

**Centre for
Economic
and Financial
Research
at
New Economic
School**



December 2008

Russian Attitudes Toward the West

Sergei Guriev
Maxim Trudolyubov
Aleh Tsyvinski

Working Paper No 135

CEFIR / NES Working Paper series

Russian Attitudes Toward the West¹

Sergei Guriev,² Maxim Trudolyubov³ and Aleh Tsyvinski⁴

December 6, 2008

Are Russians Moving Backwards?

In the late 1980s, the vast majority of Russians supported pro-Western economic and political transformation. Although transition to market and democracy has eventually delivered economic benefits, most Russians are now skeptical about Western economic and political values. In this article we use polls and microeconomic data to understand what determines Russians' attitudes to the US, the West, private property, market, democracy, etc. The negative attitudes to the Western values are strikingly uniform across economic and social strata – and across time. The negative sentiment towards the West has increased over the last four years, but the change is not substantial. While the oldest and the youngest Russians are more anti-Western than those in their 30s and 40s, all age cohorts are quite negative. On a more positive note, while most Russians do dislike the West, many of them do practice Western pragmatism in their everyday economic lives.

Introduction

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has undergone an unprecedented political, economic and social transformation. The original goal was a transition to a Western-style democracy and market economy. Given the enormous challenges, it is not surprising that the transformation has not proceeded according to the initial plan. While Russia's democracy and market economy are imperfect, modern Russia is certainly more democratic and more capitalist than the Soviet Union. What is unexpected is not the slow pace of progress but the change of the destination. Both Russian policymakers and the majority of the population no longer view the Western model as the goal of transition. These attitudes are important as they move Russia away from rather than toward the Western model.

Why and to what extent Russians are really negative to the West as a partner and as a model for the Russian society? We summarize the results from regular opinion polls and recent

¹ This paper is the Chapter 7 in the "Russia Balance Sheet" book edited by Anders Aslund and Andrew Kuchins. We are grateful to Anders Aslund and Andrew Kuchins for their insightful comments and editing, and to Alexander Oslon and the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) for the unique poll data.

² New Economic School, Moscow. sguriev@nes.ru

³ Vedomosti

⁴ Yale University and New Economic School.

large-scale datasets on values, attitudes and perceptions.⁵ To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first one to carry out microeconomic analysis of these data. Thanks to these large scale surveys we are able to go beyond analysis based on regular opinion polls (surveying 1,000-2,000 Russians) and investigate how attitudes to the West depend on age, income, family and social status, etc. Our findings are as follows.

First, the attitude towards the West is almost uniformly negative across all economic and social strata of Russian society. There are some differences between rich and poor, young, middle age or old but these differences are not important compared to the magnitude of the negative sentiment. The negative attitudes to the West are accompanied by the negative attitudes to the Western social model, to democracy and to the markets. These attitudes are substantially more negative than in any other surveyed transition country.

Second, there is no reason to believe that this negative sentiment will fade away as time goes by. The idea that Russians will automatically come closer to the Western values as Russia grows richer and experiences generational change does not seem to be consistent with the data. Young Russians dislike the West more than middle-age Russians. Even though every year of economic growth has brought more prosperity to Russia, Russians' perceptions are only further departing from the Western ones over time. Although private enterprise delivers productivity growth and higher wages, public approval of markets is sinking not rising.

Third, Russians dislike the Western socioeconomic model and the US in particular, but they seem to rely on Western economic values in their everyday life. Surveys show that Russians are “uber-capitalists” in their daily life and place significant value on wealth, power, and achievement – they are, in fact, more “capitalist” than most other European nations.

These three findings seem hard to reconcile. Why are the younger Russians' values more similar to their grandparents' than their parents'? How can the negative attitude to Western society co-exist with the everyday Western pragmatism? In the concluding remarks we speculate about a few possible explanations.

Why Beliefs Matter

The first comprehensive study of beliefs of Russians and whether they are similar or different from those in the West was conducted by Robert Shiller, Maxim Boycko, and Vladimir Korobov.⁶ They conducted telephone interviews in Moscow and New York, posing questions about attitudes to the markets, inequality, and wealth. This survey was followed by another

⁵ One is the “Life in Transition Survey” carried out by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank in the Fall 2006. It covered issues related to various objective and subjective measures of life of about 10,000 Russians, and 1,000 respondents in each of the other 28 transition countries. Another dataset, “GeoRating,” comes from the leading Russian pollster Public Opinion Foundation (Russian abbreviation FOM). It includes quarterly surveys of 34,000 Russians in 68 Russian regions on various aspects of their life and their political, economic and social views from 2003 through 2008. We also rely on multi-country opinion polls such as the Pew Global Attitudes Survey and the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS – somewhat similar to the World Values Survey – has been administered biannually in 30 countries since 2002 and in 2006 included Russia for the first time.

