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## **The Political Consciousness of Adolescents**

Normal School Students  
vs. Children of the Streets

*Survey data show that the life desires of homeless or troubled children are more connected to personal safety and less to social ambition than children from intact families. They also show that children in general are as uncritically accepting of media propaganda as was true of children during most of the Soviet period.*

Political psychologists and political scientists began to be interested in the study of the national self-awareness and political thinking of adolescents in the early 1950s. In their now-classic study (Piaget and Weil 1951), J. Piaget and A. Weil tried for the first time to study the cognitive processes and emotions that lie at the basis

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of a child's relationship to his country. In a fundamental work by D. Easton and J. Dennis (1969) devoted to the interpretation of the political socialization of children, the authors devised a theoretical substantiation of the characteristics of children's perception of politics, to be determined empirically.

Western specialists have built up a substantial body of theoretical and empirical material that makes it possible to conduct large-scale studies of the political world view of adolescents, their political views and value orientations, their attitudes toward the political process, and so on. For example, interesting results are to be found in works by S. Palonsky (Palonsky 1981), J. Kevin (Kevin 1994), J. Torney-Purta (Torney-Purta 2004), and others.

The Center for the Sociology of Education of the Russian Academy of Education, under the direction of V.S. Sobkin, is currently engaged in the study of school students' attitudes toward a broad spectrum of political issues.

In the case of homeless children, sociologists in our country did not focus on that category from the 1930s on. Only a few studies were made of the residents of children's homes [orphanages] and children's correctional institutions, as well as children who ended up in homeless placement centers. For the most part, these studies were devoted to the root causes of the emergence of deviant behavior, to social problems. There have not been many works on this topic in Western sociology either, the primary object of interest there being factors that cause children to run away from home, such as violence in the home and sexual abuse on the part of adults (Stephenson 2000). In the 1990s and more recently, studies of homeless and neglected children and their participation in "grey area" urban communities, their social networks, have been the focus of works by S. Stephenson (2000, 2001). However, research devoted to the study specifically of the political consciousness of these problem adolescents has not been carried out either in Russia or abroad, as far as we know.

In October to December 2008, the Laboratory for Political Research at the Higher School of Economics State University, as part of a broad project devoted to determining the degree of homogene-

ity versus heterogeneity of the political consciousness of today's Russian society, carried out a sociological survey on the topic "The Political Consciousness of Adolescents: Normal School Students vs. Children of the Streets." The study's purpose was to reconstruct the political consciousness of adolescents in various social strata. The study was conducted using the interview method, with each interview lasting twenty to thirty minutes. Interviews were conducted with 300 adolescents between the ages of thirteen and eighteen: 150 Moscow school students and 150 children of the streets. In our use of the generalized term "children of the streets" we interpret it broadly as not only homeless and neglected children who do not have parents or a home but also youngsters from troubled families in which the father and mother are drinkers or have been incarcerated. These youngsters are not going to school. They are making a living by menial work or begging, they are committing various kinds of statutory or criminal offenses, they are involved in prostitution, they smoke and use alcohol and/or narcotics. In effect, they represent the beginning sprouts of the social lower orders. One could also say that the children of the streets are a "blank spot" in sociology, hard to gain access to and not studied much.

The sample was compiled using the following methods:

1. The Moscow school students were surveyed in the classrooms of gymnasiums and lyceums in various administrative districts of the city of Moscow.

2. The children of the streets were interviewed in the places where they regularly stay (shelters, social rehabilitation centers, placement and detention centers, and hospital wards for neglected children). Later on, the adolescents helped the researchers to find participants who were "at large," serving as informers (the "snowball" method) by pointing out places where these young people hang out in the streets, subway, cellars, markets, and so on.

The study attempted to determine and compare the basic ideas of the two groups being studied about Russia and the country's future; their normative ideas about the president/leader of the state and the directions of his policies; their ideas about the friends/enemies of Russia, and their value orientations.

Table 1

**The Dreams of Adolescents** (% of respondents)\*

I	II	III	IV
Dream	Moscow school students	Children of the streets	II–III
An education	24 (2)	11 (4)	13
A life of enjoyment	14 (3)	3 (7)	11
A job	32 (1)	23 (1)	9
Sports and music	11 (5)	5 (6)	6
Money	11 (5)	9 (5)	2
A car	6 (6)	5 (6)	1
A family	13 (4)	14 (3)	–1
A place to live	14 (3)	21 (2)	–7
No dream	—	9 (5)	–9

\*The data in the table have been ranked in accordance with column IV. In columns II and III the numbers in parentheses indicate the place ranking occupied by the dreams of the adolescents in each of the groups studied.

