

THE PUTIN EXODUS:

THE NEW RUSSIAN BRAIN DRAIN

John Herbst and Sergei Erofeev



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Foreword

The post-Cold War era has thus far been one of the most felicitous periods in human history. While the past thirty years have been tumultuous, there have been no wars between major powers. The absence of major war, coupled with the information revolution, has also led to great economic advances. During this period, a number of countries in Asia and Eastern Europe have transformed themselves into First World economies, and the economic rise of both China and India have lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty.

During this time, the astonishing economic transformation of the Baltic States, Poland, the Czech Republic, and other formerly communist countries raises important questions: Why not Russia? Why has Russia lagged behind? The key to economic progress in the information age is creativity or human capital. The Soviet Union had for years produced numerous Nobel Laureates in mathematics and science. Today, Russia harbors some of the world's top hackers. Why is this talent not producing new, cutting edge products and establishing world-competitive technology firms?

The Eurasia Center at the Atlantic Council has paid a great deal of attention to Kremlin foreign policy over the past five years because that policy is aggressive—conducting wars in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria—and poses a great and immediate threat to US interests; Washington and its allies must take steps to thwart Kremlin aggression. But the Center also has a deep interest in what is happening domestically in Russia, both for its own sake and as an influencer on Moscow's national security policy.

The questions of why Russia, thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, has not transformed its economy and why the Russian economy has suffered over a decade of stagnation are complex ones that we cannot address here. But we believe that one main factor has contributed to these failures: the outflow of creative talent.

The twenty-first century Russian “brain drain” is not an unknown topic. It has been discussed occasionally in scholarly journals, newspapers, and other media. But there has not been much study of the reasons why people leave Russia. This report is a small start to addressing this need.

With the expertise of my co-author Professor Sergei Erofeev, we designed a questionnaire for four hundred Russian emigres—one hundred each in Berlin, London, New York, and San Francisco. The survey asked about their background, reasons for leaving, general political outlook, and ongoing engagement with Russia. We then followed that by conducting a focus group in each city with seven or eight Russian participants.

The answers that our participants provided in the survey and in the focus groups provide some insight into why they left, their ongoing interaction with Russia, and their thoughts about a possible return if conditions in Russia change. These insights are useful in seeking to understand what is driving this emigration.

The results of our study are not authoritative. (To produce an authoritative study would have required a much larger budget—for a much larger survey—than the one at our disposal.) But our findings provide a good launching point for future work.

Ambassador (Ret.) John Herbst
Director, Eurasia Center
Atlantic Council

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Executive Summary

Human capital is fleeing Russia. Since President Vladimir Putin's ascent to the presidency, between 1.6 and 2 million Russians—out of a total population of 145 million—have left for Western democracies and some new destinations where they can be freer with their skills put to a better use. This emigration sped up with Putin's return as president in 2012, followed by a weakening economy and growing repressions. It soon began to look like a politically driven brain drain, causing increasing concern among Russian and international observers.

In this report, the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center offers a comprehensive analysis of what we are calling the Putin Exodus and its implications for Russia and the West. It is supported by a pioneering sociological study of new Russian émigrés now living in four key locations in the United States and Europe, through a 100-question survey and a series of focus groups.

After a detailed political background, an original summary of Russian emigration waves since the late nineteenth century, and a critical overview of the current media and analytical accounts of the exodus, the report focuses on the following:

- ◆ demographic, educational, and other parameters for the respondents;
- ◆ political, economic, and sociocultural emigration drivers;
- ◆ a description of the new émigrés' adaptation to life in the United States and Europe, as well as their political leanings and communications;
- ◆ differences among the émigrés in the four locations;
- ◆ their views of Putin's policies and international politics;
- ◆ differences between those who emigrated before and after 2012;
- ◆ an assessment of Russia's future;
- ◆ how the émigrés' cope with Putin's propaganda and politics of fear.

Our study has indicated that, unlike the preceding

waves, the new Russian emigration is based more on cultural and entrepreneurial motivations than on traditional economic or purely political ones. Its members are younger, better educated, and skilled in languages. They are more creative, dynamic, and globally aware. The new wave is more diverse culturally and in terms of occupation, more individualistic and self-reliant.

While reluctant to build traditional diasporic communities, the new émigrés maintain stronger bonds with Russia in this age of new communications and easier travel. Compared to those who left the country in the 1990s, they are notably more critical of the Kremlin's authoritarian policies: its greater control of the media, including the internet; growing restrictions on speech and political activity; corruption; neo-imperialism; and inflating fears of the West.

There are two particularly important findings. On the one hand, the new Russian émigrés living in different locations are very similar in the way they use their high cultural capital to adapt to new life and employment in a postindustrial society. At the same time, there is a distinct disparity between those who emigrated before 2012 and those who left later: among other things, the latter demonstrate a growing pro-Western and liberal orientation and greater politicization in general, including stronger support for the anti-Putin "non-systemic" opposition.

The Kremlin's politics represent a growing threat to transatlantic security. Today, this problem includes the issue of Russian emigration as well. Based on the threats and opportunities behind the Putin Exodus, the following policy recommendations are offered.

- ◆ Say "the Kremlin," not "Russians": Western political institutions and media should distinguish between Russia's leadership and the Russian people, including the diaspora.
- ◆ Bring the Exodus closer to the core of West-Russia relations as an indicator of the Kremlin's growing weakness.
- ◆ The West should embrace these new Russian immigrants, who are a valuable resource for advancing political democracy and liberal economy. Their voices should be amplified regarding their lives in the new countries as well as in terms of Western and Kremlin politics.

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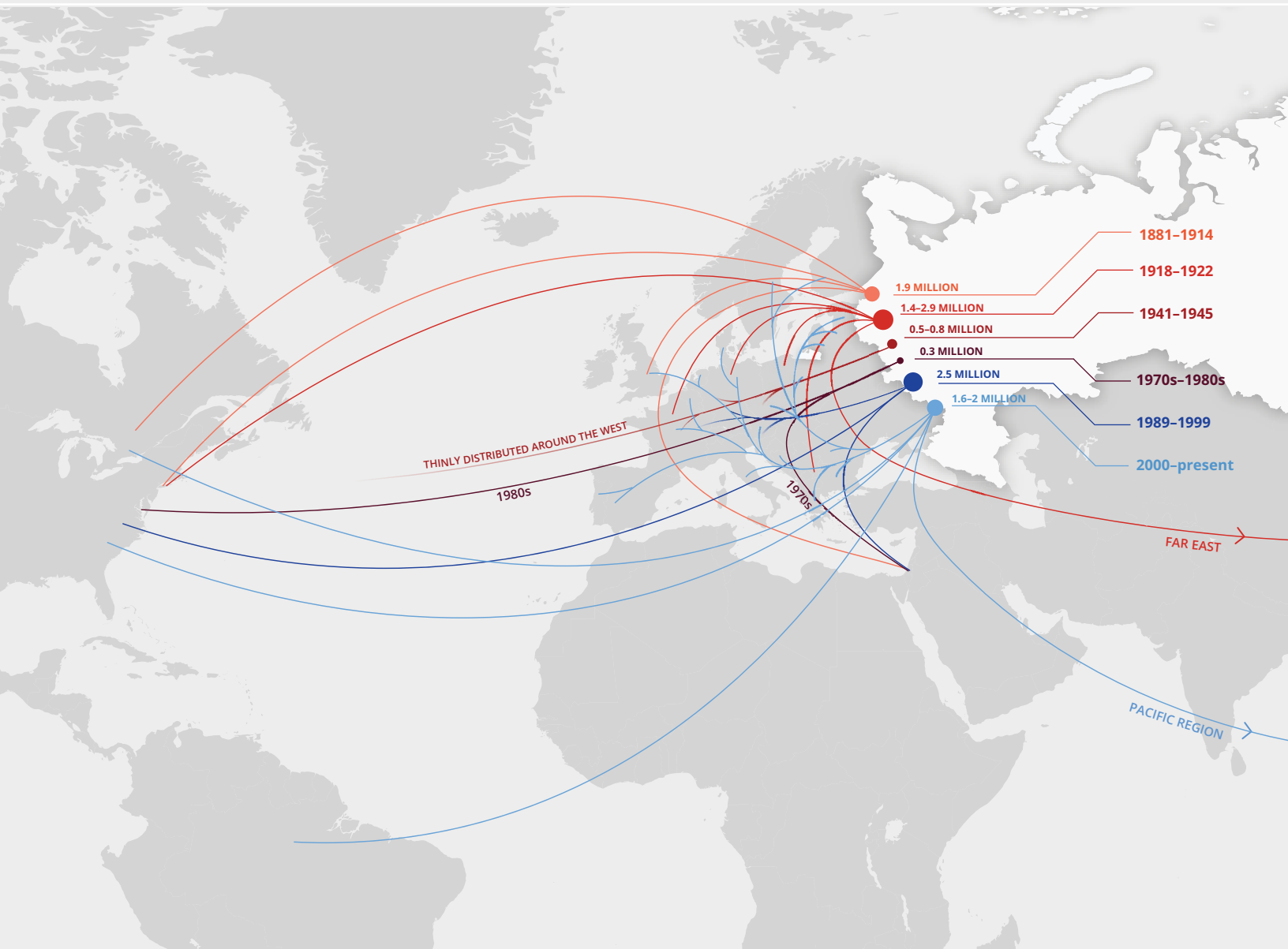
- ◆ Western governments and wider communities should aim to better understand the non-systemic opposition in Russia that is increasingly supported by the new Russian émigrés.
- ◆ A more detailed mapping of the exodus will help fight the Kremlin's diaspora-related manipulations. Further study will also facilitate engaging the Russian émigrés in the protection of democracy and stability including building a better post-Putin Russia.

continue in Russia, talented people will continue to leave. It also undermines the notion peddled by the Kremlin that Russia represents a distinct civilization with its own values, one that favors communal advantage over individual liberty.

But in the end, this study of the new Russian emigration is one of hope. It illustrates that the latest wave of Russian émigrés can ultimately serve as a bridge between the West and a Russia of the future, one that is not destined to be authoritarian.

This study's results suggest that so long as authoritarianism and politically connected economic privilege

RUSSIAN EMIGRATION SINCE LATE 19TH CENTURY



CHAPTER I

The Problem and the Political Background

The movement of peoples from one country to another has played a major role in history. British historian Arnold Toynbee spoke of the *Volkerwanderung*—the wandering of peoples—as a critical element in the creation of civilizations. The events of the past few years, the emigration from Africa and the Middle East remind us of how profoundly such processes can affect the economic, political, and cultural life of the West and the rest of the world.

Some movements of people are of global historic significance, such as the migrations of the people of the great Eurasian steppes many centuries ago. Others are of national significance, although they may have wider implications. This paper looks at one of these waves: the recent emigration of bright and entrepreneurial Russians as a result of the country’s growing authoritarianism and the consolidation of an economic system in which independent entrepreneurs are subject to pressure from the state and state-connected competitors.

Over almost a century and a half, there have been six waves of emigration from Russia.¹ The most notable are the pogrom-related Jewish emigration around the turn of the twentieth century, the “White” flight during the Bolshevik revolution and Russian Civil War, the late Soviet and early post-Soviet emigration, and the one we are calling the Putin Exodus.² Since Vladimir Putin became president of Russia in 2000, between 1.6 and 2 million people have left the country.³

At least two factors make this last wave important. First, as illustrated in the OECD International Migration Database and other sources, the number of émigrés decreased during Putin’s tenure in office between 2000 and 2008, but increased again following his return to the presidency in 2012, with Russians immigrating to Germany, the United States, Canada, Spain, and other countries. The data also demonstrates the growing popularity of new destinations, like Korea, Estonia, Latvia, New Zealand, Mexico, and Chile.⁴ Second, there

is substantial anecdotal evidence that this emigration is disproportionately composed of more educated and entrepreneurial Russians.

Unlike the 1990s wave, this Exodus has not been caused largely by economic frustration. And in contrast to earlier waves, it takes place at a time of open borders and continuing strong bonds with the home country.

This study looks at the distinctive driving factors of this new wave of emigration, the attitude of the émigrés toward Russia and their new lives, their views of Russian and Western politics, and their willingness to retain ties with or repatriate to Russia. Unlike the 1990s wave, this Exodus has not been caused largely by economic frustration. And in contrast to earlier waves, it takes place at a time of open borders and continuing strong bonds with the home country. So what are the specifics of this Exodus? How does it benefit the Western democracies that are its main destinations? Are its consequences for Russia and the world more profound than those of the waves that immediately preceded it?

