. Britain, until now one of the most liberal countries in terms of asylum policy, joined with Spain in proposing a pan-European border police. Austria, France, and Australia have already experienced the political impact of openly racist politicians campaigning for office.

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Germany's 2002 election campaign offers insights into the debate over immigration and the need for controls. The basic slogan might be phrased, “workers, yes; refugees, no.” Competition for skilled immigrants is increasing as those with needed skills are able to market themselves on a global scale. Few nations have successfully fine-tuned their immigration policies to guarantee that they admit only individuals with talents that are needed in the economy and not supplied by the indigenous population. Some of the needed skills can be acquired only through education/training, or require periodic upgrading, so that access to the education system inevitably becomes an issue, as do health care, insurance, and social welfare. Highly skilled immigrants are in a position to make demands and frequently insist that spouses, children, and in some instances other relatives be permitted to accompany them. There is growing evidence that the rich nations need not only highly skilled professionals in fields such as medicine and information sciences, but also someone to collect the garbage—many immigrants work in low-end service and construction jobs.

New arrivals (immigrants) are almost universally the target of resentment and discrimination. Illegal migrants generally fare the worst, but large numbers of legal immigrants have significantly altered the electoral landscape in France, Ger-

many, the Netherlands, Denmark, and a growing number of other European states. In Russia, many regions have adopted policies that directly violate the Russian constitution, and anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner groups have taken government inaction in the legal realm as a tacit endorsement of their growing violence against people who look “different.” Without drastic change in official policy in this realm, the growing number of immigrants in Russia will face more hostility and increased violence. Even if the regime had a choice regarding continued legal immigration (and the demographic reality leaves it little choice), illegal immigration and natural increase among non-Russian groups will make this a continuing challenge.

One of the consequences of globalization is the phenomenon of the “angry young majority ethnic male.” In many societies, disadvantaged members of the main ethnic group blame immigrants and in general anyone who is different for their economic and social problems. In the industrialized nations, they tend to form a subculture inclined to “skinhead” lifestyles. In the developing world, they often turn into informal military groups—young, uneducated, and armed with AK 47s. Moscow is now home to white supremacist groups with aspirations to both street violence and a role in future elections. Before 11 September 2001 immigrants were almost everywhere blamed for rising crime rates. Now terrorism has been added to the list of their presumed sins.

Incidents of racial violence have become regular occurrences in Moscow and other Russian cities. Skinhead attacks on foreigners also regularly occur in many European cities. It might be plausible to argue that Russia has simply become like many other countries in this regard. The crucial questions involve how the problems are handled, whether they continue to become more acute, and whether they break into mainstream political life. Russia, with the Soviet heritage of state-sponsored discrimination, may be especially prone to abuses. President Putin has made laudable public statements condemning intolerance, but action against specific groups has been selective: Eduard Limonov is in jail, but People’s National Party founder Alexander Ivanov-Sukharevsky maintains an office in Moscow and regularly gives interviews to journalists proclaiming his views. One of the major potential sources of immigrants to Russia is China. Where Russia suffers from a population shortage, China has a large “floating population,” and WTO membership will result in increased unemployment. Reports of Chinese overrunning the Russian Far East are exaggerated. Chinese are more likely to go where economic opportunities are most attractive, which means major urban areas such as Yekaterinburg and Moscow. Many would prefer to go to the United States, and Chinese who spend time in Russia are often seeking to accumulate sufficient savings to finance a move to the West. Those who are not successful may end up in Russia for a longer time. Chinese who immigrate to Russia are likely to be those with lower skills and lower intellectual capital. There may be as many as four million Chinese in Russia in 2002, and over time poorly managed Chinese immigration could present serious difficulties. Tatars have voiced concern that by 2010 they will be replaced by Chinese as the second largest ethnic group in the Russian Federation.