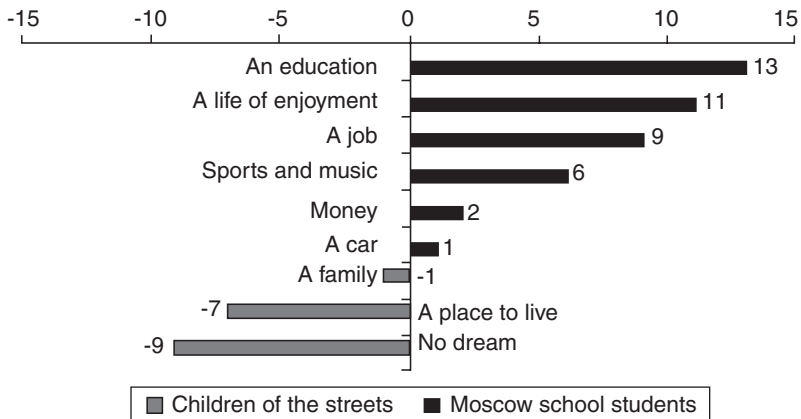
**The adolescents' dreams**

The respondents were presented with an open question—"What do you dream about?"—to which they could give any number of answers, formalized and presented in Table 1. To see how the groups compare, for each item we subtracted the answers given by children of the streets from those given by Moscow school students (see Table 1, column IV). The result is shown graphically in Figure 1.

The distinguishing characteristics of the school students were their dreams of an education, a life of enjoyment, a job, sports, and music.

***Education***

For the *students*, getting a good education is much more important than it is for the problem youngsters. They mentioned their dream of an education almost twice as often (24 percent and 11 percent, respectively), and it was different in terms of content.



**Figure 1. The Dreams of Adolescents**

Among the overwhelming majority of the students, “having a good education” is associated exclusively with being enrolled in “a prestigious higher educational institution in Moscow” (thirty-five mentions). Many had already decided on their future specialty: “I dream of enrolling in a foreign-language institution,” “I want to enroll in the faculty of graphic arts at MGUK” [Moscow State University of Commerce], “I want to enroll in a university and major in public relations.”

In contrast, the *problem youngsters* did not once mention having a higher education. Most had dropped out of secondary school before completing it or regularly skipped classes; any dream of getting an education was expressed “I want to go back to school and graduate” and then “get into a training school or a [secondary-level] college [*kolledzh*]” (fifteen mentions).

### *A life of enjoyment*

Another distinguishing feature of the students was the desire to “live a life of enjoyment,” mentioned by 14 percent of students and only 3 percent of the children of the streets. What is meant by a carefree life for the Moscow students is “to spend money on the fun things of life,” “on anything that my heart desires” (nine mentions), and travel around the world (ten mentions): “I have a

dream of traveling around the world,” “I want to travel to Brazil with my family,” and “I want to go to Hawaii.”

Just as in the case of the typical youngsters, what the children of the streets mean by “living the good life” is “to spend money all over the place” (four mentions), but just what specifically they would like to spend the money on, “big money,” they did not spell out.

### *A job*

The desire to have a “decent” job, like the dream of having an education and living a life of enjoyment, was mentioned considerably more often by the Moscow students than by the children of the streets (32 percent and 23 percent, respectively). Ideas as to a desirable job differed a great deal between the groups.

“A decent job” in the case of Moscow students is “prestigious, interesting, and highly paid,” one that would highlight their social status and would require a higher education. The students dream of working in the banking sector, of becoming doctors, journalists, actors, and public leaders, including president of the country. The respondents in this group are three times more likely than children of the streets to mention wanting to open their own business (fifteen mentions compared to five mentions)—for example, to set up a chain of restaurants or flower shops, to have their own enterprise, to set up their own clothing company, and so on.

A *normal job*, as perceived by the children of the streets, was more down to earth. As a rule, they mentioned professions that do not require a higher education, such as a cook, hair stylist, nurse, or moving man, the kind of work that would pay “a whole 400 rubles a day.” The upper limit of the dreams of problem youngsters includes “prestigious” professions such as realtor, actor, or manager for the Coca Cola Company. A desire to have their own business was expressed by only five, who would like to set up their own shop or piercing salon, for example.

### *Sports and music*

The students were almost twice as likely to dream of achieving big things in sports. As in the preceding cases, the students’ dreams were

distinguished from the prosaic desires of the problem youngsters by their ambitiousness. For example, the students would like, at the minimum, to become swimming champions or champion skydivers, and, at the maximum, to be awarded the title of world champion in soccer or a [female] Olympic badminton champion. For the children of the streets, achieving “big things in sports” would mean being able to “just be a soccer player.”