⁶ Shiller, Robert J., Boycko, Maxim, and Korobov, Vladimir. 1991. Popular Attitudes Toward Free Markets: The Soviet Union and the United States Compared. *American Economic Review* 81, no. 3: 385-400.

round extended to regional Russian and Ukrainian cities.⁷ They concluded that Russians were surprisingly similar to Americans in their attitude to most of these issues. Overall, the authors argued that *homo sovieticus* did not exist, or was at least not broadly different from the Westerner. A potential explanation for such attitudes was that Russians were in the period of a honeymoon with the idea of the market economy. The interviews were conducted in the early 1990s when an average Russian was disillusioned with the state-run economy and had not yet seen the functioning of the market.

Contrary to widespread beliefs, the reformers of the Russian economy in the 1990s understood the challenge of large-scale institutional transformation and knew that such a comprehensive reform could not be undertaken in one top-down effort and that the grassroots support is needed. The initial Yegor Gaidar plan was that reforms would be painful but as they bear fruit, Russians will appreciate the reforms' value and support further reform.⁸ It was necessary to establish a base for continued reform and completion of transition. That is why beliefs and perceptions are crucial – forming pro-reform attitudes at the interim stage is a necessary condition for further reform.

However, the painful reforms of 1990s caused Russians severe disillusionment with the market economy. Partially in response to such negative popular sentiment, Russian policymakers have then undertaken a significant policy reversal. In the early 2000s, democratization policies were first reversed. This can be seen in Russia's democracy and media freedom rankings which went down.⁹ A few years later, liberal economic policy was also reversed – starting with the nationalization of the Yukos oil company and a few other major companies, as well as the development of the state corporations and the expansion of government spending.

The reversal of pro-market and democratic policies coincided with a decade of spectacular economic growth (7 percent per annum on average). Moreover, contrary to the popular stereotype, this economic growth has not just benefited the lucky few but it has trickled down to everybody. All measures of economic well-being have improved – unemployment and poverty fell by half, and real wages tripled. Russians were buying cars, cell phones, and vacationing abroad at a level that could not be envisioned in the 1990s. An average Russian attained the level of prosperity higher than at any point in Russian history. Moreover, Russians themselves think that they are doing better. Figure 1 presents a proxy for the subjective well-being – an index of life satisfaction, measured across the same representative panel of Russians since 1994.¹⁰ This graph shows that people have become substantially happier than in the late 1990s.

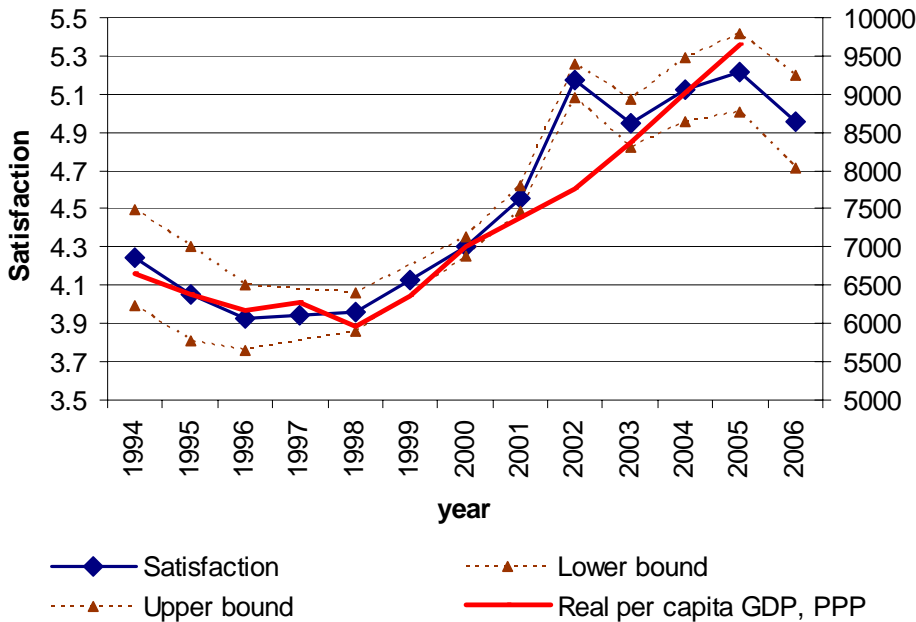
⁷ Shiller, Robert J., Boycko, Maxim, and Korobov, Vladimir. 1992. Hunting for Homo Sovieticus: Situational Versus Attitudinal Factors in Economic Behavior. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, no. 1: 127-181.