The whirlwind of politics

The world looks very different today than it did a quarter-century ago. When the Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991, the United States and other Western nations expected the Russia that emerged to become a friend and partner. They dispatched advisers and

1 See an overview of the history of emigration in Chapter 2.

2 These waves involve approximately 2 million people.

3 This is an approximation used by various sources as the official statistics which, as it is discussed below, does not provide verifiable data.

4 See the OECD data for 2000-2016. Unfortunately, there is no national or international database that would expose comprehensive data on Russian emigration, but at least the OECD reports detect the mentioned dynamics. “OECD Statistics,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, <https://stats.oecd.org/>.



Demonstrators rally to protest against election fraud in Moscow, Saturday, Dec. 24, 2011. Tens of thousands of demonstrators rallied in the Russian capital Saturday in the largest protest so far against election fraud, signaling growing outrage over Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's 12-year rule. *Photo credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko*

substantial assistance to help its transition to democracy and a market economy. Russia was invited into the G7, and even NATO created a special council to manage and improve relations. Yet already in the 1990s, the revived Russia-West confrontation that we experience today was foreshadowed by the Kremlin's "frozen conflicts" policy, which capitalized on ethnic tensions

to increase Russian influence over the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. The West paid little attention to this provocative policy, focusing instead on building a "Europe whole and free."

The West's policy included granting the requests of former Warsaw Pact states, and states that emerged

from the Soviet Union, to join its two prize clubs: NATO and the European Union (EU). By 2009, thirteen of those states had joined NATO in three waves of accession and more had joined the EU. Seeing it as a potential existential threat, the Kremlin objected publicly to NATO expansion and, as revealed in time, also had reservations about EU expansion.

During the 1990s, the need for Western help with the painful post-Soviet transition muted partly the Kremlin challenge to NATO enlargement. At the same time, the combination of both greater poverty and the increasingly opulent lifestyles of the “new Russians” who emerged on top in the post-Soviet transition did much to discredit the ideals of an open society in Russia.

Putin’s ascendancy to the presidency produced a turn toward authoritarianism. Early in his term, he seized control of the major television stations, thus establishing a state monopoly on mass information. Then, in 2003 and 2004, he used the Mikhail Khodorkovsky case to attack oligarchs, and the Beslan massacre to curtail the election of regional governors and the burgeoning post-Soviet political system as a whole. Throughout the 2000s, relying heavily on the fusion of organized crime and the security apparatus, the Kremlin transformed the Russian state into an authoritarian kleptocracy.

It is true that at first Putin took certain liberal steps designed to strengthen the economy: 1) tax reforms (including a flat tax); 2) deregulation; and 3) quickly paying off Russian international debt. With the skyrocketing price of oil and gas, Russia’s major exports, the country enjoyed a yearly growth rate of roughly 7 percent through 2007. The resulting influx of wealth eliminated Russian dependence on Western assistance and emboldened the Kremlin to start pushing back against Western policies that it did not like—from NATO enlargement to growing influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union. This was evident in Moscow’s efforts to quash the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004–05), Putin’s sharply anti-Western speech at the Munich Security Conference (2007), its cyberattack on Estonia (2007), and the war against Georgia (2008).

However, the election of Dmitry Medvedev as president in 2008 led many observers to think that Moscow

would pursue more liberal policies. These hopes were not entirely misplaced, as Medvedev pursued a reset with the incoming Obama administration and spoke about the importance of the rule of law domestically. But they began to fade as the situation came to a head during the 2011–2012 political season, when Medvedev announced that he would step aside and allow Putin to run for president in 2012 (so called Putin-Medvedev “castling”⁵).

Putin’s candidacy and the subsequent fraudulent parliamentary and presidential elections sparked popular protests, followed by new political repressions. Economic growth rates in its aftermath stagnated, despite the fact that the price of oil generally remained high. As a result, Putin’s popular support within the country started to decrease in 2012 and 2013, while Russia’s political and economic ties with CIS countries showed signs of decline. To keep its political grip both internally and regionally, the Kremlin started preparations for more radical steps in accordance with the old frozen-conflicts strategy.

This time, Putin provoked the crisis in Ukraine by insisting in late 2013 that Kyiv walk away from negotiating a free trade agreement with the EU. When Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich did so, demonstrations involving tens of thousands began. An effort to repress those protests brought hundreds of thousands into the streets. When the subsequent cycle of demonstrations and repression led to the Revolution of Dignity of February 2014, which prompted Yanukovich to flee Ukraine for Russia, Putin responded by seizing Crimea forcibly, “annexing” it, and starting a hybrid war in Donbas. This in turn prompted Western sanctions, increased NATO deployments to the east, and the tensest East-West relations since the height of the Cold War.

For internal Russian audiences, the “return of Crimea” and “standing up to the West” were claimed by Putin as a political victory, which led to his popular approval spiking even higher than before 2012, allegedly to 86 percent.⁶ At the same time, domestic problems worsened as Western sanctions were accompanied by a sharp fall in hydrocarbon prices in late 2014. Russian GNP fell by over 3 percent in 2015 and living standards by nearly 10 percent.⁷ Recovery since then has been slow, even as oil prices rose to over \$70 per barrel.

5 The agreement to exchange the president and prime minister seats to enable Putin to return to full power in 2012.

6 Reputable sociologists do not believe in data accuracy in a distorted propaganda environment. The true post-Crimea approval rate for Putin should be lower but is still considered high. Lev Gudkov and Natalia Demina, «Независимой социологии в России нет,» *Троицкий вариант - Наука*, April 24, 2018, <https://trv-science.ru/2018/04/24/gudkov-demina-sociology/>.

7 The average disposable income of Russians in 2018 became comparable to the level of 2008–09.

Since the seizure of Crimea, Putin's policy toward the West has become even more provocative, including an intervention in Syria, active meddling in elections in the United States in 2016 and in France and Germany in 2017, and the poisoning in the United Kingdom of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal. The renewed confrontation with the West has been effectively used by Kremlin propaganda to help maintain control of domestic affairs.

The state and society

The evolution of Kremlin policy since Crimea has not been a plus for the Kremlin's social contract with the Russian people. Putin's first two terms in office guaranteed the people a rising standard of living and served as the source of his popularity. With the "return" of Crimea, he was offering the assertion of Russia's great power status as a substitute. Along the way, this contract has diminished the concept of the people's role as citizens; in other words, "You don't interfere with politics and we (the state) don't interfere with you." This approach has required waging anti-Western propaganda, greater conformity in Russian society, and less freedom for alternate points of view.

Putin's "social contract" has diminished the concept of the people's role as citizens. This approach has required waging anti-Western propaganda, greater conformity in Russian society, and less freedom for alternate points of view.

The intensified "fortress under siege" media campaign has not stopped the government's popularity from falling in 2017 and 2018. A stagnant economy has been a critical factor. While Putin's official approval ratings are still over 60 percent, the Kremlin has not found a way to completely counter opposition voices from anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny and others. Russia has witnessed growing Internet criticism of its official media rhetoric⁸ and skepticism of the country's prospects under Putin's leadership.⁹

Since the March 2018 presidential elections, the Russian state has shown new symptoms of a deepening management crisis: It has increased taxes and even the retirement age, thus disavowing the social contract. After Putin's reelection, fearing further loss of control, the Kremlin started a new campaign against freedom of expression on the Internet and in popular culture.¹⁰ As a result, even the data coming from Kremlin-controlled pollsters reflects growing pessimism about Russia's future, as well as increased interest in emigration.

As it did in Soviet times, the Kremlin today claims that political dissent is manufactured by the West. But unlike the Soviet model, the Putin system does not prohibit emigration. It rather permits and even encourages it, as a way to rid the country of those who might object to the way Russia is ruled. Today's Kremlin policy leads to critically-minded and independent people being pushed out of mainstream political and economic life and, in many cases, out of the country.

It is understandable that Russia's weakening economic performance, coupled with the Kremlin's growing political repression, has resulted in increased emigration. Putin wants his regime to be sustained at any expense and will further antagonize the West to expand his internal control and blunt the influence of educated Russians and new dissident thought. The Kremlin centers its policies around Russia's natural resources rather than its citizens, further encouraging an exodus.

Our effort in this study is to provide a more detailed picture demonstrating how these and other factors explain the Putin Exodus and its effects, and how the

8 A decisive basis for the growing popular distrust is the fact that Putin's cronies and the corrupt establishment prefer to keep their wealth and their families in the West.

9 One of the ways of delivering such criticism to widening YouTube audiences is NavalnyLive channel, particularly the program hosted by Navalny's associate Vladimir Milov, called "Where is the Money?". «Где деньги?» с Владимиром Миловым, January 3, 2019, <http://www.milov.org/entry/3826>.

10 In particular, this is currently reflected in turning the social network VKontakte into an active FSB informer about critical and satirical posts for the purposes of criminal prosecution, and in banning of concerts of popular rap performers; Petr Manyakhin, "It's a record to be proud of: How a Siberian city prosecutes Russian Internet users for 'criminal' memes," *Meduza*, August 15, 2018, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2018/08/15/it-s-a-record-to-be-proud-of>; Alexander Gorbachev, "Russian Musicians are Being Forced to Cancel Their Concerts Across the Country, Which Makes Now the Perfect Time to Listen to Their Music," *Meduza*, November 30, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y8s7gtoh>

Table 1: Russian emigration waves*

The wave	Dates	Who left	Estimated numbers (millions)	Main emigration factors	Main first destinations	Significance today
1. First Jewish emigration	1881-1914	Mostly Jews from the Pale of Settlement	1.9	Political: ethnic and religious oppression	US (84%), UK (8.5%), Canada (2.2%) Palestine (2.1%)	Part of modern anti-Semitism history, human capital loss, little or no connection to today's Russia
2. White emigration	1918-1922	Mostly Russian nobility, educated upper- and upper-middle classes	1.4 to 2.9	The establishment of the communist state	France (28%), Far East (20%), Germany (14%), Poland (13%), the Balkans (11%), other European countries and the US	Radical human capital loss, partial connection to Russian cultural legacy
3. World War II	1941-1945	POW and Ostarbeiter non-returnees of various backgrounds	0.5 to 0.8	The fear of Stalinist persecution	Thinly distributed around "the West"	Partial connection to the history of Stalinism
4. Soviet Jewish emigration	1970s-1980s	Soviet Jews using the Israel repatriation strategy	0.3	Ethnic deprivation	Mostly Israel in the 1970s, mostly US in the 1980s	Partial connection to Soviet history, little or no connection to today's Russia
5. Perestroika and early post-Soviet emigration	1989-1999	1989 - mid-1990s: mostly ethnic émigrés using repatriation strategy (Jewish, German, Greek) 1995-1999: seasonal workers, non-returning students, mail brides, middle class of various backgrounds	2.5	Economic collapse Lack of economic prospects	US, Israel, Germany, some EU countries	Low to middle connection to today's Russia
6. Putin Exodus	2000-	2000-2011: entrepreneurs, middle-class, imported parents and children of the 1990s émigrés, rentiers 2012-present: entrepreneurs, upper, middle and upper middle class, specifically IT, NGO, creative workers, and political activists	1.6 to 2	New economic and career opportunities, family reunion Growing corruption and worsening political atmosphere	US, Canada, Germany, all EU countries, the Pacific region, Turkey, Baltic States, Latin America	Middle to strong connection to today's Russia Strong connection to Russian affairs?

* The émigrés numbers are based on estimated ranges drawn from the public discourse backed by numerous, mostly non-academic sources. A comprehensive academic study of the historical waves and their numbers is largely absent in the scholarship. There are a few useful sources though that provide a comparative glimpse at the most waves' numbers: e.g. Pavel Polyan, "Emigration: Who and When Left Russia in the 20th Century" in *Russia and Its Regions in the 20th century: Territory - Settlement - Migrations*. Ed. by Olga Glezer and Pavel Polyan. (Moscow: OGI, 2005), 493-519.

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West can work with this group of educated Russians. So far, there have been few efforts by the academic and analytical community to closely examine the Putin Exodus. Our small-scale research is a first step in looking at the phenomenon using sociological methods.

Although a fully representative analysis of the Putin Exodus can only be produced with the help of comprehensive official demographic data, we believe that our study offers an insightful glimpse into what it is and its significance for Russia and the wider world today.