Another distinguishing feature of the students was a passion for music. The participants dream of playing in a band (seven mentions) or, for example, “to play a Celtic harp and perform Irish dances.” The respondents in the other group did not mention any activities relating to music.

Both the groups dream of having money, a car, and a family.

### *Money*

A dream of having money was expressed by 11 percent of the students and 9 percent of the children of the streets. To the Moscow students having money is essential in order to have a “stable income” and to have “a secure life.” The troubled youngsters would like to have “a whole lot of dough” in order to “become materially wealthy.”

### *A car*

Both the students and the children of the streets would like to have a car (6 percent and 5 percent, respectively). But while three out of every nine such students would want a Bentley and one would like a Hummer, the children of the streets did not specify the make of the car, because to them just having some kind of vehicle to drive around in is significant and symbolic.

### *Family*

The youngsters in both groups are almost equal in their dream of “starting a family and having children” (13 percent of students and 14 percent of the children of the streets). But while Moscow’s

female students associate having a “normal family” and “a happy family life” with “mutual affection,” the troubled young women, as a rule, associate it with “a husband who does not drink.”

The youngsters interviewed in detention and placement centers or in hospital wards for neglected children dream of “going back to their parents” (eight mentions) or “finding a foster family” (three mentions).

The maximum difference between the children of the streets and the Moscow students were revealed in the dream of having a place to live and not having any dream at all.

### *A place to live*

The desire of the children of the streets to have a place to live was much more powerful than in the case of the Moscow students (21 percent compared to 14 percent, respectively).

The dream of “having a roof over their heads” for the children of the streets was expressed as a desire to have their own apartment (twenty mentions) and/or a house (fifteen mentions). Most of the youngsters did not say much about the kind of dwelling they would like, since often it was not very important—it could be “a little house in a village, with a farm plot” or a “shack in Moscow”; the important thing was to have a place to live. Of the fifteen respondents who dreamed of having their own house, only two called it “a mansion,” while three imagined having a place in another country without mentioning a specific location.

The *Moscow students* worry much less than the children of the streets about the necessity of solving the housing problem. However, the students’ dream of a place to live looked much more ambitious and fine. For example, an “ordinary” apartment in Moscow was mentioned by only four respondents whereas “a mansion, a villa, or a cottage in Rublevka” [an elite community near Moscow] was mentioned by nine respondents, and a house in another country was mentioned by ten respondents, for example: “a dacha on some cozy island,” “a house in the Canary Islands,” “a fine house in France,” or “a house on the ocean in Beverly Hills.”



Table 2

**Image of Russia** (% of respondents)

Characterization	Moscow school students	Children of the streets
Positive	79	58
Negative	18	32
Neutral	3	10

***No dream***

A total of 9 percent of the children of the streets stated that they “do not have a dream,” while none of the students made that statement. This may be due to the meagerness of their perception of the world and their dulled emotions, or the fact that they were not willing to share their hidden desires, since they had learned not to “let down their guard,” to be always on the alert and not trust people. It is not to be ruled out, in addition, that the difficult circumstances of their lives had taught these youngsters not to have a dream. Under conditions in which the most urgent task is to find something to eat and a place to spend the night, there is no time left over to dream.

**The image of Russia**

For the purpose of determining the adolescents’ ideas about Russia, they were presented with the open question “How would you describe our country?” The answers were grouped as positive, negative, and neutral characterizations of the image of Russia (see Table 2).

The ratio of positive and negative descriptions stood at 79 percent to 18 percent in the case of *Moscow students*, compared to 58 percent to 32 percent, respectively, in the case of the *children of the streets*. And so, a negative characterization by the students occurred in about one out of five answers, whereas among children of the streets it occurred in one out of every three answers.

Table 3

**Positive Image of Russia** (% of positive characterizations in answers to the question "How would you describe our country?")

I	II	III	IV
Characterization	Moscow school students	Children of the streets	II–III
Rich	14	4	10
Powerful	27	18	9
Big	40	44	–4
Beautiful	18	34	–16

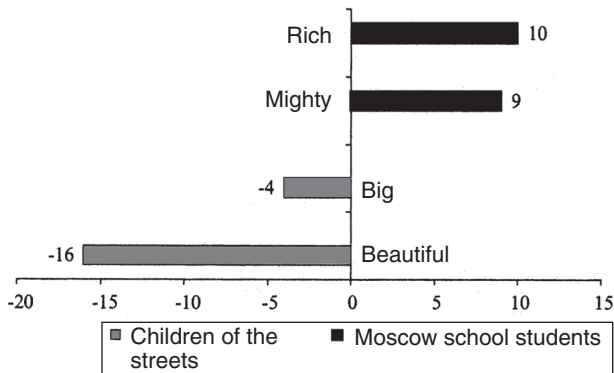
### *A positive image of Russia*

The variegated positive characterizations were gathered together into four basic groups: rich, powerful, big, and beautiful (Table 3).