⁸ Yegor T. Gaidar. 1993. Inflationary Pressures and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union. In *Economic Transition in Eastern Europe*, ed. P. H. Admiraal. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁹ The Freedom House's Media Freedom Index for Russia changed by 12 points in just five years 2000-2005. This is a substantial change: the index is measured by a 100 points scale with the standard deviation across countries being only 25 points. Larger declines in media freedom in the same period were only observed in Venezuela and Iran. In Polity IV's datasets measures of democracy, Russia was ranked 61-69 (out of 150 countries) in 2000 and 69-78 (out of 152 countries) in 2005.

¹⁰ Guriev, Sergei M. and Zhuravskaya, Ekaterina V. 2009. *(Un)Happiness in Transition*. Journal of Economic Perspectives.

Figure 1. Dynamics of Life Satisfaction and per Capita GDP in Russia



Left scale: Life satisfaction for an average individual from the panel regressions with person fixed effects and other usual controls (with 95% confidence interval). In 1997 and 1999, there were no RLMS surveys, we use linear interpolation. Source: RLMS. Right scale: Real PPP-adjusted per capita GDP in 2000 US dollars in PPP terms. Source: WDI. (According to the PWT, in 2004, the PPP-adjusted GDP per capita in Russia reached \$11,794.)

There is little doubt that Russians are more prosperous and happier than in the 1990s. What effect does this new prosperity have on beliefs? The average Russian sees the reversal of liberal policies, and at the same time he/she sees improved material outcomes. It is not surprising that the support for such a reversal is great, as Russians associate market reforms with bad economic outcomes. Russia is not unique in this respect. French economists Augustan Landier and David Thesmar argue that the economic growth in France after World War II (probably caused by the rebuilding of the economy and a natural bouncing up from a very low starting point) coincided with greater government involvement in the economy.¹¹ These two events changed the beliefs of the French that government is beneficial to economic growth and, hence, should play a larger role in the economy.

Why do the Russians' attitudes to the Western model matter now? One reason is that these beliefs lead to a tradeoff between economic growth and democracy. At the current level of GDP per capita, sustained economic growth can only be achieved by relying on capitalist or free market values. Yet, as the Russian's attitudes show, democracy requires policies that are inconsistent with voters' preferences. A median voter in Russia does not want markets or a capitalist economic model. Therefore, a fully democratic Russia would vote for the reversal of

¹¹ Landier Augustin, Thesmar, David, . 2008. Le grand méchant marché, Décryptage d'un fantasme français. Flammarion. [In French]

many pro-market reforms. An alternative is to promote markets and private property but to be non-democratic.¹² In other words, Russians' beliefs and attitudes may become a constraint on the implementation of liberal economic reforms.

This constraint is even more important now as Russia has probably picked most of the low hanging fruit of the economic growth. The “catch up” phase of economic growth after the economic slump following the collapse of the Soviet Union is finished. The main market infrastructure such as a functioning financial market and a system of commercial banks has already been built. The benefits of the conservative macroeconomic policy, flat income tax reform, and administrative reform have already come into fruition. As Russia is growing richer, it is facing a new economic challenge: how to move to the innovation-based growth at the world's technology frontier. For such human capital intensive economic growth, political and personal freedoms are important, but then the values of Russians have to change.

Interestingly, the present government seems to understand this issue. Putin and Medvedev campaign speeches in February 2008 as well as *The Long-Run Strategy 2020* aim at building a prosperous and democratic society in 2020. While these speeches stress the value of freedom, they also acknowledge that the political liberalization is a prerequisite for “innovation economy”, and that without the “innovation economy” the economic growth will inevitably slow down.

Attitudes toward the West

We now turn to the attitudes of Russians toward the West and the U.S., starting with the GeoRating dataset to see the broad pattern.

Negative Attitude to the US

The first issue is whether Russians consider the U.S. to be a friend of Russia. During the Cold War, the U.S. was the primary enemy of the Soviet Union and the main object of the state propaganda. One could imagine that the perceptions would have changed since the Soviet time. There has been an inflow of all kinds of American things. McDonalds, Hollywood movies, and Hummers are everywhere in Moscow and in many regional cities. Yet, the official rhetoric often portrays NATO and the U.S. as unfriendly, and even uses the old Soviet-like propaganda of “militarism and imperialism”.

In Table 1, we present the answers to the question “*Is the U.S. a friendly country?*” for the GeoRating 2003 poll.

¹² This distinction can be illustrated by the divide between the two major pro-Western parties – the now disbanded Union of Right-wing Forces (SPS) and Yabloko. While the former emphasized private property and economic reform even at the cost of political centralization, the latter focused on defending democratic values even at the cost of reversing privatization.

Table 1. “Is the U.S. a friendly country?” Percent who answered:

“Is the U.S. a friendly country?” (August 2003)

Certainly no	18.3
Rather no	30.8
Rather yes	27.8
Certainly yes	3.6
Difficult to say	19.4

Source: GeoRating, Public Opinion Foundation (FOM).