Chinese migration demonstrates the complex and cross-cutting interests involved in Russia's population policy. A large portion of the Chinese in Russia are traders, providing inexpensive goods that Russians both crave and disparage. Some employers in the Far East want Chinese workers, who are willing to take jobs Russians eschew and often can be exploited at low or delayed wages; yet many Russian traders and businessmen resent competition from Chinese who demonstrate entrepreneurial skills. University administrators view Chinese youth as a potential source of tuition-paying students, particularly as the number of school-age Russians declines. Their interests conflict with the security concerns of government officials and the fears of many Russians, which provide fodder for populist politicians. Sober analysts provide compelling arguments that Chinese migration to the Russian Far East does not represent a serious threat. Yet these same scholars note that three-fourths of Russians in the Far East perceive it to be a threat. For the short term, it is a political rather than a demographic problem. In the longer term it could be both.

The Russian Duma approved a new Law on Foreigners as deputies left for vacation in July 2002. The legislation does little to address the problems of thousands of individuals from former Soviet republics living in limbo across Russia. They represent a potentially significant political force, one more example of the growing importance of demographic issues in Russian politics.

Regional and Federation Politics

Population movement will also influence politics within the Russian Federation. The Russian "core" is becoming more Russian, as Russians move back from former Soviet republics and from the Russian north and east. This may temporarily offset the lower birthrates among Russians in regions such as the Volga. At the same time, non-Russian regions are becoming more "ethnic," with the proportion of members of the titular nationalities increasing in some republics. In the short term, this represents a decline in intellectual capital in regions where the Russians and other Slavs provided the scientific, technical, and administrative personnel, a factor that could hinder economic development. (It is also part of a broad drain of talented managers to Moscow, which creates difficulties for business development in some regions.) In the longer term, the consequence of a reduced Russian presence could be to encourage immigration from other countries, and eventually new demands for greater autonomy. The situation is an invitation to politicians both in the regions and in Moscow to "play the ethnic card."

Vladimir Putin's policy of reasserting central authority must be viewed in this context. In the short run, it appears to have induced (at least formal) compliance. In the longer run, it may result in greater resentment. The Duma passed legislation prohibiting Tatarstan from abandoning the Cyrillic alphabet; a future generation might seek to replace it not with Latin script, but with Arabic.

The seven "federal districts" are also potentially double-edged. To the extent that the new presidential representatives are successful, that success will be due to their ability to develop strong ties to their regions and foster a sense of regional economic cooperation and identity. But some of the seven districts could be viable

independent entities in ways that the individual subjects of the Federation are not. The federal districts have already added a new level to the federal political game.

Gender Imbalance

One of the less-emphasized aspects of Russia's demographic crisis is the shortage of males. At the beginning of 2001, there were 9.3 million more women than men in the Russian Federation. Although men outnumber women in the age cohorts younger than thirty-five, the picture changes drastically for males in what should be their prime working years (see table 1). Russian men between sixteen and sixty die at a rate unlike anything known in other industrialized nations. Russia, and especially rural Russia, is home to vast numbers of elderly single women.

While Russia has an excess of women, China has the opposite problem: China's one-child policy induced families to utilize sonograms, abortions, and even female infanticide in efforts to ensure that their one child is a boy. This has produced a significant disproportion—by some estimates more than forty million excess males. One place they may find both outlets for their energies and brides is across the Russian border. One Russian oligarch has suggested that Russian women in the Far East prefer to marry Chinese men—they work harder than Russians, drink less, and are less likely to beat their wives. The accuracy of such accounts is far less important than their frequency, and they provide fodder for populist politicians.