About half of the two positive characterizations given by students went like this: "Russia is big, boundless, vast, and huge." In most of the answers, "big Russia" was used in conjunction with epithets like "powerful" and/or "beautiful." For example, in speaking of the gigantic dimensions of the country, about one out of every three students mentioned Russia's power: "Our country is a great power that has no equal in the world" (a girl, age sixteen). One out of every five respondents mentioned the beauty of their native land: "Our country is very beautiful, with wonderful landscapes. Just look at Lake Baikal" (a boy, age thirteen). One out of every seven mentioned this country's rich natural resources.

Just as in the case of the normal youngsters, in the case of children of the streets the descriptions of Russia that were mentioned the most included "big" and "huge." In contrast to the students, almost one out of every three problem youngsters offered the characterization "big" in conjunction with the epithets "beautiful and good," whereas the might of "big Russia" was mentioned in only one out of every five answers. Only four respondents called their country rich.

To illustrate more graphically the ways in which the positive image of Russia, in the eyes of the Moscow students, differs from the perception of it by the children of the streets, for each item the



**Figure 2. Positive Image of Russia**

answers given by problem youngsters were subtracted from the answers given by students (see Table 3 and Figure 2).

### *A negative image of Russia*

The students whose perceptions included a negative image of Russia (only twenty-five characterizations) talked about “the unjust policies of the state, which does not care about children,” the state’s poor ecological policy, and corruption, because “everyone is on the take,” and also Russia’s undeveloped industry.

In the eyes of the children of the streets, the characterization “bad Russia” is a country that is “miserable, raving mad, good for nothing, messed up, and stupid,” in which “everything is as jumbled up as a garbage heap,” a country that is “disgraceful, because everyone here steals and robs,” “there is nothing positive in it,” and “no one obeys the rules” (forty-five mentions). Also among the negative characterizations were statements like “Russia is unjust” and “hateful.” “Russia will continue to be unjust and unfree as long as there are kids like us in it” (a girl age fifteen).

### *Russia’s future prospects*

The respondents’ answers to the open question “What is our country going to be like in ten to twelve years?” were systematized as fol-

Table 4

**Future Prospects of Russia** (% of respondents)

Future prospects	Moscow school students	Children of the streets
Optimistic	31	13
Pessimistic	20	6
Neutral	7	4
I find it difficult to answer	42	77

lows: optimistic, pessimistic, and neutral predictions of the future of Russia (see Table 4).

Giving a meaningful answer about Russia's future prospects was difficult not only for the children of the streets (77 percent) but also for the Moscow students (42 percent).

The percentage of the optimistic prospects offered by the students did not greatly exceed their pessimistic scenarios of the country's development (31 percent compared to 20 percent). In the near future the youngsters who were positively inclined would like to see Russia as a "flourishing" country with "new technologies," with a well-developed system of education and medical services (forty-three mentions). Also among the optimists were children who exhibit a definite postimperial syndrome, who dream of "a great power that the whole world will fear," which "will rise to first-place ranking for all indicators" and "will set an example to the other countries" (eighteen mentions).

In the opinion of the children of the streets, to a large extent any optimistic scenario of the country's development will have to depend on people themselves: "if people will just try, everything will be all right," "there will be more new construction projects," and "there will not be a third world war" (nineteen statements).

Very often the students who described the present situation in the country in the most glowing terms predicted that it will inevitably perish: "Russia is a powerful country, but in twelve years it will be in ruins" a boy age sixteen). "Russia is a vast, great country. In ten years it will be polluted and little, and will have been taken over

Table 5

**The “Main” Enemies of Russia** (% of respondents,  $N = 150$  for each group)

I	II	III	IV
Enemy	Moscow school students	Children of the streets	II–III
United States	48	23	25
Georgia	19	19	0
Churki	3	13	–10
Fascists	0	10	–10
No enemies	23	12	11

by other countries” (a girl age thirteen). “Our country is great and rich and has wonderful landscapes. But before long it will turn into a big garbage dump!” (a boy age thirteen).

Among the pessimistic predictions given by the Moscow students and the children of the streets we can single out three scenarios of the course of events. According to the first scenario, mentioned the most often, the country will still exist in ten to twelve years, but will become “dirty and ugly,” “it will fall into a decline and become poor,” because “there will be a crisis, a collapse, and complete destruction,” as a result of which “Russia will lose its status as a great and mighty power” and turn into “a big garbage dump.” The second scenario foresees “the country’s collapse” because of being “taken over by other countries.” The third scenario, an apocalyptic one, envisions “the end of the world” and “a catastrophe” as the result of a third world war or an atomic blast.