CHAPTER II

Historical Context, Contemporary Accounts, and Research Methodology

Since the return of Vladimir Putin as the president of Russia in May 2012, the issue of the best and brightest leaving Russia has gained much attention both inside and outside of the country. In the public discourse, this often revives Russian historical debates and calls for comparisons with earlier emigration waves. The conventional media have consistently made audiences aware that emigration is at its highest since the late 1990s.¹¹ Going further back in history, some Internet sources claim that that the current outflow is greater than that of the “White emigration” that occurred one hundred years ago.¹²

Some of the facts associated with this new emigration stand out. For instance, in 2017, the United States hit a twenty-four-year high of Russian asylum applications.¹³ At the same time, the Russian brain drain has been quoted as doubling during 2015-2017.¹⁴ Even the governmental pollster All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) points out that 10 percent of Russians (31 percent of ages eighteen to twenty-four) want to move abroad permanently.¹⁵ Research by the Boston Consulting Group, in collaboration with the international recruitment company The Network and the Russian agency HeadHunter, found an even greater number who want to leave: 57 percent under age thirty and 46 percent of professionals.¹⁶

In the absence of official departure information, the limited data from RosStat (the Russian Federal State

Statistics Service) shows a radical increase in the number of people emigrating from Russia to countries other than those of the former Soviet Union. For 2016, the figure is 56,730, four times that of 2011, which was 14,206.¹⁷ On social media, the number of posts about the motives and processes of the current emigration has been dramatically growing. As a rule, these testimonies come from intellectually advanced, relatively young, and economically active Russians who have already left or are planning to leave their country.¹⁸

Russian emigration since the late nineteenth century

A look at past waves of Russian emigration is essential to better understand the nature and significance of the Putin Exodus since 2000. Historically speaking, being in possession of enormous natural, geographical, and human resources, Russian rulers have repeatedly tried to gain regional and world dominance. These attempts have included reforms aimed at triggering immigration rather than emigration. However, the inconsistencies of the highly centralized policies of the Russian government and its straightforwardly reactionary moves have more often served as a push rather than a pull migration factor.

Starting in the mid-17th century, relatively small religion-based exoduses from Russia took place.¹⁹ But it

11 E.g. see the BBC and Kommersant publications: Stephen Ennis, “Russia Brain Drain After Putin Crackdown,” *BBC*, October 2, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29450930>; “Четверть граждан задумывалась об эмиграции,” *Kommersant*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3042053>.

12 Victor Vladimirov, “Массовая эмиграция из России превысила уровень первой волны Белой эмиграции,” *Echo of Russia*, May 4, 2018, <https://ehorussia.com/new/node/16237>.

13 Carl Schreck, “Russian Asylum Applications In U.S. Hit 24-Year Record,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 2, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-asylum-applications-in-u-s-hit-24-year-record/29204843.html>; Aleksandr Lyarin, “Россияне ищут убежище,” *Kommersant*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3619827>.

14 Polina Zvezdina, “В РАН заявили о возросшей в два раза за три года ‘утечке мозгов’,” *RBC*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/society/29/03/2018/5abcc9f59a7947e576977387>.

15 “Эмиграционные настроения россиян—2018,” Всероссийский Центр Изучения общественного Мнения, July 2, 2018, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9187>.

16 Rainer Strack et al., “Russia Faces a Talent Conundrum,” Boston Consulting Group (BCG), June 25, 2018, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/russia-faces-talent-conundrum-global-talent.aspx>; Polina Smertina, “Российская молодежь мечтает работать за границей,” *Vedomosti*, June 27, 2018, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/articles/2018/06/27/773870-molodezh-zh-granitsei>.

17 Zhanna Nemtsova, “Young, Liberal and Russian,” *The New York Times*, September 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/23/opinion/young-liberal-russian.html>.

18 Among the many Facebook groups, one of the most active is titled ‘Time to Shove Off’. «Пора валить—всё про эмиграцию,» Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/poravalit/>.

19 One commonly referred to historical phenomenon causing such early outflows is the Old Believer Schism.



Rue Daru, Paris, 1930. “A La Ville de Petrograd” restaurant is located right in front of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in the Russian quarter of Paris. Operating since 1924, the restaurant had been a popular gathering spot among the White émigrés. *Photo credit: Library of Congress*

was not until the late nineteenth century, with its industrialization and controversial liberalization, that the first massive wave of emigration took place. This wave is known as the Jewish emigration, related to the infamous pogroms, and historically it serves as a departure point for our analysis. Altogether, there have been six major emigration waves which are described below. The table lists these waves, their dates, their composition, as well as the estimated number of émigrés, causes of emigration, destinations, and their historical role.

As one can see from Table 1, political factors—including persecution on religious and cultural grounds (the first Jewish emigration), fighting through the revolution and civil war (the White emigration), fear of repression (World War II), and deprivation of particular ethnic groups (Soviet Jewish emigration)—were dominant

themes up to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Historically, these factors played a decisive role in creating the conditions of no return and, for most groups with the exception of some public intellectuals as political dissidents of the 1960–1980s, loss of interest in the country of exodus.

In terms of building cohesive cultural diasporas abroad, for most Russian immigrants in Western countries²⁰—apart from old believers before the end of the nineteenth century and some of the Jews leaving for Israel and the United States toward the end of the twentieth century—the sense of original cultural unity and identity was lost. This happened during the process of adaptation to a new life in complex open and pluralistic societies, which became a part of the general modernization process Russians underwent alongside Westerners.

²⁰ The “White” Russians going to the Far East after the Bolshevik revolution eventually also landed in Western democracies.



Svetlana and Manashe Babayev with their children, Larisa, 8 years old, Zina, 7, and Oxana, 4, at rear, after arriving recently at Kennedy International Airport in 1989. More than 300,000 Soviet Jews left the Soviet Union, mainly for Israel and the United States, in 1970-1980s. *Photo credit: Library of Congress*

Unlike a poor population arriving in America from, say, Italy or Ireland, the relatively economically secure Russians never built strong émigré communities with multiple ties to their motherland.²¹ The general sharing of Western values was typical for almost all who left Russia. Coupled with their high education level, this became a main factor for the decision to leave, as well as an asset facilitating integration in the new country. Only a couple of emigration factors before the mid-1990s were not part of this general modernization process, namely contact with traditional Jewish culture

abroad in the case of religious people and that with German culture in the case of agricultural workers.²²

Although they had already played a role for both Jewish emigrations that took place before the 1990s, economic factors largely replaced political ones immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They became the main cause of emigration. What brought economic motivation to the foreground was Russia's painful transition to democracy and a market economy, which equally hurt all ethnocultural groups in the country.

21 While testifying to a certain strength of the Russian identity and active cultural and intellectual community life, the popular example of the "Whites" in Paris in the period between the two world wars obviously doesn't meet the "motherland connection" criterion due to the political rupture.

22 Many of the Russian ethnic Germans emigrating within the German repatriation program, mainly in the early 1990s, were actually Soviet collective farmers or factory workers with strong family memories of pre-collectivization life in the country.

Unlike in the past, contemporary Russian rulers have at their disposal neither a growing population nor up-to-date technological means for achieving lasting success in economic and geopolitical competition. And as regards cementing and mobilizing society, the Kremlin no longer has an ideological vision of a future for the country.

At the same time, as the emigration processes developed after the late 1990s, one can see how the general picture became more complex. In addition to the cultural-ethnic pull, which never went away completely, and economic distress or interest, new political overtones began to gain weight. After the Khodorkovsky case in 2003–04, the difficulties of pursuing economic success at home became more often associated with politically grounded corruption. At the same time, growing economic globalization provided new opportunities abroad for educated Russians with technological and entrepreneurial skills.

Thus, not only the traditional destinations of the United States, Germany, or Israel were considered, but many other countries also landed on the map for Russian emigration in recent years. New émigrés have found their new homes where education, creativity, and entrepreneurship are actively at play, from Spain to Thailand and from the Baltic states to Turkey.

Historically speaking, is the current outflow just another drain of Russia's seemingly infinite resources? Could it be true that, similar to the flight of the Jews in 1881–1914 or the White emigration in 1918–1922, the Putin Exodus cannot radically change the country's status as a world power? The historical facts are that Russia today cannot demonstrate anything like its pre-World War I economic achievement or the ideological power of the Soviet state.

The context of the Putin Exodus is quite different than the emigrations of the Soviet period, in which

ideological animosity and repression played the major roles. The context now has more to do with crony capitalism exploiting the country's natural resources and not caring about retaining the human capital, although the diminution of freedom also plays a role. Unlike in the past, contemporary Russian rulers have at their disposal neither a growing population nor up-to-date technological means for achieving lasting success in economic and geopolitical competition. And as regards cementing and mobilizing society, the Kremlin no longer has an ideological vision of a future for the country. This remarkable historical difference affects the analytical perspective on the relations between the Russian state and the Russian society today.

Current media and analytical accounts

The growth of the public discourse

As Table 1 shows, the Putin Exodus is especially diverse in terms of emigration drivers and destination countries. There are certain new social, economic, and political conditions that lead to this diversity, including greater financial security, wider awareness of professional and personal opportunities through education and languages acquisition, and improved freedom of movement, both inside and outside the Russian Federation. What makes the Exodus even more special is that the new émigrés, who unlike the Soviet ones are not banished from Russia completely and forever, demonstrate connectedness with the country of exodus. Even more than traveling back and forth, the use of new communication tools helps the émigrés remain connected to their families and friends left in Russia. At the same time, as observed through both conventional and new media, the Putin Exodus members since 2012 seem to have a stronger connection to Russia than their earlier counterparts. While this could be partly explained by the shorter time distance since emigration, other factors are also likely at play.

As we know, the Jewish and White emigration waves reduced the talent available for the cultural and economic development of the nation. Under the ruthless leadership of first Lenin and then Stalin, the Soviets tried to make up for this by the harsh mobilization of the population in the first Five Year plans and the great collectivization process. While those measures produced fast industrialization, the human costs were substantial and often, like in the case of Holodomor in Ukraine, inhumane.

The post-Soviet economic and political conditions are radically different, causing much higher ambivalence

regarding the new emigration. Its configuration is much more complex and calls for greater scrutiny. In contrast to the fourth and fifth waves, and in partial resemblance to the flight of noble, rich, and intellectual Russians in the times of the Bolshevik revolution, the most recent emigration is often portrayed as being politically rather than economically driven, as a result of growing authoritarianism in Russia. For example, Leonid Bershidsky, a former editor of the Moscow business newspaper *Vedomosti* and now a Bloomberg journalist, talks about an “emigration of disappointment.”²³ Referring to asylum-seeking in the United States, Lev Gudkov, the director of the Levada Center, lists its causes, which include “the intensification of the domestic repressive policy.”²⁴ The émigré-popular Russian online news agency Meduza has conducted some interviews reflecting the strong sense of danger among some Russians who have recently left the country.²⁵ Such accounts in both Western and the Russian independent press are plentiful.

What makes the Exodus even more special is that the new émigrés, who unlike the Soviet ones are not banished from Russia completely and forever, demonstrate connectedness with the country of exodus.

Apart from observations coming from journalists and sociologists, there is a burgeoning culture of self-reflection among the new émigrés themselves on new media; there are numerous online platforms actively

discussing the nature of the Putin Exodus, some active for many years now.²⁶ They discuss not only the practicalities but also the causes of the Putin Exodus. For example, the Facebook group “Russian Emigration” pairs the members’ exchange about their reasons for emigration with a title picture of a brain pulling a travel bag.²⁷

In April 2018, in an interview to the YouTube channel “Russian America,” Yan Poliansky, the France-based coordinator of a Facebook community called “Time to Shove Off,” mentioned there were 58,000 members of his group; by January 2019, the group had 122,000 members. According to Poliansky, due to Putin’s militarist rhetoric, membership is rapidly growing and the émigré/would-be émigré ratio in the group is currently one to two.²⁸ Interestingly, as a possible sign of growing political battles around the Putin Exodus, the idea of “shoving off” has been picked up by the Kremlin’s “Olginio” troll factory²⁹, which calls on young Russians studying at universities in “adversary countries” to “shove off back” to mother Russia. This, however, should be considered not as an attempt to regain brains, but as another propaganda attack against “Western Russophobia.”

The limits of analysis

Despite the widening discussion, there is not yet any in-depth study of today’s Russian emigration that would help observers understand its nature and reveal its implications—both for Russia’s development and in order to adjust the policymaking framework in the West. To answer questions like whether this emigration weakens Russia or whether it can possibly play an active role in shaping the country’s future, one should look at both the external comparative historical contexts of economy and ideology and the internal characteristics of the current Exodus.