The attitudes of the Russians towards the U.S. are quite negative. Of those who provided a definite answer, on average 40 percent of the respondents like the U.S, while 60 percent do not.¹³

Such a negative attitude is not unique to Russia: Russians are not more negative than average Europeans. Unfortunately, mid-2003 was the only time when GeoRating posed this question, when responses might have been affected by the war in Iraq. At that time, the United States was unpopular in many countries including its long-term allies. For example, Pew Global Attitudes survey of about five thousand residents of nine European countries in March 2003 showed that Russians’ attitude to the US was at the level of those of Germans and French and much more positive than that of the Spanish and the Turkish population. In a similar survey of 44 countries carried out in April 2002, Pew Global Survey showed that the world on average – and Russians in particular – had a much more positive opinion of the United States prior to the war in Iraq. While the Pew’s sample in Russia is only 1002 respondents in 2002, more than 50 percent of the Russians held a very or somewhat favorable view of the United States and of the Americans. On the contrary, in the 2007 survey of 47 countries, Pew Global Survey found that the United States is quite unpopular, and again, Russians are more positive on the United States than most West European countries, and even most East European countries.

We further explore whether there are differences in the attitudes towards the United States across various parts of Russian society. One of the most important dimensions to consider is the age of a respondent. One could think that the older Russians would dislike the U.S. more than the middle-aged, and certainly more than the “McDonalds and Nintendo” generation of the young Russians. The older generations grew up in the Soviet Union with its anti-West propaganda in the school and in the press. The younger Russians grow with many things American and, one could have conjectured, would be more positive about the United States. If

¹³ Ideally, we would have liked to see answers to the question “Is the West friendly towards Russia” as opposed only to the attitude towards the U.S. Unfortunately, our dataset does not have such data. The dataset has a question “Name three countries that are most sympathetic to you” and lists 11 Western countries. However, the coding of the data that we have contains inconsistencies that preclude us from including the results.

this were the case, one would expect a change to a friendlier attitude over time as the younger generation takes over.

The results are not consistent with the view. The older generation does believe that the United States is not friendly to Russia. But young Russians also perceive the United States as less friendly than Russians in their 30s and 40s. This result holds even controlling for the most common socio-economic characteristics: gender, income, location (city, town, or village), and education. The resulting pattern is presented in Figure 2. The horizontal axis of the graph is the age of the respondent. The vertical axis is the average numerical value of the response as follows: “certainly friendly” being 1, “rather friendly” being 0.67, “rather unfriendly” 0.33, and “certainly unfriendly” 0.

Figure 2. “Is the US a friendly country” across age cohorts.



The graph shows an average answer (technically speaking, a non-parametric smoother) to the question “Are the US friendly to Russia?” controlling for respondents’ individual characteristics including income, education, gender, self-assessed social status, location type etc. The dependent variable is coded 1 “certainly friendly”, 0.67 “rather friendly”, 0.33 “rather unfriendly”, and 0 “certainly unfriendly”. Source: GeoRating Aug 2003.

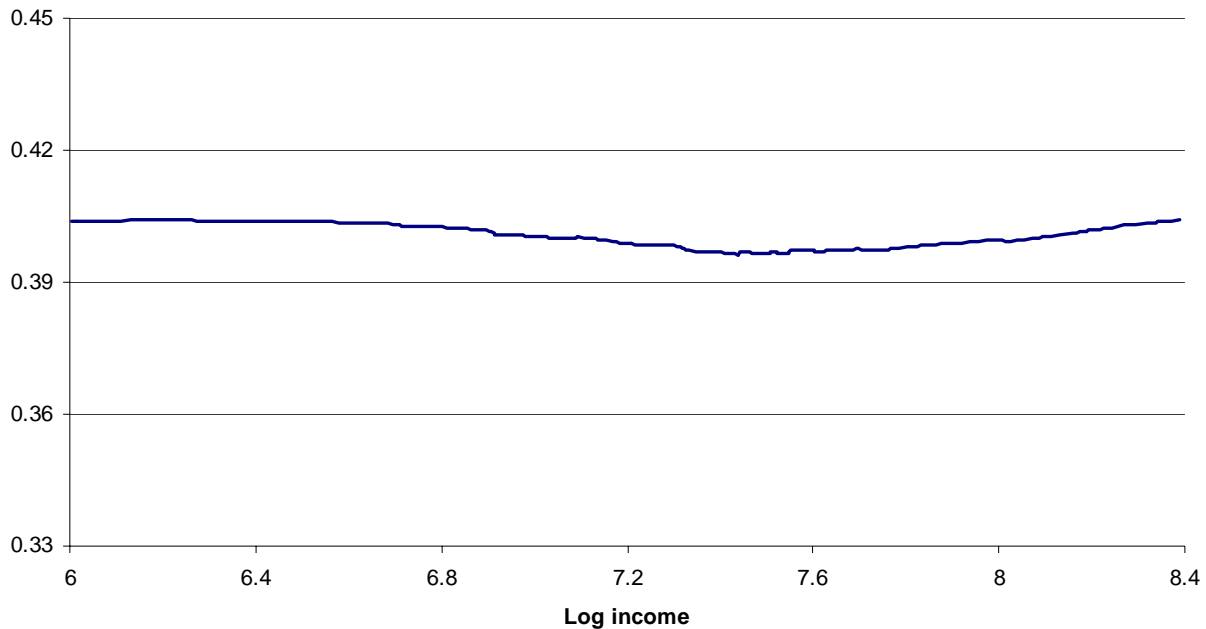
We find an inverted-U-shaped profile with regard to age. The youngest respondents (20-year old) dislike the United States to the same degree as the 60-year olds. The people who are most favorable towards the United States are the middle-aged (35-45 year old). As could be expected, the older respondents (60 and older) are negative towards the United States, but it is surprising that the young people dislike the United States so much. The difference between ages is not very large but the pattern is certainly not random. A similar age pattern is found in other measures of anti-Western sentiment from GeoRating as well as in the Life in Transition