### The enemies of Russia

In order to find out how the respondents rate Russia’s position in the world, they were asked this question: “Does Russia have enemies?” The most frequent answers are presented in Table 5.

Almost half of the students (48 percent) said that the main adversary of Russia is the United States, which “acts in an underhanded way,” “goes nuts,” and “incites everyone against us.” In such a

situation, “it is time for us to knock them off their pedestal in the world, or at any rate we need to stop being so dependent on them,” for example by “outlawing the English language.” The normal adolescents also suggested “blowing up the White House with an atomic missile” or “wiping America off the face of the earth.”

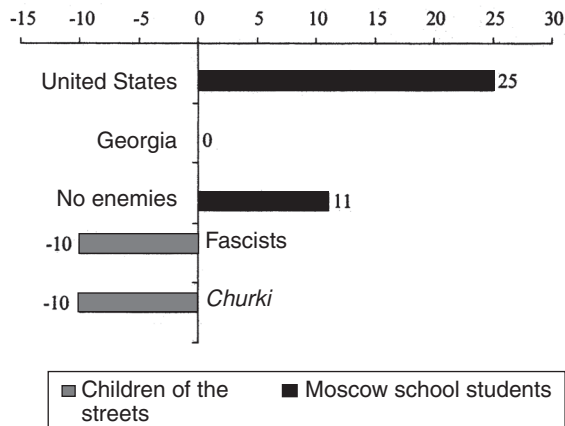
The students also named Georgia as one of Russia’s enemies (19 percent), calling that country a “sidekick” of the Americans and “we exposed them” as such. “In the Georgian–Ossetian conflict Russia revealed to the Western world the real state of affairs in Georgia, which is to say, the lack of democracy there, which was carefully concealed by the United States” (a boy age seventeen).

The United States is also viewed as the chief enemy of Russia by the children of the streets (23 percent). However, they make this assertion much less often. The Moscow students talked about the threat posed by the United States in half the cases; the children of the streets, on the other hand, did so in only one-fifth of the cases. They also named Georgia as an enemy of Russia (19 percent): “our enemies are Americans and Georgians: we watched the news in the shelter.”

In the words of the participants, in addition to the United States and Georgia another enemy of Russia is represented by the *Churki* [an ethnic slur referring mostly to people of swarthy complexion]. This opinion is shared by 13 percent of the children of the streets and 3 percent of the students.

What the children of the streets mean by *Churki* are people who are not ethnic Russians, such as Azerbaijanis, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Chechens, and so on, with whom they clash in the markets, train station, and subway system, competing for “zones of influence”: “the *Churki* who live here are destroying us, it won’t be long before we will be working for them.” The respondents came up with nationalistic proposals such as: “divide Moscow into neighborhoods for the wealthy, the poor, and the *Churki*,” “kick out all of the *khachiki* [roughly equivalent to “slant-eyes”] except for the Ossetians and Tatars,” “send all of the non-Russians to Tajikistan,” and “fight the Azerbaijanis.”

Among the Moscow students we also found nationalistic statements targeting immigrants: “take half of the foreigners out of



**Figure 3. Enemies of Russia**

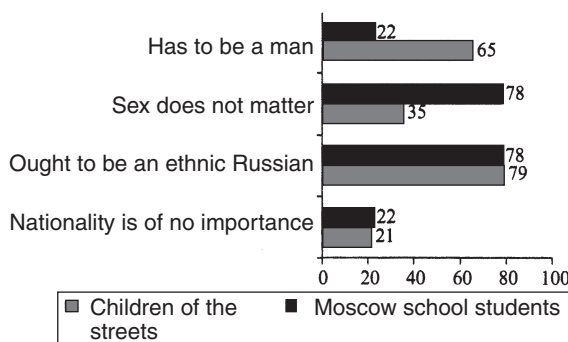
our country so that ethnic Russians can develop our business” and “exercise stronger control over migrants.”

Fascists constitute one specific enemy, in the eyes of children of the streets (10 percent); they were not mentioned by any normal youngsters. “Our enemies are the fascists that we fought against.” Apparently, the notions that the youngsters have about this enemy are based on scattered fragments of things learned in school.

To demonstrate more graphically how the enemies of Russia, as perceived by the Moscow students, differ from the country’s adversaries in the eyes of the children of the streets, we subtracted the answers given by the problem youngsters from the answers given by the students for each item (see Table 5 and Figure 3).