23 Natalia Frolova, “Пятая Волна Отъезда: Разочарованные,” *The New Times*, December 3, 2018, <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/152010>.

24 Viktor Vladimirov, «Лев Гудков: новая волна российской эмиграции связана с ужесточением внутренней ситуации в стране,» *Voice of America*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/lev-gudkov-on-russian-brain-drain/3980619.html>.

25 Meduza’s popularity is confirmed by our research, as is shown in the next chapter. Anna Rodina, «Попросить убежище? Но от чего? Как живут россияне, которые уехали в США по туристической или студенческой визе—и решили остаться,» *Meduza*, November 19, 2017, <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/11/19/poprosit-ubezhische-no-ot-chego>.

26 “Как уехать жить за границу,» Форум Винского, accessed January 5, 2019, <http://forum.awd.ru/viewforum.php?f=76>.

27 “Русская эмиграция,» Facebook, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/alltourists/>.

28 Русская Америка, «Интервью с владельцем ресурса Пора Валишь Ян из Франции,» YouTube, April 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8PmVc9IAE0>; Seth Mydans, «Putin’s Eye for Power Leads Some in Russia to Ponder Life Abroad,» *The New York Times*, October 1, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/world/europe/putins-eye-for-power-leads-some-in-russia-to-ponder-life-abroad.html>.

29 Neil Macfarquhar, “Yevgeny Prigozhin, Russian Oligarch Indicted by U.S., Is Known as ‘Putin’s Cook’,» *The New York Times*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/world/europe/prigozhin-russia-indictment-mueller.html>.

While emigration is not new to Russia, those who have been emigrating since Putin's return seem to be Russia's most educated, active, and independent, coming from the middle and upper middle classes.

It should be acknowledged that, in the past, talking to some Soviet emigration representatives played an important role in understanding what was going on behind the iron curtain. In particular, the “Harvard project” following World War II and the “Soviet Interview Project” of the 1980s generated a substantial scholarly literature.³⁰ Being instrumental in complementing the analysis of Soviet political, economic, and military potential, this type of research was not, however, primarily aimed at the life of the diaspora per se, wider geopolitical implications of Russian emigration, or the phenomenon of “Global Russians.”³¹ Some efforts have recently been made to summarize Russian soft power tactics using the diaspora today,³² but this hasn't added much to the sociological study of the population in question.

Although there is not yet an established academic field studying the new Russian emigration, the phenomenon has attracted the attention of some Western and Russian observers. An interesting summary of the intellectual component of the 2000s emigration characterized as “brain drain” rather than post-industrial global “brain circulation” is provided by the group of Sergey

Ryazantsev.³³ Both this group of Russian scholars and their American colleagues have also paid attention to the new destination of Southeast Asia and to how the new emigration can be more entrepreneurial than academic.³⁴ Importantly, a few more general reports on the subject of the new Russian emigration have been produced by various analytical centers since 2012 including the much quoted *Stratfor* publication.³⁵ Together with conventional media coverage and social media testimonies, they contribute to the development of a new discourse on Russian emigration.

Typically, the reports point out that, while emigration is not new to Russia, those who have been emigrating since Putin's return seem to be Russia's most educated, active, and independent, coming from the middle and upper-middle classes.³⁶ Regarding the details and dynamics of the Putin Exodus, some new analyses have recently become available. They are usually based on (1) statistics from Russia and destination countries, (2) interviews with those who now live abroad, (3) surveys of Russian immigrants in Western countries, and (4) studies of attitudes toward emigration among Russians in Russia.

However, a number of problems arise here.

First, official Russian RosStat statistics are extremely limited as citizens may leave the country without informing state agencies of their departure. This is further distorted by a reform of migration registration since 2012, not distinguishing between the outflows of Russian citizens and those of immigrants, mostly from Central Asia, who are returning to their home countries from Russia.³⁷ This distortion can only be partially remedied by immigration statistics on the receiving end, which in any case requires a lot of work and coordination around the globe to make sense of the overall numbers of Russian émigrés.

30 James R. Millar, *Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR. A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

31 For a cultural mapping of the contemporary diaspora see: Kevin M.F. Platt, *Global Russian Cultures*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

32 See the Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI) publication: Mikhail Suslov, “‘Russian World’: Russia's Policy towards its Diaspora,” *Notes de l'Ifri Russie.Nei.Visions*, July 2017, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/suslov_russian_world_2017.pdf.

33 Sergei Ryazantsev and Evgenia Pismennaya, “Эмиграция Ученых из России: “Циркуляция” или “Утечка” Умов,” *Sotsiologicheskiiye Issledovaniya* 4, (2013): 24-35, <https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/29875823>.

34 Harley Balzer and Maria Repnikova, “Migration Between China and Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2010): 1-37; Sergei Ryazantsev et al., “‘Asian Vector’ in Russia's Migration Policy: The Potential of Vietnamese Migration for the Socio-Economic Development of Russia,” *International Trends* 2, no. 3, (2016): 14-22, <http://intertrends.ru/system/Doc/ArticlePdf/1700/3ulGBSAY16.pdf>.

35 “The Problem With Russia's Best and Brightest,” *Stratfor*, June 29, 2016, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/problem-russias-best-and-brightest>.

36 Khristina Narizhnaya, “Russians Go West,” *World Policy Journal* 30, no. 1, (2013), <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/spring2013/russians-go-west>.

37 Although a few scholars have tried to address this problem, it is usually ignored by both western commentators including *Stratfor* and those in Russia like the group led by Ryazantsev.

Second, over the last half decade, there have been only a few studies based on talking to the new émigrés themselves. One of them was conducted in 2014 by the New York-based Institute of Modern Russia (IMR).³⁸ After a series of interviews with well-known Russians living abroad, this predominantly journalistic study concludes that “it is highly educated and entrepreneurially inclined people who are leaving Russia” and that “the current regime is not interested in the country’s long-term development” as it is pushing critically-minded people out, “leaving behind those who are more likely to be successfully brainwashed and whose critical faculty atrophies a bit more every time they watch Russian state TV.” This study’s report also states that “today’s contingent of Russian emigrants contrasts starkly to those of previous post-Soviet emigration waves.” However, this study’s scale, methodology, and limited objectives do not allow one to make much sense of the émigrés as a population to understand their personal and economic lives, political views, and connectedness to Russia.

There is another study—which in fact is devoted to intellectual migration in Russia generally—that was conducted in 2017 by RANEPa University in Moscow. Among other things, it touches upon the aspect of “intellectual emigration” from Russia. The project report quotes methodology similar to that of the study conducted by IMR.³⁹ However, the sociological character of this study can only be guessed at, due to the scarcity of the information about emigration that was eventually made publicly available. However, its main conclusion that has reached the press is that the Russian brain drain is growing.⁴⁰

The third problem is that no standardized surveys of Russian émigrés have been conducted yet. There are, however, a few reports providing statistics about Russians who live in Germany and Britain. One such report is presented by the Nemtsov Foundation on the basis of 2016 telephone interviews with

Russian-speakers who live in Germany and emigrated before 2009.⁴¹ Despite the valuable addition of questions about media consumption, including Russian news, this survey largely looks at potential voting behavior in relation to issues within Germany and the EU, rather than to those of Russia, Russia-West relations, or to emigration as such.

Another study, completed in 2018 in Germany deals with post-Soviet migrants in general rather than with just Russians. It is conducted by the Berlin-based Center for Eastern European and International Studies (ZOiS). Despite the broader post-Soviet national origin of the studied groups, this project is of particular interest because of its focus on social-network activities in connection with the émigrés’ various values, including right-wing political leanings. It is notable that at least partly the growing interest of some Russian-speakers in political actors like AfD is connected to the neo-imperialist euphoria after the “incorporation” of Crimea. ZOiS presents this as a part of the politicization process.⁴²

One more survey has been conducted by the London-based Russian community magazine *Zima* (“Winter”), which also deals with Russian-speakers from the former Soviet Union.⁴³ Its characteristic feature is the distinction between “high net worth individuals” and “professionals” (100 respondents in each group), profiling the groups’ age, time lived in the UK, education, income/occupation, change in the quality of life, and a hierarchy of negative aspects of their life in Britain. The survey also covers preferences in communication (with either Russians or “locals”), leisure time, and news consumption.

Given the problems of the currently available analyses, it is not easy to prove that the Putin Exodus émigrés are indeed younger, better-educated, economically more active, or politically more engaged compared to those who emigrated earlier. In this sense, a useful source is the comprehensive review of diverse statistical data

38 Institute of Modern Russia is sponsored by a son of the ex-oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Ksenia Semenova, “A New Wave of Emigration: The Best Are Leaving Part 2,” Institute of Modern Russia, April 23, 2015. <https://imrussia.org/en/analysis/nation/2238-a-new-wave-of-emigration-the-best-are-leaving-part-2>.

39 Nikita Mkrtychyan and Yulia Florinskaya, “Международная миграция в России: квалифицированная составляющая,” Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation (RANEPa), Moscow, 2018, <ftp://w82.ranepa.ru/rnp/wpaper/O21809.PDF>.

40 “Russia’s Brain Drain on the Rise Over Economic Woes – Report,” *The Moscow Times*, January 24, 2018, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russias-brain-drain-on-the-rise-over-economic-woes-report-60263>.

41 Boris Nemtsov Foundation, “Russians in Germany,” (Berlin: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit, 2016), <https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2016/10/10/boris-nemtsov-foundationrussiansingermanyprint.pdf>.

42 Tatiana Golova, “Social Media Networks of the Post-Soviet Minority in Germany,” Zentrum Für Osteuropa-und Internationale Studien (ZOiS), July 11, 2018, <https://en.zois-berlin.de/publications/zois-spotlight/social-media-networks-of-the-post-soviet-minority-in-germany/>.

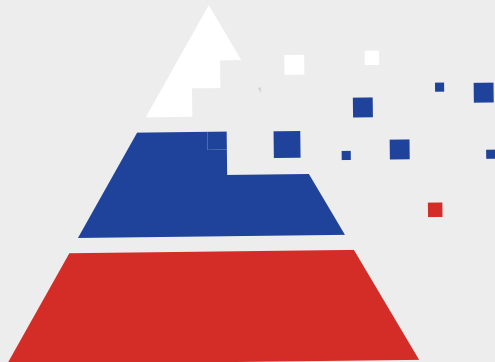
43 “Русскоязычные в Британии. Кто они и сколько их? Исследование ZIMA,” *ZIMA Magazine*, December 2, 2017, <https://zimamagazine.com/2017/10/russian-speaking-in-britain/>.

OVERVIEW OF THE PUTIN EXODUS

FROM 2000, AN ESTIMATED
1.6-2
MILLION
OUT OF 145 MILLION

POPULATION LEFT RUSSIA UNDER PUTIN'S WATCH. THIS TREND HAS INTENSIFIED SINCE PUTIN ASSUMED HIS THIRD TERM IN OFFICE IN 2012, AT WHICH POINT ANNUAL EMIGRATION STARTED TO EXCEED ITS HIGHEST LEVELS SINCE THE EARLY 2000S.

WHILE THE EMIGRATION OF THE 1990S WAS DRIVEN BY ECONOMIC FRUSTRATION, THE REASONS FOR THE PUTIN EXODUS APPEAR TO BE MORE COMPLEX.



YET, IT IS GENERALLY CAUSED BY AN INCREASINGLY REPRESSIVE AND INFLEXIBLE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM THAT STIFLES FREE EXPRESSION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LIMITS OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEW GENERATIONS.

produced by the Moscow-based Committee of Civil Initiatives (CCI). The report indirectly confirms the Putin Exodus uniqueness hypothesis and can serve as an additional foundation for innovative field study of Russian immigrants in the West.⁴⁴

Listing the emigration factors, composition, and geographies, the CCI report goes on to outline the dynamic changes from 1990 to 2015. Among other things, it looks at the changes in the formal immigration channels used by the émigrés to settle in their new countries: from refugees and ethnic immigrants to academic and work-related, from business and middle-class immigration to study or family reunion. It also tries to trace changes in the character of emigration using categories of brain drain, capital flight, knowledge flight, talents, or demographic and intellectual potential. Although not everything is clear in its conclusions, and bearing in mind that they are not based on original research, what deserves special attention is the attempt at differentiation and the conception of “five post-Soviet emigration waves” in particular.