Survey,¹⁴ where young Russians seem more negative about transition than middle-aged Russians.

We can only speculate why young Russians are less positive about transition and the United States than their parents. A possible explanation is that they have not witnessed the shortcomings of the Soviet system but have been influenced by the recent years' official propaganda. They may have also learned about Soviet system and the West from their grandparents who dislike the United States and the markets more than the middle-aged Russians.

Other socio-economic characteristics do not have substantial effect on the attitude to the United States – the negative attitude is virtually uniform across Russian society. The income of respondent, for example, is presented in Figure 3 below. If anything, the better-off and educated Russians perceive the United States to be less friendly toward Russia. Only the upper class is slightly more positive about the United States but the difference is very small.

Figure 3. “Is the US a friendly country?” Answers by income.



The graph shows an average answer (a non-parametric smoother) to the question “Are the US friendly to Russia?” controlling for respondents’ individual characteristics. The dependent variable is coded 1 “certainly friendly”, 0.67 “rather friendly”, 0.33 “rather unfriendly”, and 0 “certainly unfriendly”. Source: GeoRating Aug 2003.

¹⁴ Denisova, I., Eller, M., Zhuravskaya, E. 2007. *What Russians Think about Transition: Evidence from RLMS Survey*. CE FIR/NES Working Papers no. 114. Moscow: Centre for Economic and Financial Research.

The Negative Attitude to the Western Model of Society

Given that the negative attitude to the United States may be driven by the US foreign policy (at least this would explain the low popularity of the United States among its Western allies), we now turn to analyze whether Russians think that the West is a good socioeconomic example for Russia. The difference from the question above is that, while Russians may think that the West is “against them”, they may still think that the Russian society has to be built along the same principles as the Western one.

We present the answers to the question “*Is the Western society a good model for Russia?*” for the polls conducted in the 1st quarter of 2004 and in the 1st quarter of 2008 in Table 2. These two polls also allow us to study the dynamics of the attitudes towards the West.

Table 2. “Is the Western society a good model for Russia?” Percent of Answers.

	<i>“Is the Western society a good model for Russia?” 2004Q1</i>	<i>“Is the Western society a good model for Russia?” 2008Q1</i>
Certainly no	27.1	30.2
Rather no	29.8	29.8
Rather yes	22.3	18.2
Certainly yes	7.3	7.2
Difficult to say	13.5	14.6

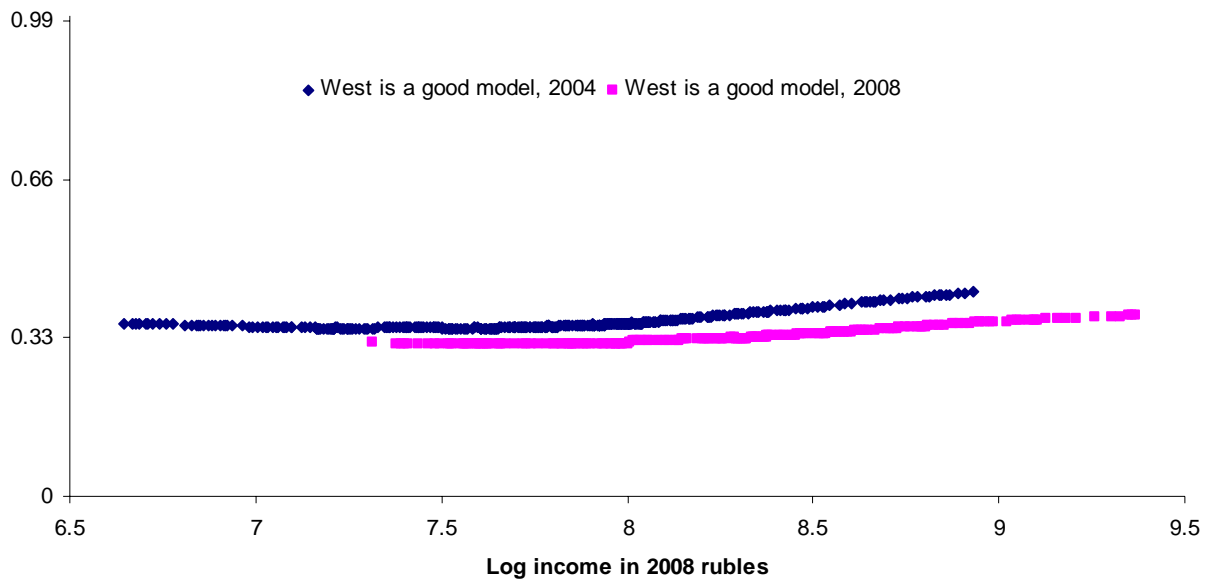
Source: GeoRating, 2004 and 2008.