### **The image of the “ideal” president**

For the purpose of determining the image of the “ideal” president, the respondents were presented with the following questions: “What nationality, sex, and age should the president be? What kind of character should the country’s president have (kindly, tough, or other quality)? What should the president look like? If you were the president of Russia, what would be the first thing that you would do? What would you spend the state’s money on? Whom would you



**Figure 4. Sex and Nationality of the “Ideal” President** (as % of the number of meaningful statements in the corresponding group)

help? Whom would you punish?” Among the *students*, 22 percent answered “I do not want to be president.”

### *Sex, age, and nationality*

In the opinion of a majority of the students (78 percent), the sex of the “ideal” president is of no importance (for more detail see Figure 4).

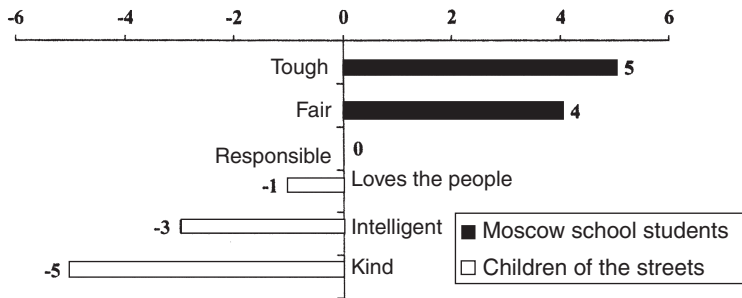
In contrast to the views of the normal adolescents, the views of the *children of the streets* in regard to the sex of the head of the state are more patriarchal: 65 percent say that the president definitely has to be a man: “A woman should not be a president because she is a housewife.” When it comes to the age and nationality of the “ideal” president, the participants of both groups in the survey agreed unanimously that the president ought to be thirty to fifty years old, and that he most definitely ought to be an ethnic Russian, because “only an ethnic Russian can understand the Russian land.”

### *Character traits*

The most frequently occurring character traits of the “ideal” president in both groups surveyed were toughness, fairness, responsibility, love for the people, intelligence, and kindness. Figure 5 shows the “ideal” president’s distinguishing characteristics as seen by Moscow students and children of the streets (also see Table 6).

The Moscow students’ “ideal” president is similar to the “ideal”





**Figure 5. Image of the “Ideal” President**

Table 6

**Character Traits of the “Ideal” President** (% of meaningful answers in the corresponding group)

I	II	III	IV
Character traits	Moscow school students	Children of the streets	II–III
Toughness	29	24	5
Fairness	14	10	4
Responsibility	7	7	0
Love for the people	11	12	–1
Intelligence	10	13	–3
Kindness	29	34	–5

leader of the state as seen by the children of the streets in just about all basic characteristics. Distinguishing traits of the “ideal” president, as perceived by the normal youngsters, included a slight preponderance of toughness and fairness, whereas to the children of the streets kindness and intelligence are a bit more predominant.

In the words of the students, the political leader “must, without question, be a humanist with a character that is fairly tough” (a girl age sixteen). Quite frequently in the characterizations of the “ideal” president, characterizations of “tough” and “kind” occurred in combination. “What we need is a president with a moderate character: moderately tough and moderately kind” (a girl age sixteen). The students explained that the head of the state “ought to be good to

the people” and “strict in dealing with members of the government,” and should “have connections.”

The children of the streets would like to see an “ideal” president who is “simultaneously tough and kind,” but they more frequently noted of the president’s kindness and generosity: “He should not be stingy with money.”

### *Appearance*

In the opinion of a certain percentage of the Moscow students, the appearance of the president does not play any special role (twenty-five mentions): “The most important thing is he should not have an ugly face, so as not to spoil the mood at New Year’s” (a boy age fifteen). Other youngsters said that the president’s looks ought to be “befitting to the country’s status”: “representative,” “presentable,” and “stalwart,” able to “say what he thinks and not just read from notes, to keep his word to the people” (a girl age fifteen).

A number of the students associated the “ideal” president with V.V. Putin (six mentions), who has a “political frame of mind” and who is “smart, confident, and reserved, does not smoke, hardly uses strong liquor at all, and devotes a lot of time to sports” (a girl age sixteen) and who, in effect, “is still running our country right now.” “Even when he was a child, Vladimir Vladimirovich was distinguished by his conscientiousness, restraint, and purposefulness. And by the age of forty-seven, he had not lost these qualities, but had multiplied them by hundreds of times. His competence has never been doubted either by his colleagues or by the citizens of the Russian Federation” (a girl age seventeen). The school students did not associate D.A. Medvedev, who is the president of Russia, with the image of the ideal president.