What remains absent in all of these studies is an evaluation of the interest of Putin Exodus émigrés in Russian affairs and Russia-West relations, as well as an analysis of their interest in remaining engaged in Russia’s future. There are no research publications of this kind so far despite initiatives like that of the independent European University at Saint Petersburg which has tried, through a couple of international conferences, to launch a discussion of a possible intellectual diaspora’s role in Russian socioeconomic progress. Yet, just by looking closely at today’s media reflections and personal Internet and social media-delivered evidence, one could detect certain different qualities

of the new Russian emigration. A simple overview of online sources could lay the foundations of innovative sociological studies of its cultural and political aspects ranging from Kremlin’s manipulations of the diaspora and manifestations of Russian imperialism among immigrants in California⁴⁵ to Russians abroad trying to counter Kremlin’s subversive activities.⁴⁶ Analyzing such online information could lead to a critical evaluation of diverging claims like “fifty percent of Russians in the UK are spies”⁴⁷ or “Russians are ‘norm’” meaning “normal” in the sense “better than expected.”⁴⁸

For the purposes of understanding the Putin Exodus, it would also be useful to utilize data regularly produced by the main Russian pollsters asking those who live in Russia about their attitudes toward emigration. For example, alongside studying attitudes toward domestic problems and foreign relations, the only independent Russian national pollster, the Levada Center, has followed a popular interest in emigration, especially among the young and better educated.⁴⁹ At the same time, in July 2017, the Kremlin-controlled VTsIOM reported that Russians now “dream about the high standard of living abroad much less, while factors like social stability, climate and environment, the level of culture, observation of human rights, etc., are valued much more than before. Also, among the reasons to leave, the dissatisfaction with the policies of the authorities... is now mentioned more often.”⁵⁰

These are all reasons that an innovative, systematic, and comprehensive sociological study of Putin Exodus members should yield rich results of great significance for various stakeholders—from social scholars to Russian political elite and oppositionists, to US and international decisionmakers, to émigrés themselves.

44 Committee of Civil Initiatives is sponsored by the former Russian vice premier and finance minister Alexei Kudrin. Olga Vorobieva and Aleksandr Grebenyuk, Эмиграция из России в конце XX – начале XXI века, Committee of Civil Initiatives, October 6, 2016, <https://komitetgi.ru/analytics/2977/>.

45 “Why Does Kremlin Need Militarized Troops in the US,” *Slavic Sacramento / Slavic News in California*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.slavicsac.com/2017/09/01/kremlin-need-militarized-troops-u-s/>.

46 “Русскоязычные американцы просят Трампа ужесточить санкций против РФ,” *Slavic Sacramento / Slavic News in California*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.slavicsac.com/2018/04/09/russian-americans-more-sanctions/>.

47 Christopher Hope, “Half of the Russians in London Are Spies, Claims New Report,” *The Telegraph*, November 5, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/11/05/half-russians-london-spies-claims-new-report/>.

48 The project initiated by the head of the media project The Bell, a former Vedomosti and RBC editor-in-chief Elizaveta Osetinskaya uses this Russian new slang word. The Bell, “Русские норм!” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCo3S9OQDrM79i7yPmixnSsQ>.

49 «Эмиграционные настроения,» Levada Center, June 19, 2017, <https://www.levada.ru/2017/06/19/emigratsionnye-nastroeniya-2/>. A new publication by Roman Badanin’s “Project” takes into account Levada’s findings. The article entitled “The other Russian World” does not reflect an original sociological study and repeats some faults of earlier overviews. However, on a journalistic level, it highlights, stronger than anything before, some important points about the scale and aspects of the new emigration. Sofya Savina, “Иной русский мир. Исследование о том, сколько россиян уезжают из страны,” Proekt, January 16, 2019, <https://www.proekt.media/research/statistika-emigration/>.

50 «Эмиграционные настроения россиян—2017,» Всероссийский Центр Изучения Общественного Мнения, July 4, 2017, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116299>.

Research methodology

To identify push and pull factors driving modern Russian emigration, the Atlantic Council conducted several research activities. First, we reviewed the relevant literature and assessed publicly available census data from sources such as the OECD International Migration Database, RosStat, Eurostat, the US Department of Homeland Security Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, the UK Office for National Statistics, and the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees databases. It is obvious that since 2000 the emigration has significantly widened geographically. Not just academic and creative, but also entrepreneurial brain drain elements have come into play. The business and sometimes rent-based strategies of the new Russian middle class are often finding nutrient soil in Southeast Asia, Turkey, Latin America, Eastern Europe, etc.

Given the small scale of the project, we decided to concentrate on the more “traditional” destinations which, as we believe, continue to play a key role in characterizing the Putin Exodus as a whole. Using on an analysis of “settlement hubs” and not claiming universal applicability of our findings, we identified two US and two European locations as continuously attracting large numbers of Russian émigrés and most representative of the new Russian emigration in general. The chosen locations are the San Francisco Bay Area, the New York Metropolitan Area, greater London, and Berlin/Brandenburg.

Though we were able to determine the geographic areas with the highest number of Russian immigrants, publicly available data did not reflect their demographic characteristics or socioeconomic status (i.e., gender, age, education, occupation, and income) so that a representative sample could be built on that basis. To examine the socio-demographic profile and motivations of Russians who arrived after 2000 in these four major settlement locations, we conducted an original online survey and organized focus groups in San Jose and New York City in the United States, and in Berlin and London in Europe. We designed a bilingual survey questionnaire consisting of 100 questions covering five topical categories: demographics (including questions about socioeconomic background, employment patterns, and occupation before and after emigration); personal migration history (emigration motivations and immigration experiences); political

and economic views (i.e., political leanings and attitudes toward various political issues in Russia and in the host country); news consumption; and connections and plans, which covered questions on communication preferences and ideas about Russia’s future.

Our poll included 400 individuals, 100 in each location. All survey respondents left Russia in 2000 or later and consider themselves temporary or permanent immigrants to their host country. All respondents were eighteen years of age or older and residing in the locations where the survey was conducted. It was our priority to ensure a roughly equal number of men and women who were taking the survey: 55 percent of respondents were female, 44 percent male, and 1 percent of respondents identified their gender as “other.”

There is an important divide within the Putin Exodus: between the émigrés who left in 2000–2011 and those who emigrated from 2012 on.

The survey was conducted in November and December of 2017 in the San Francisco Bay Area; from December 2017 to January 2018 in New York Metropolitan Area; in January and February 2018 in Berlin/Brandenburg; and from February to early March 2018 in Greater London. To recruit survey respondents, our local researchers (two in the United States and two in Europe) facilitated a mix of the “snowball sample” approach⁵¹ and open invitations via social media. Particularly helpful were Facebook-based diaspora networks bringing together Russian émigrés around a shared non-political, daily life hobby or interest. While such sampling introduces a bias because it is not random and representative of the broader population, it is a recognized technique for reaching so-called “hidden populations,” or individuals who cannot be easily identified based on a common characteristic or location.⁵²

Following the completion of the survey, we held focus groups in the four cities involving various Russian émigré

51 The snowball sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which respondents are approached through their social network contact or suggest other individuals for inclusion in the study if they meet the eligibility criteria. This method is often utilized by investigators in studies when the population is unknown, and therefore the sample selection is difficult to achieve. “Frequently Asked Questions and Vignettes,” National Science Foundation—Where Science Begins, <https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/hsfaqs.jsp#snow>.

52 Douglas D. Heckathorn, “Respondent Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations,” *Social Problems* 44, no. 2, (1997): 174-199.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

TO IDENTIFY PUSH AND PULL FACTORS DRIVING MODERN RUSSIAN EMIGRATION, THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL'S EURASIA CENTER CONDUCTED AN ORIGINAL SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS IN FOUR KEY NEW EMIGRATION LOCATIONS IN THE US AND EUROPE.



STUDY GROUP

PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEFT RUSSIA SINCE 2000 AND LIVE IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA, GREATER LONDON, AND BERLIN/BRANDENBURG.

SAMPLE SIZE

400 PEOPLE (100 IN EACH LOCATION).

TYPE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION

ONLINE SURVEYS CONSISTING OF 100 QUESTIONS AND FOCUS GROUPS.

SAMPLING TYPE

COMBINATION OF "SNOWBALL SAMPLING" AND OPEN RECRUITMENT PRIMARILY THROUGH FACEBOOK GROUPS.

FIELD DATES

NOVEMBER 2017 – MARCH 2018.

populations. The team selected their participants from survey respondents who expressed interest in taking part in a focus group discussion. Based on demographic characteristics, occupation, migration history, and the political views of the respondents, we selected a balanced and diverse group of eight people in the San Francisco Bay Area and Berlin and seven people in Greater London and New York City.⁵³ During the convenings, which were held in Russian, participants shared their immigration experiences and thoughts about the political and economic situation in Russia as well as the characteristics of the new Russian emigration. Rich in information, the focus groups provided a wealth of data for qualitative analysis and led to more ideas and themes for further exploration.

We recognize that the sample of 400 respondents is not fully representative of the entire Russian diaspora and the findings presented in this paper might not apply to the totality of the post-2000 “brain drain” segment. However, this study gives a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the new immigrants’ motivations for leaving, and their views on the future of Russia. More important, this study identifies the difference between the emigration waves of the early 2000s compared to those that occurred post-2012, and serves as a starting point for a further exploration of the Putin Exodus.

⁵³ The selection was based on a preliminary survey answers analysis to avoid group bias.

CHAPTER III

The New Russian Emigration to the United States and Europe: Main Findings

The data obtained through surveys and focus groups (FGs) of members of the Putin Exodus indicates a distinct culture conditioned by the émigrés' education, entrepreneurship, and overall emigration situation in Russia during the Putin era. As perceived by the project informants, compared to their predecessors, they are more interested in politics, both Russian and Western, and their mindsets and lives are more multifaceted. In comparisons of the new diasporas across the four locations in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany, the reasons for emigrating, political leanings, ways of adapting to a new life, and other characteristics prove to be remarkably similar. At the same time, there is an important divide within the Putin Exodus: between the émigrés who left in 2000–2011 (marked Cohort A) and those who emigrated from 2012 on (Cohort B).

Parameters of the new emigration

The Putin Exodus survey of 400 people includes slightly more women than men (55 percent compared to 44 percent), and the FGs had a similar gender composition.⁵⁴ The overwhelming majority of respondents (80.5 percent) were between twenty-five and forty-four years old, a relatively young group. Before leaving the country, 17 percent of the survey respondents were studying.

Russia has a low birth rate and the FGs reflected that; the emigration process, therefore, involves mainly individuals or couples, some with few children. In that sense they are different not only from the previous wave of Russian immigration, but also from other immigrants who are more centered around traditional, multi-generational family values. Other important characteristics of our respondents are similar to those of educated Americans and Europeans: 67 percent are married or live in a civil union, 83 percent live in big

cities or suburbs, 71 percent receive wages or salaries, and 16 percent are self-employed.