Religion

In addition to ethnic and territorial issues, population change involves religious differences. The fastest-growing religion in Russia, as it is globally, is Islam. In Russia, the growth is due in part to higher birthrates among ethnic groups that are predominantly Muslim, in part to an influx of refugees and laborers from the Caucasus, and in part to conversion (there are reported to be 5,000 Muslims in Karelia, many of them converts). Despite adopting a Law on Religion that recognizes Islam as one of four "traditional" Russian religions, Russian officials have a distinctly ambivalent attitude toward Islam. Moscow authorities stigmatize all Chechens, and indeed all people from the Caucasus, as Islamic fundamentalists or terrorists. A portion of the Russian intelligentsia perceives Russia as playing a historic role defending Western Christendom from an Islamic onslaught. The growing number of mosques is disturbing to Russians in many cities. In Yakutsk a newly opened mosque serves mainly workers from the Caucasus, but the Mullah claims at least fifty local converts. Without tolerant and intelligent political leadership, there will be more disorder, posing a challenge to democratic norms. That opens the door to a greater role for the Russian Orthodox Church in political life, and thus far the church hierarchy has not shown itself to be a strong force for democracy. Muslim leaders bear an equal responsibility.

Educational and Social Stratification

Russian higher education institutions now enroll more students, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population, than at any time in Russian histo-

ry. Those with adequate financial resources (or connections) can obtain a world-class education, but the educational opportunities are not extending to a majority of the population. More than two-thirds of the students in higher education come from the one-quarter of the population that is relatively well-off. The cost of attending the best universities is high, and a corrupt system of admissions makes it almost prohibitive for most families. At the end of the 1990s a secret memorandum circulating in the Ministry of Education warned of a possible *bunt* (riot) by parents outraged at the cost of bribes for tutors and admissions. The ministry has responded by trying to draw private money into the public system and is struggling to introduce a standardized entrance exam for higher school admissions.

What are the increased numbers of university students studying? The honest answer is that no one really knows. Of the 387 private institutions of higher education in the Russian Federation, perhaps one-third are officially accredited. At the state-funded institutions, enrollments in Soviet-era specialties in construction, transportation, and engineering are returning to Soviet-era levels. In some cases the content of the curriculum has changed while the labels have not; in other instances new labels disguise unreformed educational programs. For half of the young men enrolled in higher education institutions, avoiding military service is the top priority. While the military operation in Chechnya continues, access to higher education can be a matter of life and death. This increases both the willingness to pay and the resentment when a son does not gain admission.

The increase in higher education enrollments has been accompanied by decreasing coverage at the other levels of the education system, the opposite of what is occurring in OECD nations. Kindergarten and day-care programs have declined markedly; many street children are not attending school, and some 10 percent to 20 percent of those in school drop out by the fifth year of elementary education. Poorly educated young people could become a Russian "underclass."

The welfare state everywhere is under pressure from global economic competition and the inability of a declining number of workers to support growing populations of pensioners whose medical needs constantly increase. In June 2002 Spain and France experienced strikes over government policies to cut back welfare systems that are far less extensive than what the USSR aspired to provide. Russia has both a tradition of more welfare and a more acute version of the aging population syndrome. If there is any saving grace here it may be that in the USSR no one really believed that all of the social benefits would be provided as promised, so the reaction may be less intense. But in Russia, as elsewhere, pensioners vote in large numbers.

AIDS, Health, and the Medical System

The system of medical care has also become stratified. About 30 percent of Russians now buy medicines at private pharmacies, a good indication of the number with access to some sort of resources when faced with serious problems. The fate of the other 70 percent is of particular concern given the magnitude of the health crisis facing Russia. Russians are dying at an unprecedented rate from causes that are not susceptible to short-term solutions. Cardiovascular disease, the number

one killer, results from a lifetime of bad habits. A disproportionate share of those dying are in the working-age population, and this problem is about to become even more severe. HIV/AIDS affects overwhelmingly the working-age and reproductively active groups in a population, and in 2002 Russia had the largest percentage increase in HIV infection in the world.