In the words of the children of the streets, the leader of the state ought to be “nicely dressed,” “wear a suit with a tie,” “look presentable and solid,” “cultured,” and “neat and tidy.” The respondents’ opinions as to which one, V.V. Putin or D.A. Medvedev, is the most consistent with the image of the “ideal” president, were not in agreement among the problem youngsters. Some (like the students) associated the “ideal” head of state exclusively with

V.V. Putin, who is “tough” and “kind” (ten mentions), to whom they have become “accustomed” and whom they “like more because of his kind of policies.” The ones in favor of Putin had critical things to say against the present president of Russia (seven mentions): “when Medvedev came in, war started” (a boy age seventeen), “if we can believe the adults and the news, it looks like Medvedev was chosen by Putin, and so Medvedev is a nobody” (a boy age seventeen).

The problem youngsters who expressed support for Medvedev (nine mentions) said that “Medvedev is smarter than Putin” and works harder: “Medvedev has dark circles under his eyes, which means that probably Putin gets more sleep” (a girl age fourteen). Among the children of the streets, however, negative statements against Putin are expressed much less often.

### *Policies*

The Moscow students’ ideas about the directions of the policies of the “ideal” president touched on many different aspects, but they dealt in more detail with the social sphere. If the participants ever found themselves in the position of president, what they would do first would be to provide social support for the needy and unprotected strata of society. In their opinion, those who are most in need of assistance are retired people, military veterans, and the handicapped (thirty-nine mentions); the destitute, poor, and homeless (thirty-six mentions); children in families with many children, and orphans (twenty-five mentions). Regarding social policy, it is essential to “solve the housing problem,” to invest in the development of health care and education, in the construction of kindergartens, schools, and hospitals. The students also expressed the opinion that it is the “middle class” that has an interest in “development” and higher wages and salaries (nineteen respondents): “I would strengthen health care in the country, I would raise the pay of doctors and personnel working in the Ministry for Emergency Management” (a girl age fourteen); “I would increase the salaries paid to state personnel by 10 percent” (a boy age sixteen).

The next strategic area of activity on the part of the “ideal”

president would be to “transform the state” (forty-five mentions). In the youngsters’ opinion, in order to “improve the well-being of the country” the head of the state ought to “spend money to develop the most important sectors of industry” and “build good roads.”

The students also talked about the need to “pay more attention to the ecology” (eight mentions): “I would spend the state’s money on the development of new, ecologically clean cars” (a boy age fourteen).

In international policy, in the opinion of the students, it is necessary to “solve world problems,” “establish relations with other countries,” and “reinforce our borders” (seven mentions).

The youngsters also mentioned the need for “modernization” and “strengthening of the armed forces” (seven mentions): “I would increase our military might by several times” (a girl age fourteen).

If they ever had to take punitive measures, the students would punish criminals (forty-nine mentions). Efforts to combat corruption, as they see it, must include meting out punishment to [crooked] “traffic cops,” “werewolves wearing shoulder straps” [i.e., crooked military officers], “embezzlers of state property,” and “bribe takers” (nineteen mentions).

To the children of the streets, top-priority areas of activity of an “ideal” leader should be providing social support for the unprotected strata of the population. For example, the head of the state could “travel around the country and write articles about the problems of children and the homeless” (a boy age fourteen). Most thought the president must be responsible first and foremost for the homeless, the poor, the destitute, and the needy (forty-one mentions). In second place were children in families with many children and troubled families, residents of orphanages, and children living in shelters (thirty-six mentions). The youngsters said that “if all of the homeless were gathered together and a home were built for them, then they would certainly be able to make something of themselves” (a boy age fourteen). To solve the problems of the needy it would be possible to “open a bank that would provide money for orphans” (a boy age sixteen). Eighteen respondents said that the president ought to help “all of the people of Russia.”

The children of the streets did not say anything about other areas of the president's activity.

In response to the question "If you were the president, whom would you punish?" the most frequent answer was "maniacs, murderers, gangsters, rapists, and thieves" (fifty-six mentions). It is interesting that, since they are little thieves themselves, the children of the streets do not identify themselves with that category, which is why they speak so calmly about the need to take punitive measures. Also deserving of punishment are narcotics abusers and alcoholics (nine mentions), whom the youngsters sometimes associate with their parents.

\* \* \*

The survey results permit us to say that the value orientations of the two groups of adolescents being surveyed, their ideas about today's Russia, the country's future and its enemies, and also about the president of the country and his policies, are in many parameters similar in quantitative indicators but different in content.

We will now attempt to generalize the social aspirations of the "typical" normal Moscow school student, and reconstruct his political consciousness.