Ethnically, 71 percent of survey participants identify themselves as ethnic Russians, 12 percent as “mixed,” 7 percent as Jewish, and 6 percent as “other,” with noticeable numbers of Ukrainians and people of Turkic background in the group. In this respect, two important conclusions can be drawn from the survey data and the FGs. First, in terms of ethnicity, the Putin Exodus is more “Russian” compared to the waves of the late 1970s when mostly Soviet Jews emigrated and to the 1990s when Russians from all over the country just started to join the outflows of Jews, Germans, and Greeks. At the same time, it is more diverse, with new ethnic minorities now emigrating from Russia. However, this diversity is only nominal. There is no tendency among the new émigrés to establish large and lasting ethnic communities. The overall diaspora is dominated by the civic Russian identity related to the idea of a modern multiethnic nation-state rather than traditional ethnic identity.⁵⁵

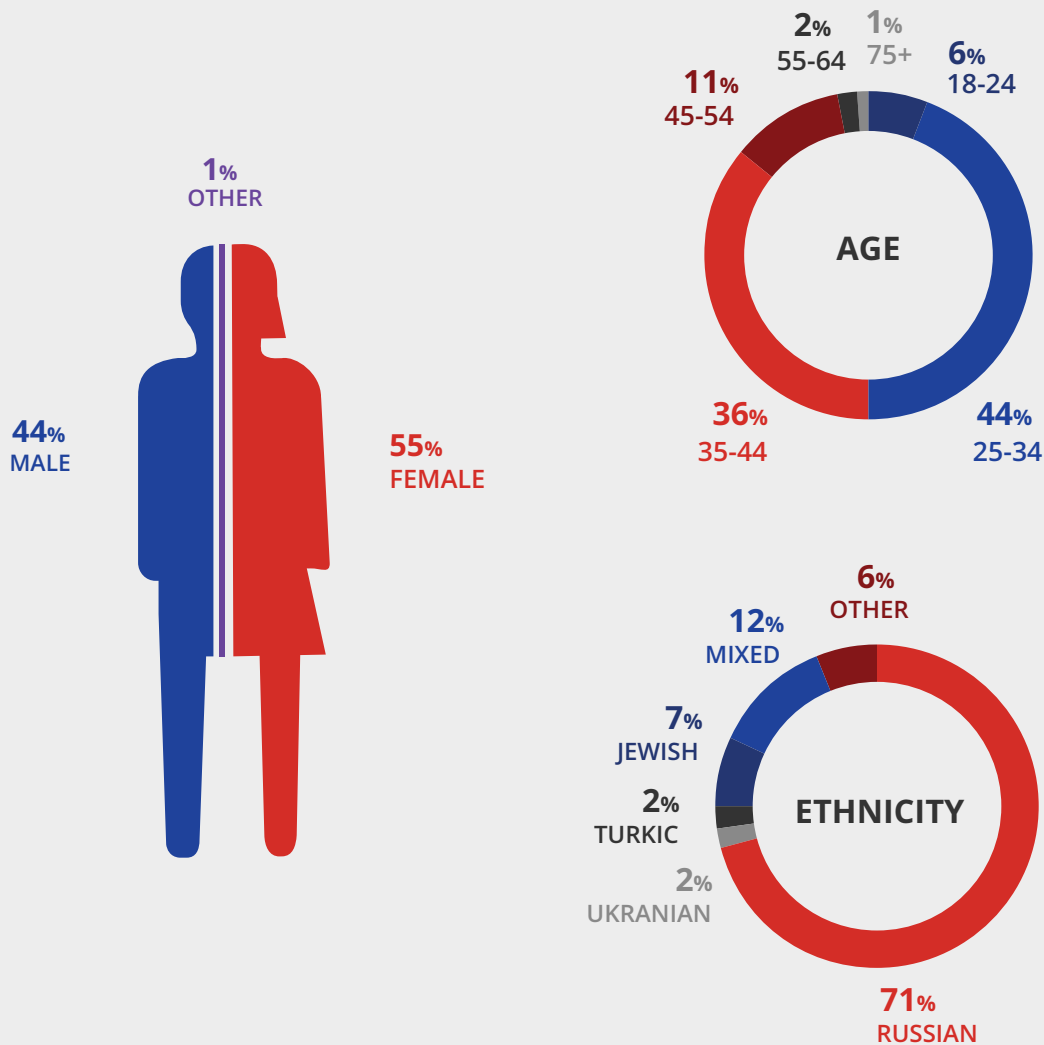
Our study confirms that the level of education of Russian émigrés is remarkably high. A large proportion of the survey respondents have studied social science (41 percent). After that come the humanities (23 percent), then natural and applied sciences (20 percent and 19 percent, respectively). Nine percent have training in the arts. These percentages add up to over 100 percent because many have degrees in more than one area which is another indicator of high qualifications. When the respondents left Russia, only 19 percent had less than a university degree, 45 percent had a bachelor/specialist degree, and remarkably, 36 percent had a master's degree or a PhD.⁵⁶ After their settlement abroad, the proportions shifted further toward graduate degrees, a sign of aspiration and dynamism. Only 10 percent now have less than a college degree, 47

54 A sign of the respondents' proactivity and openness compared to the average gender self-identification through surveys in Russia is that more than 1 percent of respondents marked their gender under “other.”

55 Further analysis of the parameters of this ethnic diversity could be a valuable addition to the discussions of Russian civic nationalism vs. Russian ethnic nationalism today.

56 This is much higher even in comparison with Brookings Institution information that generally any new arrivals to the United States are better educated (“about 45 percent were college educated, the analysis found, compared with about 30 percent of those who came between 2000 and 2009”). Sabrina Tavernise, “U.S. Has Highest Share of Foreign-Born Since 1910, With More Coming From Asia,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/us/census-foreign-population.html>

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



percent have a bachelor’s degree, and 43 percent have a master’s degree or a PhD.

The survey shows that the exodus largely came from the centers of educational excellence (47 percent from Moscow and 18 percent from Saint Petersburg). At least, that is where many émigrés lived immediately before leaving Russia. In all four locations, the FG participants emphasized the civic awareness-raising factor of better education. This includes the idea of the political push being stronger for “Muscovites who see

the dynamics in the country better.” At the same time, the FGs revealed that a growing proportion originated in other regions, “the capitals” being used as springboards for emigration. While this may suggest that prospective émigrés, by moving first to the capitals, sought primarily career and economic success, the FG data indicated that dissatisfaction with the political situation in the regions was also significant.

In terms of important economic characteristics, 58 percent of the surveyed new Russian émigrés “earned

enough to live comfortably”⁵⁷ back in Russia, and 72 percent were fully employed just before emigrating.⁵⁸ This influenced how they arrived, settled, and integrated in the new society. Better prepared for high-qualification jobs and entrepreneurship and mostly lacking a history of economic deprivation in their country of origin, the surveyed Russians predominantly immigrated to the United States and Europe legally, unlike some of the members of other recent immigration flows.

The main immigration channels of the Putin Exodus (some respondents did not pick an option, therefore the sum is under 100 percent):

- ◆ 25 percent obtained permanent residence after utilizing student visas, scholarships, or exchanges;
- ◆ 25 percent settled through high qualification recognition: work permit, Blue Card for EU, or business immigration;
- ◆ 17 percent immigrated through family reunion and marriage;
- ◆ 16 percent obtained political refugee status and political asylum;
- ◆ Fewer than 5 percent hinted at an indirect route of converting tourist/business visas into permanent immigrant status.

Their use of legal immigration pathways demonstrates the group’s participation in the global knowledge economy. This doesn’t contradict, however, Russian immigrants’ growing use of refugee status; many genuinely are refugees who felt unwelcome in their home country, as critical intelligence and some religious minorities or members of the LGBT community are often unappreciated by Putin’s regime.

FG members observed that Russia is full of “dissident lonely people who are tired of poverty but would not act.” But participants also confirmed that interest in emigration is growing in Russia: “I see it during my visits. People ask how and where to make it.” It is also understood that the range of various social groups to

Professional and educational “pull factors” have given way to “push factors,” like the discomfort of living in a country that limits political activity, human rights, and other freedoms.

which potential émigrés belong and regions and where they live is widening.

Drivers of the Putin Exodus

Emigration for Russians today is a much less formal process than in earlier times, and its context is significantly different. Unlike before, people do not have to inform the authorities of their leaving, one of the reasons why the Russian outgoing migration statistics is not reliable, or give up their Russian passports;⁵⁹ they may rent out their property in Russia and telecommute. In this context, the combination of negative and positive drivers may be quite complex and not always easily discernable.

However, our survey confirms that for the new emigration wave, professional and educational “pull factors” have given way to “push factors,” like the discomfort of living in a country that limits political activity, human rights, and other freedoms. The FGs showed that even for new émigrés seeking education and careers in the West, leaving Russia was frequently also a way to escape those problems and to settle in “free and progressive countries,” as a few FG members put it.

Like the 1990s wave, most of the new émigrés said that they are pessimistic about Russian economic prospects,⁶⁰ but the FGs’ discussions also highlighted some non-economic sociocultural push factors that make the current wave quite different. They are varied, from degradation of the education system to failing legal institutions, and from domestic violence to racism

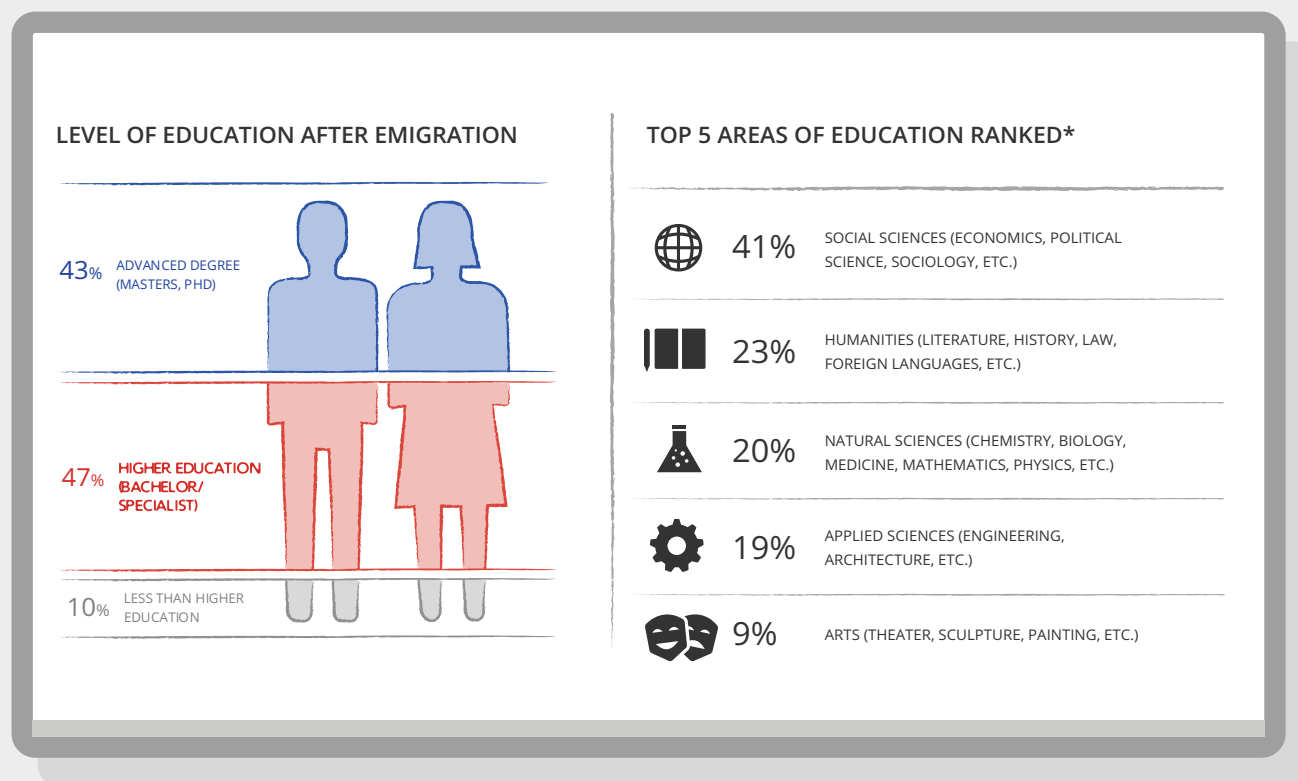
57 E.g. earning enough to cover basic expenses and discretionary items, such as vacation, entertainment, etc.

58 According to our survey, 17 percent of the respondents were students right before they left Russia. The top occupational areas in Russia among the respondents include: junior and mid-level managers (16 percent); IT and software engineering (10 percent); art, culture, and media professionals (6 percent); education, research, and postdoc (5 percent); analytics, finance, and accounting (5 percent); lawyers and other legal occupations (5 percent); journalists (4 percent).

59 The exception in our sample is Germany, where dual citizenship is significantly restricted.

60 54 percent of respondents say that the economic situation in Russia will become worse in the near future.

RESPONDENT LEVEL OF EDUCATION



* RESPONDENTS HAD AN OPTION TO CHOOSE MULTIPLE ANSWERS

and homophobia. The FGs revealed that sociocultural concerns often led to heightened political awareness, sparked by events such as the protests against the democracy crackdown that occurred after Putin's return as president in 2012, the aggression against Ukraine, or the assassination of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov.

Regional differences add a new dimension to Russia's present brain drain, separating those who are seeking an improvement in personal and professional opportunities from those fleeing from injustice. For the FG participants, the perceived disparity between "the capitals" and "the provinces" is greater than that between the rich and the poor.⁶¹ It includes many "little things" like "conversations, ecology, swearing, smoking, dirt, etc." or "difficulties in the province with foreign visas... while we want to be free to travel." At the same time, considering that "political repressions are as bad in

the province as they are in the capitals," the popular opinion in the regions is that America and the West in general are more desirable than Moscow and Saint Petersburg. People believe that in America "everything is well-developed...full of interesting jobs, while in Russia everything is in Moscow."

Those emigrating from Russia after 2000 are different from earlier émigrés because they experienced the early post-Soviet freedom of the 1990s and said they can't stand "the tension in the air" that now exists in Russia. Contrary to what many traditionalists say, they explained, "freedom is very important for Russians." The FG participants stressed that a healthier atmosphere exists in the West compared to Russia where, especially after 2012, "some politically vicious virus suddenly started to spread."