The AIDS epidemic that will strike Russia in 2005–10 will have a serious political impact. The learning curve for politicians and for societies appears to be quite steep where this disease is concerned, and most Russian politicians appear intent on repeating others' mistakes. In South Africa AIDS is now the leading cause of death, and it is having a devastating impact on the economy as

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it kills people of working age, lowers birth rates, and increases the proportion of the population unable to support itself. Many Russian politicians sound disturbingly like Thabo Mbeki, rejecting scientific evidence and refusing to confront the Orthodox Church on its opposition to sex education. The 2002 International AIDS Conference cited ignorance of

the disease as one of the most serious problems in combating it. Thailand, despite its reputation for sex tourism and trafficking, has been relatively successful in decreasing the rate of HIV infection by encouraging condom use. The lesson ought to be clear.

One relatively bright spot is the apparent stabilization or even decline in heroin use, which could reduce the spread of HIV from shared needles. But once the virus is present in a population, it spreads through sexual contact. High incidence of sexually transmitted diseases is both an indication of the likely trajectory and a factor increasing transmission. To the extent that Russia continues its economic integration with other countries, this will encourage the spread of disease. Increased traffic along truck routes between Asia and Europe will inevitably provide a route for diseases as well. The political response may well be to blame foreigners and turn inward, but economic necessity will make that almost impossible. The result is likely to be a politics that recognizes the need for economic intercourse but seeks to limit the unwanted side effects by arbitrary restrictions.

As AIDS in Russia spreads from drug users to the general population through sexual transmission, it will almost inevitably provoke a political response. When the victims are drug users (or homosexuals) there is a sense that the people suffering in some way brought on their fate by their behavior. When “ordinary” people can be infected through “normal” sexual relationships, the demand for action becomes impossible to ignore.

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Myriad diseases have reappeared. Between one-quarter and one-half of children are not receiving the medical immunizations considered necessary during the first year of life. The contradictory situation can be seen in data showing a simultaneous increase in the number of underweight children and the number of overweight adults. The data on children reflect increased poverty; the data on adults indicate both less healthy diet for some and greater affluence for others.

If projections of increases in the incidence of AIDS are correct, by 2010 the cost of treating Russians with AIDS will be greater than the entire national budget for health care. What political/policy response should be expected? If more of the resources available for health care are used to treat HIV/AIDS, the rest of the population will be furious. If the AIDS sufferers are left to their own devices so that other citizens can receive "normal" medical care, the AIDS rate will continue to increase. One plausible response might be to copy the approach to other sexually transmitted diseases, stigmatizing or even criminalizing the AIDS victims, essentially placing them outside the mainstream population. A government inclined to do this would be a government unlikely to protect civil rights in other realms.

Ecology

Although it remains difficult to prove the direct relationship between perceived general environmental degradation and deteriorating health, Russia faces difficult choices as the country's water supply, sanitation, and other infrastructure systems require replacement. Little has been done to remedy the decades of Soviet mistreatment of the environment. It is politically risky for President Putin to state publicly that environmental concerns are a luxury only rich nations can afford. The ecology movement was one of the strongest political forces in the Gorbachev era, forming the initial basis for many of the popular fronts in USSR republics. In Russia, a tradition of environmental awareness persisted despite Soviet repression, and it remains a strong rallying point for Russians and other ethnic groups. Activists collected 2.5 million signatures on a petition demanding a referendum that could have overturned Duma approval of a plan to import spent nuclear fuel from other nations. The government acceded to the economic demands of MinAtom and declared enough signatures invalid to void the petition. The issue, and others like it, will not go away. One intriguing aspect of Russia's ecology movement is that it is not solely the province of left-leaning "greens": It also attracts conservatives and romantic nationalists. That gives it a highly unpredictable and potentially destabilizing political character.

Military Needs

Russia does not have enough fit conscripts to meet its current military personnel targets, but the nation lacks the resources to fund the professional military that would be the alternative. In late 2002 some high-ranking officers proposed increasing the number of women serving in the Russian army. The young men being inducted into the army are both less physically fit and less well-educated than before 1990. Increasingly, recruits have criminal records. The spring 2002

draft called up 94 percent of the number needed, but only 11 percent were considered fully suitable for military service. One in five of those called up had only an elementary education. As the number of young people declines after 2005, the military will increasingly be competing with educational institutions and employers for the shrinking pool of young men. Without improvements in nutrition and education, the portion of the draft-age population fit to serve is likely to decline even further.

