Public Sentiment After the Protests
Why the Kremlin is Winning the Battle for the Average Russian

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Attitudes Toward Navalny

- Navalny pushes ordinary Russians out of their comfort zone. He irritates the sensibilities of average Russian citizens.
- Russia’s authoritarian regime benefits from mass conformism. That factor works against him.

Do you approve or disapprove of Alexey Navalny’s activities?

as % of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approve</th>
<th>Disapprove</th>
<th>I have not heard of him/ do not know him</th>
<th>It is difficult to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May ’13</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep ’20</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan ’21</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Intricacies of Protest Sentiment

- Street protests, including those inspired by Navalny’s arrest and mistreatment, don’t trigger much popular support.
- That’s because people know they’re expected to conform. Anyone who doesn’t display unity needs to be marginalized. Following the January 2021 wave of protests, such actions are now being criminalized as well.
- Average Russians display more sympathy toward protests that don’t have a leader or clear labels. That also hurts Navalny.

What is your attitude towards people who attend the protest?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>August 2019 (Moscow)</th>
<th>August 2020 (Khabarovsk)</th>
<th>January 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rather positive</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral, indifferent</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rather negative</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is difficult to say</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Modest Slide in Putin’s Approval Rating

• Two big drivers have hit Putin’s approval rating more than anything else: raising the retirement age in summer 2018 and the pandemic.
• Russians’ attitudes toward government are more heavily shaped by their psychological/emotional outlook than more abstract ideas.

• Critical Junctures for Putin’s Approval Rating
  • Before/after raising the retirement age
    • April 2018 – 82%
    • July 2018 – 67%
  • Before/after onset of pandemic
    • January 2020 – 68%
    • April 2020 – 59%
  • Most recent rating
    • March 2021 – 63%
Growing Dependence on the State

• Tougher socioeconomic conditions make people more reliant on state support. That promotes loyalty. The increased focus on day-to-day survival also bolsters traditional conservative values.

• The structure of Russians’ incomes is also changing. The proportion derived from entrepreneurial activity is now 5.2% (vs. 15.4% in 2000) while the proportion derived from social payments is now 20.1% (vs. 13.8% in 2000).

• Dependence on the state social payments is higher now than it was during the Soviet period (16.3% in 1985).
How Big is Russia’s Generation Gap?

• A good litmus test for Russians’ political outlook is their view of Putin’s future, given that he is now the regime’s main symbol.
• Half of respondents (48%) in a February 2021 survey say they would like to see Putin stay on as president after his current term expires in 2024.
• But the results among those aged 18–24 and those aged 55 and over are almost exactly inverse.

Would you like to see Vladimir Putin as President of Russia after his current term expires, after 2024?

as %% at every age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Would like to see</th>
<th>Would not like to see</th>
<th>It is difficult to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24 y.o.</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-39 y.o.</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-54 y.o.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 y.o. and older</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In the 18-24 age group, 38% of respondents have a favorable view of the opposition protests held in January.
The Battle for the Next Generation

• Putin’s battle for the next generation is continuing.

• Which will prevail?
  - The romanticism of patriotic games and the attractiveness of state support/attention?
    *OR*
  - The allure of street protests and modern values?

• It is a battle between modernization and archaization.

• Some attributes of “modern” behavior in the younger generation may be visible. But they are not always accompanied by the crystallization of modern values, including human rights and individual freedoms.