⁶¹ It is agreed by FGs participants that the standard of living is still higher in Russia than fifteen years ago, so it is not the main discontent.

The new Russian immigrants were comparatively well prepared for life and employment in a postindustrial society.

FG members reported that they have “generally no illusions about the West or Russia.” The cultural climate of the West is described as having transformed from a “Western sausage paradise” to a world focused on “self-fulfillment” and a higher order of “social security of politeness and humanism,” where “even with lower wages I have a fuller life.” One participant said that “the world outlook is closer to the American one for many who are between twenty and thirty-five. That’s why they strive to leave by any means possible, and they come not only from the IT sphere.” The cultural dichotomy between the West and Russia was also expressed by statements like, “even if there will be democracy in Russia, fifty years will pass until Russians win over sexism, patriarchy, conservatism, and traditionalism.”

Answering the question, “What is the new Russian emigration like?” the FGs in the four locations provided slightly different evaluations of its character. In the Bay Area, they pointed out that the Exodus is “very educated”; in New York, they said it’s “political”; in London, the adjective was “forced”; and in Berlin, it was “economic.” While for an observer the new diasporas in these different locations are quite unified along the lines of their high level of education, younger age, or political awareness, the most popular self-descriptor across different FGs turned out to be “diverse.” By saying this, our informants first of all demonstrate their perception of the new emigration as being pulled toward a wider range of destinations and displaying a wider spectrum of emigration drivers, from “better work” to “fleeing from repression.” Yet it can also be concluded that what drives the new emigrants the most is their criticism of the situation in Russia; they compare themselves to “those who came between seven and fifteen years ago and who sometimes like Putin; they think it is OK there.”

While politics as a theme generally remained at the center of FG conversations about emigration drivers, much of the discussion revolved around cultural and psychological rather than political or economic definitions of life before and after leaving Russia. The participants felt comfortable describing personal situations

and have developed critical ideas about freedom and justice departing from questions of values and culture.

Becoming part of the United States and Europe

According to the survey, the top occupational categories for the Russians in their new countries are IT and software (13 percent) and junior and mid-level managers (12 percent), while teaching and research have become less common (down to 4 percent, from 5 percent). The proportion of entrepreneurs remains around 5 percent and slightly growing, an indicator of the stability of the market-oriented focus of a significant proportion of the Russians. Only a few people retained their profession as lawyers. There is a remarkable growth of the number of self-employed: from under 1 percent to over 3 percent of the sample.

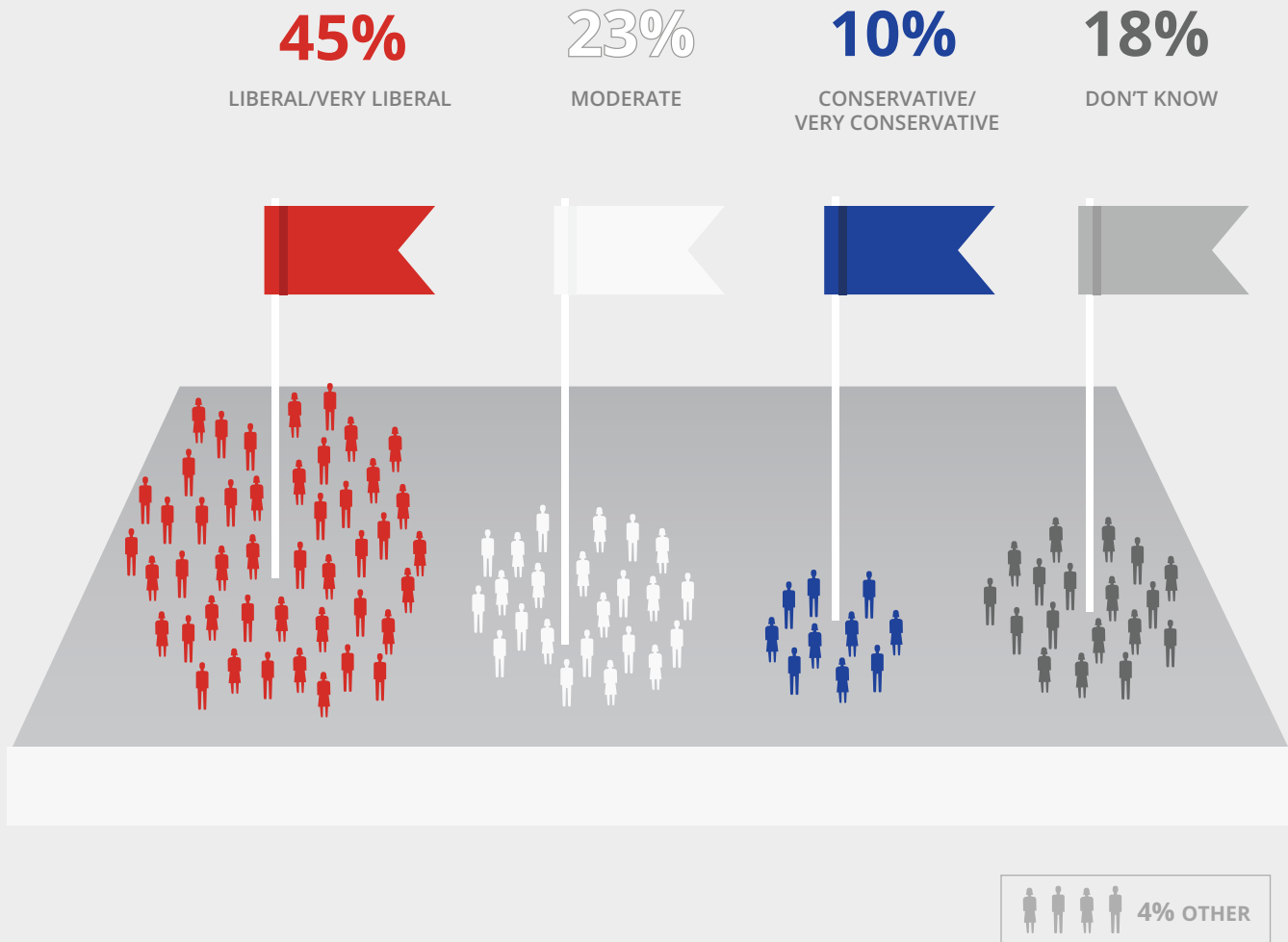
It may be striking that over 14 percent compared to 2 percent before emigration are currently unemployed or on maternity leave. This could be partly explained by the new situation of change and search for new opportunities while using the resources of savings or working spouse with a good income. The FGs do not show pessimism regarding work and income. The new Russian immigrants were comparatively well prepared for life and employment in a postindustrial society. Most survey respondents state that they have strong linguistic skills, and FGs demonstrate familiarity with the cultural and political discourses of their new countries. But despite their relative ease of assimilation compared to some other immigrants, the FGs illustrated that it does take an effort for them to adjust to life in the United States, Britain, or Germany, as many participants are still much immersed in “their Russian world.” However, they emphasized that the main thing that fosters adaptation is freedom, even despite the “notorious bureaucratism” they sometimes encounter and the limited possibility of expressing themselves politically regardless of whether or not they have become full citizens.

Those who have children often involve them early on in various aspects of social life in the new country, including preschool activities. For the FG participants, this involvement is not only an aim in itself for the child, but also a means to the parents’ own integration and achievement.

They are also steady users of traditional media and are active in social networks, often in two languages. As many as 52 percent follow the political life of their new country closely or somewhat closely; only 18 percent cannot define their allegiances according to the

POLITICAL PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

THE NEW WAVE OF RUSSIAN EMIGRATION IS INCREASINGLY POLITICIZED:
55% OF THE RESPONDENTS HAVE A GREAT DEAL OR A FAIR AMOUNT OF
INTEREST IN POLITICS.

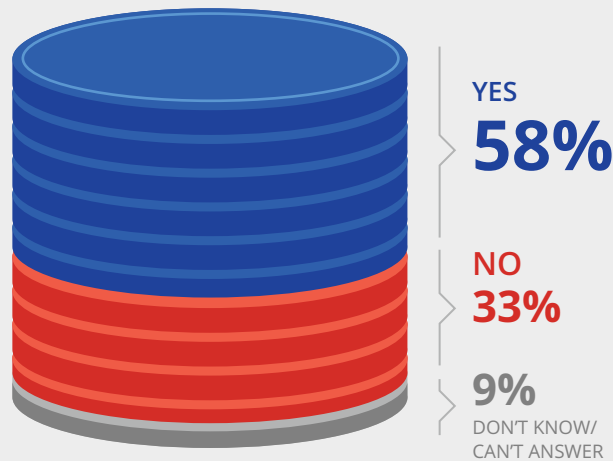


American, British, or German political spectrum. Ten percent said that they are conservative or very conservative, 23 percent are moderate, and 45 percent are liberal or very liberal. While the earlier Russian immigrants were generally more conservative and supportive of, for example, US Republicans, the Putin Exodus representatives are predominantly negative toward the politics of President Donald Trump or Brexit, and positive toward the politics of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Important characteristics of the Putin Exodus include intensive news consumption and communication preferences. First of all, an absolute majority of our sample uses the Internet as their main general news source. Interestingly, the difference in popularity between the new country's and Russian sources is very small: 78 percent compared to 74 percent. Second comes sharing news information with family, friends, and colleagues, again close in popularity between those in the new country (60 percent) and in Russia (58 percent).

RESPONDENT ECONOMICS

“ DID YOU EARN ENOUGH TO ‘LIVE COMFORTABLY’ IN RUSSIA TO COVER BASIC EXPENSES AND DISCRETIONARY ITEMS, SUCH AS VACATION, ENTERTAINMENT, ETC.? ”



TOP OCCUPATIONS BEFORE EMIGRATION



TOP OCCUPATIONS AFTER EMIGRATION



The new country's television as a main information source is much less popular (28 percent) and Russian television is preferred by just 12 percent of the respondents. The latter may lead to explaining how the Putin Exodus can be less susceptible to the Kremlin's propaganda compared to the previous wave. When asked about preferred sources for Russian news, 84 percent stated they accessed Russian sources online, and only 49 percent mentioned non-Russian ones. As of spring 2018, the most popular news outlet was the online magazine Meduza (56 percent), followed by Rain TV (34 percent) and the radio station Echo of Moscow (32 percent). The popularity of Meduza, an independent online newspaper in the Russian language based in Latvia, is an indicator of a higher level of trust toward a recently established liberal media outlet in exile.

Discussing Russia and Russian news for the new diaspora first of all means talking in person to friends or family outside Russia (62 percent); second is calling and messaging with friends and family in Russia (as many as 40 percent). Discussing Russian news during visits to Russia stands at 34 percent; also popular is the practice of talking to colleagues who may not be Russian about Russian news and current events (30 percent). Only 14 percent do not talk about Russian news with anyone. This appears to be radically different from the communication situation of the pre-2000 émigrés perceived by our FG participants as much less interested in the Russian affairs.

In comparing themselves to previous waves, the FG members in all four locations described themselves as younger, more educated and cultured, better-informed, more goal-oriented, integrating more easily, and more "connected to the present," while the 1990s immigrants were referred to as "remaining in the past" with "many Russians hating their receiving country."

In fact, members of the new Russian diaspora often seek to self-isolate from those who are like them: "Russians are proud to be Russians in Russia, but here they hide it: They [would] rather compete with each other, don't support like in other communities." Some FG participants insisted that "there is no Russian diaspora, just interest clubs, where people are united mostly through the language." This reflects the currently weak grounds for consolidation and collective action, despite the fact that the Russian language and culture are commonly at the core of individual communication.

While perhaps not unique to the new Russian émigrés, these characteristics may signal a global turn toward new patterns of highly educated postindustrial

migration in general. In particular, their preference for personal development over social links with other immigrants was highlighted by FG members: "The highbrow migrants want to be Russians as little as possible...to become international." It was also noted that "when we spend more time with Russians here, one can feel that it is a different Russianness than in Russia." This was interpreted by some as a desire "to get rid of the Russia trauma": breaking away from traditionalist, restrictive, and unfree social webs. In the survey, this sentiment was particularly reflected by the overwhelming enthusiasm toward Western cultural and political values, from support for entrepreneurship to balance of powers, and from LGBT rights to the defense of various freedoms.