What are the political consequences of a system where the wealthy can afford higher education with the accompanying military service exemptions, while the only way the poor can avoid serving is by being too frail? During the U.S. Civil War, there were draft riots in part because of the perceived unfairness of the wealthy being able to buy their way out of military service. Even more serious, is it possible to maintain civilian control over an increasingly corrupt military, especially when it is demoralized by the ongoing ulcer in Chechnya?

Alienated Intelligentsia

One of the most catastrophic errors by the Russian government and its international advisers has been the cavalier treatment of many educators, physicians, engineers, scientists, and other professionals trained in the USSR. This is a “normal” aspect of neo-liberal reforms, which everywhere have an adverse impact on state employees, including those in critically needed vocations such as education and health. Not only has this undermined capacity in important areas of public policy, but it has a highly detrimental effect on democracy. Russia’s post-Soviet middle class is missing the teachers, physicians, professors, and scientists who provided leadership to Russia’s democratic political parties before 1917. Many of them have experienced the sort of downward social mobility that led many Central European professionals to support nondemocratic political movements between the wars. Although there is little evidence for a “Weimar Russia” syndrome thus far, recent studies indicate that many of the young Russian skinheads are children of the downwardly mobile intelligentsia.

Politics of a Commodity Economy

The pressures stemming from Russia’s demographic and human capital crisis threaten to preclude addressing what may be the most serious long-term threat to the nation—the increasing dominance of natural resources in the economy. Although some of the problems Russia faces are similar to (often more extreme versions of) challenges in Europe, America, and elsewhere, Russia bears the special burden of an economy increasingly based on commodities. The “resource curse” tends to spawn rent-seeking elites who derive enormous wealth from selling natural resources but see little reason to spend money on education and medical care for the population in general. This both exacerbates the human capital problem and makes the overall political situation less promising for democracy.

Nigeria, Indonesia, and Venezuela are oil-producing nations that have recently experienced serious political disturbances stemming from the failure of oil wealth to improve the lives of people who live where the oil is extracted. Condi-

tions in west Siberia, initial reports from Sakhalin, and evidence from other regions suggest that Russia faces similar difficulties. The Russian state's capacity to repress protests remains credible, but using it has a detrimental effect on democracy.

Conclusion

The ten issue areas identified here hardly exhaust the political implications of the post-Soviet demographic crisis. For example, the Russian government might well shift its policy in the former Soviet republics from using Russians there as a source of leverage to one of encouraging their return to Russia. Re-absorbing Belarus might become more attractive, despite the enormous economic costs involved. Or, in a more optimistic vein, the attractions of European Union membership might be enormously greater (although it would severely limit the sorts of restrictions on mobility that Russia's government could introduce). What is certain is that the issues will have a growing prominence in both domestic and international politics.

Russia's demographic disaster derives from a complex combination of inter-related causes. There is no one "reason" for the situation, and there is no single solution. All of the problems are multifaceted; all of the potential solutions involve tradeoffs and difficult choices. Population policy everywhere is a blunt instrument—government programs often cut against tradition, culture, and individual preferences, all the more so in diverse societies. It is rarely possible to elicit compliance without a "culture shift," and coercion is always a less-effective and more costly approach. Both voluntary and forced programs are subject to the inevitable law of unintended consequences.

What are the likely political ramifications of the demographic issues? One possibility is the "Le Pen syndrome," where an anti-immigrant political figure can regularly get 15–20 percent of the vote in national elections, and on occasion win a local contest. Thus far, the Russian politicians who have played the nationalist card have been a KGB-sponsored clown (Vladimir Zhirinovskiy) and an unreconstructed communist (Gennady Zyuganov). Younger individuals may adopt more creative extremist programs. The Danish election in 2002 shows the potential for "libertarian extremism" in the new Europe. To pre-empt the rise of chauvinist candidates, Vladimir Putin may well choose to adopt some of their rhetoric and/or policies. That would not improve either human rights or democracy in Russia.