The attitude to the Western model is quite negative. Only 25 percent is positive or somewhat positive. Among those who gave a definite answer, only 30-35 percent is positive or somewhat positive. The negative attitude toward the West increased from 2004 to 2008, although this increase is not significant.

Income makes little difference. Figure 4 plots the average attitudes by income (2004 income is adjusted for inflation). The horizontal axis is the logarithm of income in 2008 rubles.¹⁵ The vertical axis is the average of the attitudes to the Western society as a model for Russia. The upper line on the graph presents the results for 2004; the lower one is for 2008 (all in 2008 rubles). Note that the 2008 curve is shifted by about 0.5 to the right in logarithmic terms relative to the 2004 curve, representing the 13 percent annual growth in real incomes in 2004-8.

¹⁵ We excluded the top and bottom 5 percent of income distribution to facilitate comparison.

Figure 4. The attitude to the Western society as a model for Russia (by income).



Source: GeoRating 2004 and 2008, authors' calculations. The vertical axis scale: 1 "certainly yes", 0.67 "rather year", 0.33 "rather no", 0 "certainly no". The horizontal axis: logarithm of income in 2008 rubles, top and bottom 5% of distribution excluded.

We can now summarize the results:

1. ***Russians do not like the Western model of society.*** In both 2004 and 2008, Russians did not like the Western model. In both cases the average response for *all* income categories was close to 0.66. In other words, Russians think that Russia should "rather not be like the West."
2. ***The attitude toward the Western model of the society has worsened in the last four years.*** The line of responses in 2008 shifted downwards. Russians like the West less across all levels of incomes. This fact is also true for a given relative income.
3. ***Rich Russians like the Western model more than the poor but the difference is small.*** It is surprising how flat the line of the responses is. However, there is a slight improvement in the attitudes among the rich.

Yet, Western society is more just and fair

While Russians do not think Russia should imitate the West, they acknowledge that the Western model delivers good social outcomes and is fairer. The respondents were asked: "In your opinion, today, which society is more just and fair – Russian or Western?" The breakdown of responses (for the 3rd quarter of 2004) is presented in table 3.

Table 3. Perceptions of the fairness of the Western society.

“In your opinion, today, which society is more just and fair – Russian or Western?”
(Percent of responses)

Certainly Russian	6.8
Rather Russian	16.6
Rather Western	30.4
Certainly Western	17.0
Difficult to say	29.2

Source: GeoRating 2004.