*The normal Moscow student*, who attends a lyceum or gymnasium, feels quite comfortable under present-day conditions and exhibits a high degree of social adaptiveness. He has practically no romantic dreams and notions about life and maps out the future in a pragmatic way. First, acquire an education in a prestigious college or university, then find a job that provides a steady income and will make it possible to travel, acquire a place to live, and support a family. For such a youngster it is important to live up to the common perceptions of what a normal successful person is. Thus as a rule he strives to become the possessor of symbols by which, in today's consumer society, the social status of the individual is determined: a career, a car, an apartment, a house, and so on. In such a situation there is a devaluation of values such as knowledge, creative self-realization, love, friendship, and so

on, while total pragmatic calculation comes to the forefront.

By and large, the school student is happy with the “powerful” and “rich” country in which he lives, even though he finds it difficult to predict its near future. He believes that the country’s main enemy is the United States, which needs to be “put in its place.”

In the opinion of the “typical” school student, the president of Russia definitely has to be “an ethnic Russian” of middle age, a man or a woman. In appearance, such a president ought to be presentable and solid. The traits of character of the “ideal” head of the state seem more similar to the image of the “Father Tsar” rather than today’s political leader. The basic qualities named were toughness, kindness, and fairness, rather than education, competence, responsibility, and so on. For example, a president who is “tough and kind” has to be “strict in his dealings with members of the government but kind to the people.” Instead of setting basic policy directions and keeping control over the process, the head of the state is supposed to be a “jack of all trades,” someone who repairs roads and builds kindergartens; in effect, he should be a bureaucrat “on the street level,” in the terminology of Michael Lipsky.

The social aspirations and political consciousness of the “typical” youngster of the street differ somewhat. These children are forced to survive under the conditions of “natural selection.” They grow up earlier than their normal peers. Most survive by engaging in petty theft, begging, working at illegal odd jobs in markets, in gas stations, on construction projects, and so on. Some end up in prostitution. These youngsters are familiar with the seamy side of life and have seen and experienced a lot; all they dream about is having enough to eat and a roof over their heads. They need a job and a place to live not for the sake of self-assertion and to demonstrate their social status but, rather, to have a normal existence, because many do not have parents, their own little place to stay, or money to buy food.

In spite of the conditions in which they are forced to live, more than half of these respondents express positive feelings about their “big” and “beautiful” country. However, practically none of the problem adolescents consider Russia to be a rich country, because, in their opinion, a country that is well off would not include people like themselves. The fact that Russia has natural resources does

not mean that it is rich. Even more than the students, they found it difficult to describe Russia's future prospects.

In addition to the virtual enemies of Russia (the United States, Georgia, and the fascists), which they have found out about from adults or on the basis of fragments learned in school, they actually do have a real enemy: the *Churki*, which they encounter in their daily lives.

In the eyes of the problem youngster, the "ideal" president has to be an ethnic Russian man of middle age, whose character consists simultaneously of toughness and kindness. From such a leader the children of the streets expect social support not only for themselves but also for the homeless, for the adults who share their own misery.

The shaping of the political consciousness of the adolescents in the two groups takes place under different circumstances. The entities that serve as the main relayers of political information that influence the views of Moscow students are their parents, the mass media, and the educational institutions. The children of the streets have limited access to information, so that any knowledge of politics that they acquire is undirected and random. However, in spite of the differences in the trajectories of the political socialization of the survey participants, the representatives of both groups exhibited rather primitive notions about the sphere of politics.

Political psychologists think that during the Soviet period "it was primarily ideological clichés that prevented any appropriate reflection of politics in the consciousness of citizens" (Shestopal 2007, p. 265). The results of our survey have shown that today's adolescents have not progressed very far from *homo soveticus*, because Soviet ideologemes still continue to be reproduced vigorously in their consciousness. Without regard to their educational level, the youngsters (whether school students or children of the streets) have acquired practically no skills of critical analysis of political information via the mass media, in school, from their parents, or from other adults around them. Unfortunately, we have not detected any direct functional relation between youngsters' level of education (their intelligence) and their critical thinking in regard to politics.

V.S. Sobkin, toward the end of his 1997 study *The Upper-Grade*

*School Student in the World of Politics. An Empirical Survey* [Starshklassnik v mire politiki. Empiricheskoe issledovanie], wrote: what makes the situation of the present day so tragic . . . is the fact that today's schools, when it comes to their value precepts, are not oriented toward the upbringing of the kind of individual who is capable of living in a democratic civil society" (Sobkin 1997). Twelve years have gone by, and Sobkin's conclusion, sadly, is still relevant. As before, we must address the question of the quality of the main agents and institutions of political socialization and the low level of the institutionalization of the actual process of the upbringing of competent citizens.

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