An alternative is for the Putin regime to adopt differential policies in different areas, permitting the locales with serious problems (or serious reactions) to impose restrictions on population movement, forcibly expel unwanted groups, and otherwise deviate from legal norms. The federal government has ignored Moscow's unconstitutional perpetuation of the *propiska* system (under city laws, an individual may not even obtain a mobile phone without first showing a Moscow residence permit). Cities such as Norilsk have demanded "closed" status. Anti-foreigner campaigns in Rostov and Krasnodar have been hailed as models by some politicians. Krasnodar's new border zone requires residence and work per-

mits, the region prohibits foreigners from owning property, and local police are empowered to intern and expel unwanted workers. Krasnodar authorities have begun raising private funds to finance the repatriation of unwanted residents. The program is clearly unconstitutional, but it is under consideration as a model for other border regions. (It is politically important to note that Krasnodar governor Takchev was not known as anti-immigrant when he served as a committee chairman in the Duma, but adopted more extreme policies resembling those of his predecessors when he became leader of a region with large numbers of recent immigrants.) In Putin's attempt to be all things to all people, he may well try to ignore local excesses in regions where they appear to be politically popular, while simultaneously maintaining a formal national policy of attracting skilled immigrants. This will not solve the demographic problem, but it may be politically the least bad alternative for coping with it. The complexity of the demographic challenge means that every solution entails political costs.

Challenging policy conundrums are not necessarily fatal to the eventual consolidation of democracy. The United States for a century considered itself to be a consolidated democracy even though a large region was governed by a one-party political system based largely on racial prejudice. But Russia's demographic and human capital challenges extend to far more than immigration policy. The impact of a demoralized and criminalized military; a corrupt judiciary; extreme inequalities in incomes, education, and health care; and an overall perception of insecurity are likely to make many members of the Russian middle class seek security rather than democracy. The lesson that real security comes from the protections offered by a democratic society is difficult to implement and easy to forget.

The "Third Wave" of democratization was in part generated by an international environment that encouraged democratization and seemed to offer no ideological alternatives. In the wake of 11 September, the international environment has become far less conducive to democratization. In the battle with Al Qaeda, Islam Karimov is an ally and Russia's grotesque war of attrition in Chechnya is being tolerated. External influences favoring democracy are greatly diminished.

The argument here is not that Russia is doomed or that the government must inevitably become a new incarnation of the Grozny/Stalin, leader-centered polity that some observers consider the "norm" of Russian history. Rather, it is a plea and a caution. The plea is for Russians themselves, as well as international donors, to recognize the scope and seriousness of the demographic and human capital problems and the extent to which they are not just Russian problems. The caution is for all of us who hope to see consolidated rather than electoral, delegative, illiberal, managed, or pseudo-democracy in Russia to recognize the political implications of those challenges. Population movements and the accompanying political reactions pose challenges to liberalism and democracy everywhere. The political challenges of an increasingly diverse and inegalitarian society make it enormously difficult to develop adequate policy responses within a democratic context; but without democracy the potential for corruption, demagoguery, and abuse of human rights is even greater.

NOTES

I am grateful to Robert J. Lieber, Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, Blair Ruble, and Susan Sypko for comments on earlier versions of this essay; and for financial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the National Science Foundation.

1. For a more complete discussion of the human and intellectual capital issues, see Harley Balzer, "Human Capital and Russian Security in the 21st Century," *Russia After the Fall*, edited by Andrew Kuchins (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 163–84.

2. The population of the Russian Federation *and* the Russian proportion of that population both are declining. The Russians in the Russian Federation have higher death rates than many of the other ethnic groups and lower birth rates than most other groups. In Russian, the distinction between *Russkie* and *Rossiiskie* helps to keep the difference clear. In this essay I use "Russians" to refer to the population of the Russian Federation, unless otherwise indicated.