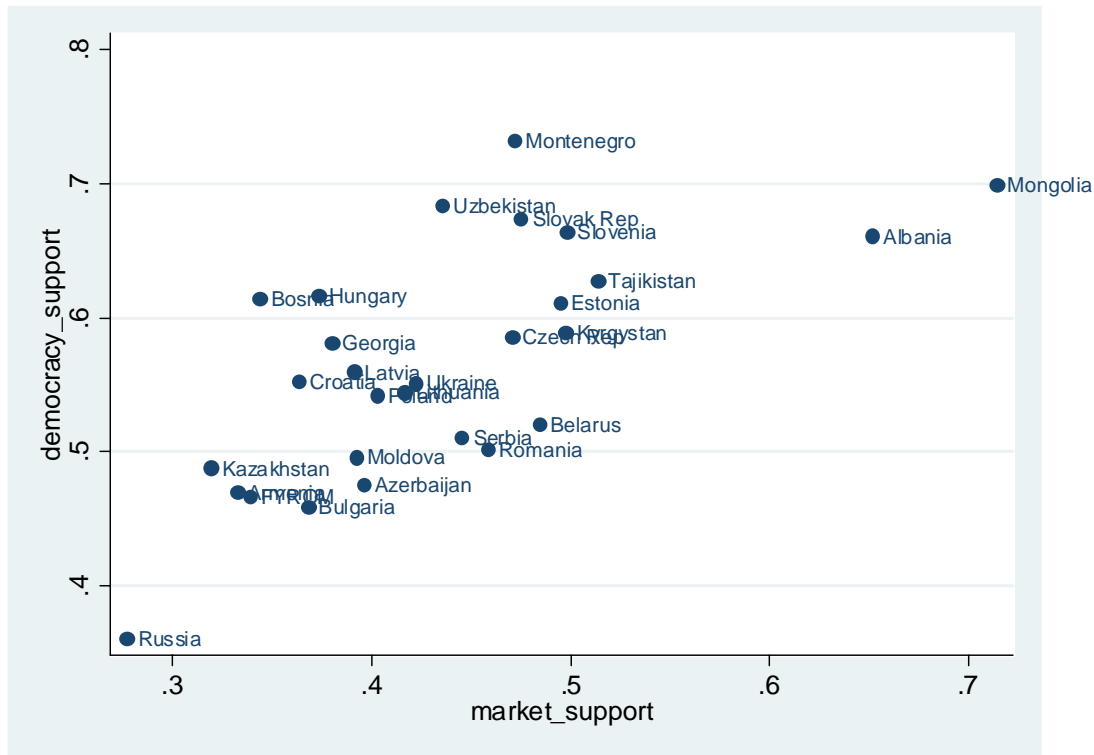
The responses are overwhelmingly positive toward the fairness of the Western society (47 percent positive) compared to only 23 percent favoring the Russian society, that is, twice as many Russians believe that the West is more fair and just than Russia. This pattern is true controlling for age, income and other characteristics.

Are Russians uniquely non-democratic?

Data from the Pew Global Attitudes Survey and the leading Russian pollster Levada Center as well as EBRD and the World Bank data address the Russians’ view of democracy. These polls usually include only 500-2000 respondents per country, but they allow international comparisons that help to benchmark Russians’ attitudes in comparison with other nations.

Figure 5 displays survey data on attitudes to market economy and democracy from the Life in Transition Survey conducted by the World Bank and the EBRD in 28 transition countries. These data show that Russia is an outlier with the least support for both market economy and democracy. Moreover, Russia fares significantly worse than the common straw man of Western criticism – Belarus. This pattern correlates with Russians’ rejection the West as a model for their society.

Figure 5. Support for market economy and for democracy across 28 transition countries.



Source: Life in Transition Survey, Fall 2006, EBRD.

Let us examine how the attitudes toward democracy have changed over time. In 1991 many Russians were ready to discard autocracy. When asked whether Russia should rely on a democratic form of government to solve the country's problems or on a leader with a strong hand, 39 percent chose a strong hand and 51 percent a democratic government, a purely abstract concept at the time.¹⁶

The picture was very different in 2005, the latest year for which comparable data are available. Confronted with the same choice, only 28 percent of the Russians favored a democracy while 66 percent preferred a strong leader.¹⁷ The growing incomes matter but are not crucial. Among Russians earning more than 8,000 rubles per month, 34 percent said democracy could solve the country's problems, compared with 27 percent of those making 4,000-8,000 rubles per month.

Perhaps the comparison itself was playing its role? When pressed to choose between a strong hand and a democracy people may pick a strong hand because democracy sounds like a “weak hand” or rather a hand that does not provide well. It is likely that the opposites ‘weakness’/‘strength’ has become associated with the opposites (relative) poverty/(relative)

¹⁶ Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press. 1991. *The Pulse of Europe. A Survey of Political and Social Values*. Washington: Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press.

¹⁷ Pew Research Center. 2006. *Pew Global Attitudes Project: 15 Nation Survey*. Washington: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

prosperity. When asked whether a good democracy or a strong economy were more important, Russians overwhelmingly chose a strong economy by an 81 -14 percent margin.¹⁸

The Levada Center has posed the same question in its regular polls. On the question: “Does Russia need a democracy?” 62 percent answered yes and only 20 percent said no in 2008.¹⁹ Answers to further questions clarify how Russians understand democracy. Of those polled 45 percent choose a democracy that is “special, suited to Russia’s uniqueness and national traditions”. Only 20 percent prefer a democracy that is just like in “the developed countries of Europe and America.” “The democracy that was in the Soviet Union” is chosen by 13 percent. The FOM poll data confirms – democracy (5 percent) and freedom (9 percent) are strongly at the bottom of the list of the words which are important to Russians.

Can we reconcile these facts? In 1991, the Russians were choosing between the known and unknown. They no longer wanted what they had, and they wanted something else instead (“democracy”). Today after being “fooled” by the “democracy” they again want something else, not a “Western-style democracy”, but a “specially suited democracy.” It is apparently important that this “special democracy” was accompanied by economic growth – unlike the “generic Western-style democracy of 1990s.”

Russians’ pragmatism

The previous section could give the impression that the Russians are very different from Westerners. A reader could even have flashbacks of the “Back in the USSR” rhetoric. We argue that in their economic behavior Russians are much closer to the Western “homo oeconomicus.” Once asked about common, everyday wisdom – rather than about general concepts like “the West”, “market”, “democracy” that may be alien and abstract to them – Russians respond very much like in the 1991 survey conducted by Maxim Boycko et al. and the data would predict.

For example, let us consider the FOM GeoRating survey. The respondents were asked in 2003: “Please name the words which are the most important to the people living in your region”. They were presented with 24 words of common human and economic values. Most important to Russians are safety (37 percent), peace (33 percent), material well-being (34 percent), followed by religion (27 percent), family (25 percent), and stability (25 percent). Terms like “patriotism” and “national power” lagged far behind – as well as “democracy” and “human rights”.

Recently, Russia became a participant in the large-scale European Social Survey (ESS) which allowed sociologists for the first time to compare current Russian values with those of other Europeans.²⁰ Respondents around Europe were given descriptions of a variety of people and for each of the descriptions the respondent had to answer how similar that person is to him/her (on a scale from 1 to 6). The ESS data describes a typical Russian as follows: “He/she wants to have a lot of money and expensive goods. It is important to him to be respected. He/she wants people to do what he/she wants. He/she wants to be successful.” In particular, the survey indicated: First, Russia (together with Romania) is ahead of 17 other European countries on the “power-wealth” index that asks how important it is to be rich, respected, and have power over

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Levada Analytical Center. 2008. *Russian Public Opinion 2007*. Moscow: Levada Center. Available at www.levada.ru/eng/index.html. Accessed on Sep 1, 2008.

²⁰ Magun, Vladimir, and Rudnev, Maxim 2008. “Zhiznennye Tsennosti Rossiiskogo Naselenia [Values of Russian Population].” *Vestnik Obshchestvennogo Mnenia*, 1, 34-59.

other people. Second, an important value for Russians is “achievement,” with Russia being ahead of 14 European countries. Yet, Russia lags behind the other countries on caring about the well-being of others, fidelity to friends, readiness to help (so called “caring about others” values) and respecting the opinion of others and caring about the environment (so called “universalism” values). Finally, the ESS data also show that Russians score high on risk-taking and openness to change. Overall, these data supports our argument that Russians are no longer “homo sovieticus”. If anything, they are even more “capitalist” in their day-to-day life than Europeans.

Concluding remarks

Multiple polls confirm that Russians are overwhelmingly negative towards the West, Western values and the Western socio-economic model. The data in this paper suggest that these attitudes are highly unlikely to change over time as Russia grows richer and the post-Soviet generation takes over. Richer Russians are only slightly more pro-Western than poorer ones, and the younger Russians are even less happy about the West and the Western model than the middle-aged Russians.

The fact that the better-off and the better-educated Russians have changed from liking the West (in late 1980s) to disliking it is not new for Russia. The waves of fascination and disillusionment with the Western ways have been following each other for centuries. Russia’s identity came into being when Russian czars started to see themselves as standard-bearers of the Orthodox world after the fall of Constantinople in the 15th century. The idea of Russia as a political and spiritual alternative to the West has been developing ever since. This messianic narrative could only be matched by an equally strong realization that Russia had to catch up with the West economically. An urgency to develop would prevail for a certain period but a messianic calling would time and again prove to be a deep-seated instinct.

Interestingly, both Slavophiles and Westernizers, the two major opposing schools of thought in 19th-century Russia, agreed on that. “In the West the soul is in decline... conscience is replaced by law, inner motives by regulations... The West has developed the rule of law because it felt a lack of truth in itself”, wrote Konstantin Aksakov, one of the leading Slavophiles. Leading Westernizer and dissident Alexander Herzen was looking for truth in the West but became disillusioned with democracy, calling it a “collective mediocrity”. This led him to believe that Russia should not repeat the West and follow its own way instead: “Should Russia follow all the stages of European development? No, I reject the need for repetition”. A messianic discourse of Russian national identity endured even as the Moscow Empire fell and a new state replaced it.²¹

The current wave of disillusionment with the West can potentially be explained by the coinciding policy reversals and the economic growth in the recent decade. In the last 10 years, Russia experienced both decline in personal and political freedoms and stellar economic growth. This may have convinced the Russian public that the Western-style democracy and market may function well in the West but are not suited for Russia. Russians do not seem to believe that Russia can build an effective democracy and developed markets. Whether the ongoing crisis will again bring the new tide of Westernization is yet to be seen.

²¹ Judith E. Kalb. 2008. *Russia’s Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890–1940*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.