Differences by location

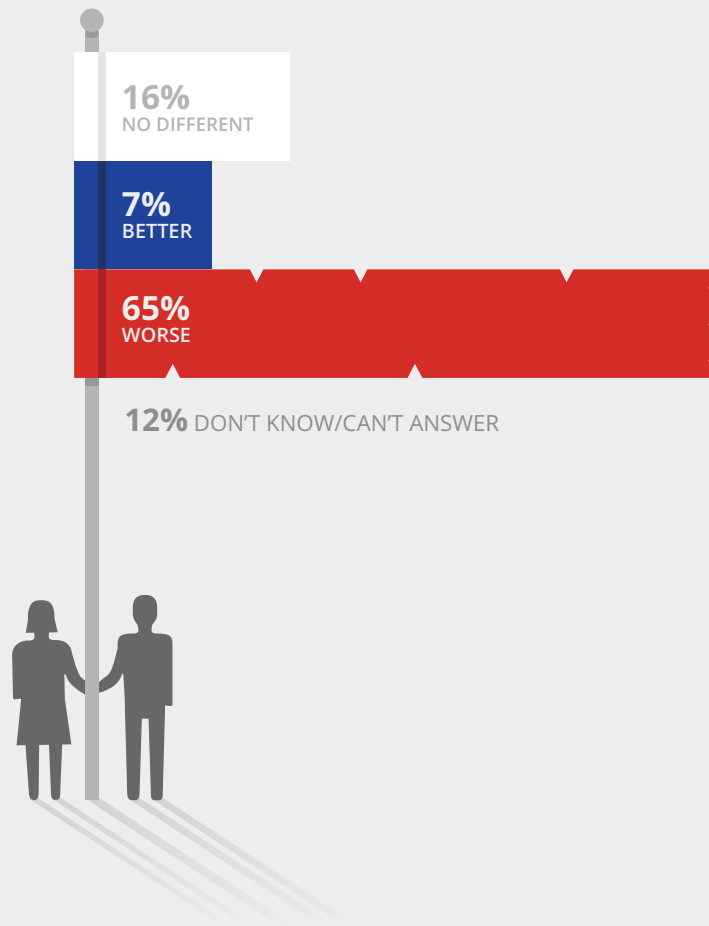
As observed in both the surveys and the FGs, the similarities between Russians in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York, London, and Berlin are much greater than their differences. This should be considered a sign of their relative homogeneity along the principal lines of economic, cultural, and political values and attitudes.

Yet some interesting specifics regarding the four locations have been identified that correspond to popular representations or anecdotal evidence. Although within the present study, this can be confirmed rather by the FGs than statistically, in terms of education, the Bay Area, to little surprise, has a higher proportion of those educated in the sciences. Interestingly, they also have more dependents. At the opposite end of the spectrum, more people are involved in creative professions in Berlin. Economically, Russians in Berlin show heavier use of unemployment benefits compared to the other locations, while those in London, not unexpectedly, more often report income from savings and property. New York has the lowest number of respondents stating income from wages and salaries and the highest who are self-employed. Although most of the Russians in this group lived relatively comfortably while in Russia, that number is smaller for those in Berlin. More people in New York and fewer in Berlin feel that they have better professional opportunities there compared to Russia.

There are certain differences between the locations in terms of how the Russians formally settle. Immigration through study, scholarships, and exchanges is more typical in Berlin; high-qualification workforce and business immigration are more prominent in the Bay Area and London. Those who moved to New York and Berlin more often had prior family connections to the new country. Berlin stands out as the destination for

PUTIN'S 2012 RETURN TO PRESIDENCY

“ DO YOU THINK THAT RUSSIA IS BETTER OR WORSE OFF
SINCE PUTIN'S 2012 PRESIDENCY? ”



repatriation for not only Russian Germans but also Russian Jews, while New York leads in the utilization of refugee status and political asylum. Tourist or business visas are more often converted into legal permanent immigration status in London.

One insight from the Berlin FG is the idea of “cultural immigration”: that is, many of the young Russians there picked Berlin because of an elective affinity for the intellectual and spiritual life in Germany. However, despite this affinity, in terms of the Russian immigrants’ participation in the everyday life of their new country through social networks, Berlin is least active while the Bay Area stands at the top of the range. There were also other elements of the FGs pointing at some differences by location. The Bay Area discussion was more about the cost of living, wages, bureaucracy, and quality of

services, while in New York it revolved around Putinism and problems of the rule of law in Russia. Londoners were keener to discuss practical problems in a similar way to Bay Area inhabitants, and Berliners were more concerned with the complexity of the diaspora and the presence of Chechens from the Russian Caucasus as a source of crime.

New émigrés’ views of Putinism and international politics

The idea of the Putin Exodus as being more political compared to previous waves was well-documented in the FGs. The understanding that more young and active people now leave Russia often frames the self-perception of the new émigrés: “The younger you were when

RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION

“ DO YOU THINK THAT THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION CARES MOSTLY ABOUT ITS OWN INTERESTS OR MOSTLY ABOUT THE INTERESTS OF ORDINARY RUSSIANS? ”

I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION CARES MOSTLY ABOUT ITS OWN INTERESTS.

65%



I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION CARES MOSTLY ABOUT THE INTERESTS OF ORDINARY RUSSIANS.

1%



5%

I SOMEWHAT BELIEVE THAT THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION CARES MOSTLY ABOUT THE INTERESTS OF ORDINARY RUSSIANS.

I SOMEWHAT BELIEVE THAT THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION CARES MOSTLY ABOUT ITS OWN INTERESTS.

21%

REASONS FOR EMIGRATION

43%

LEFT RUSSIA BEFORE

◀ **2012**

57%

LEFT RUSSIA SINCE

2012 ▶



TOP 6 REASONS FOR LEAVING RUSSIA*

40% GENERAL POLITICAL CLIMATE

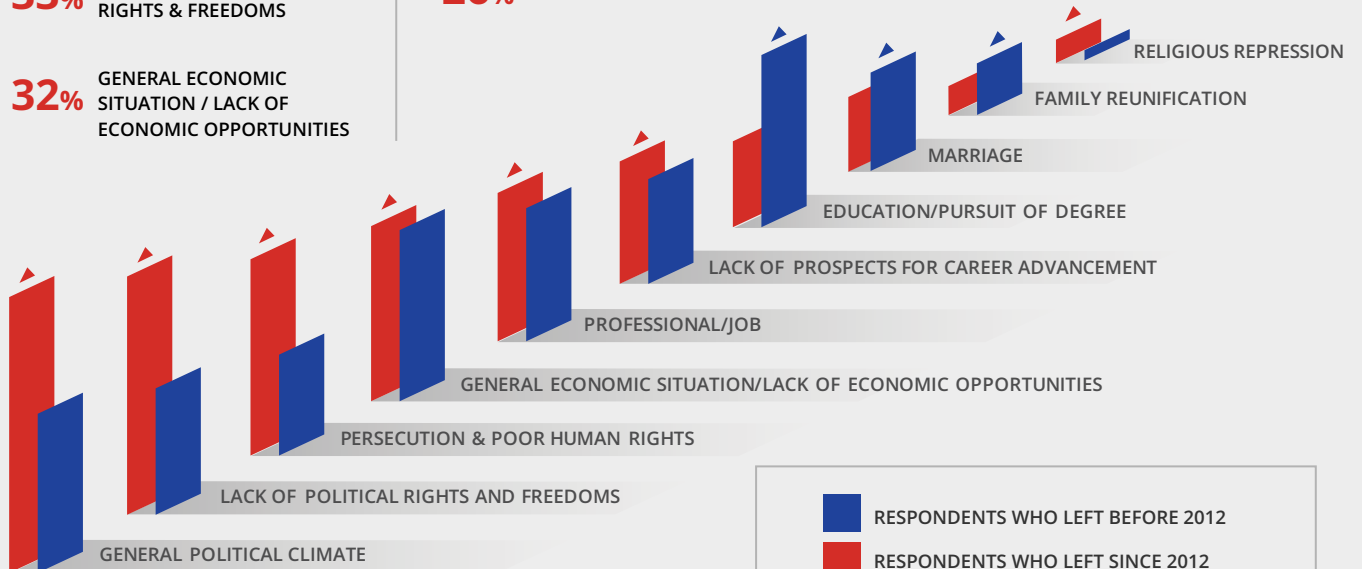
29% PERSECUTION & POOR HUMAN RIGHTS

24% EDUCATION/PURSUIT OF DEGREE

33% LACK OF POLITICAL RIGHTS & FREEDOMS

26% PROFESSIONAL / JOB

32% GENERAL ECONOMIC SITUATION / LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

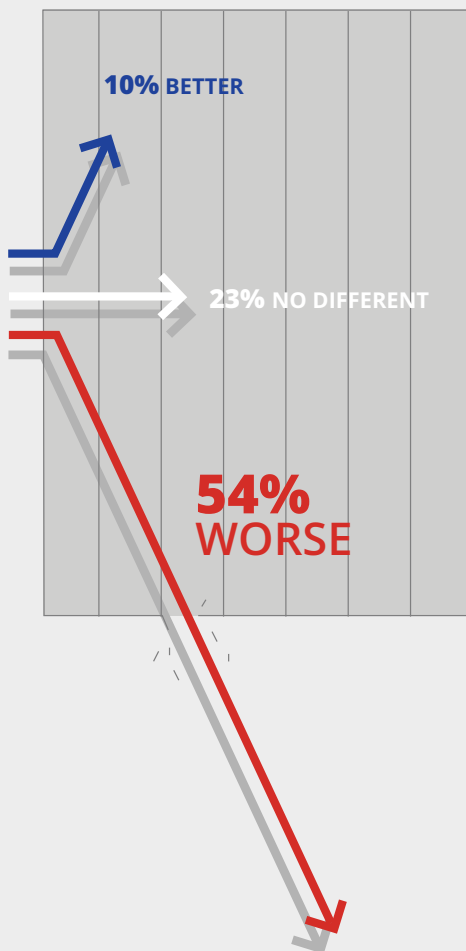


* Respondents had an option to choose multiple answers

THE PUTIN EXODUS

RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY

“ DO YOU THINK THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY WILL GET BETTER, WORSE, OR STAY THE SAME IN THE COMING YEARS? ”



emigrating, the more negative you are to what is going on in Russia.” Because of the age factor, this may imply potentially stronger durability of anti-Putinism or anti-authoritarianism among those who left the country recently.

The survey also shows much criticism of Putin’s regime, knowledge of the anti-Putin “non-systemic opposition,” and significant support for the latter. This is conditioned by the fact that 89 percent of the survey respondents follow Russian news.⁶² Even though nearly half emigrated before 2012, 68 percent of the whole sample are aware of the relatively new phenomenon of the non-systemic opposition, with only 12 percent knowing nothing about it. As many as 72 percent approve of the non-systemic opposition represented by, above all, Alexei Navalny, who has been nationally famous as an anti-corruption activist since 2010 and recently created the only nationwide opposition network. The historically popular “systemic” liberal Yabloko party has only 37 percent approval among the groups,⁶³ while the communists and Zhirinovsky’s LDPR, as Kremlin puppets, have negligible support.

Many of the respondents’ views are consistent with the ideals of Western liberal democracy, including decentralization of power and freedom of the press. As many as 69 percent of them oppose Putin’s “power vertical” and 91 percent are critical toward the Kremlin’s control of the media. Eighty-six percent believe that the Putin administration “cares mostly about its own interests” and only 6 percent believe that it cares about the people.⁶⁴ Regarding the problem of economic corruption, most respondents are convinced that having a “krysha” (state-criminal protection) is what matters most for business success in Russia.

The survey shows 65 percent of émigrés thinking that Russia is worse off since Putin’s 2012 return, 81 percent looking for someone who would offer an alternative solution to Russia’s problems after the 2018 presidential election, and 69 percent optimistic about Navalny’s participation in them. The FGs repeatedly labeled Putin a “thief” and an “international criminal,” with the concern that he is perceived too positively in certain social and political circles in the West. In connection with that,

62 This is slightly higher than the proportion of those following the domestic news of their new country.
 63 The data was collected before the March 2018 presidential elections, where Yabloko demonstrated an increased dependence on the Kremlin; its approval rate today is even lower.
 64 Some of our survey questions were designed to repeat those of the surveys conducted by Levada Center, the relatively independent pollster in Russia. It will be interesting to follow our analysis with some comparisons of the opinions of the Russians abroad with the Levada findings.

talking about the place of Russia in Western popular discourse, it was recognized that it is far from central, quite contrary to the clichés of Kremlin propaganda. Yet, as the FG members noted, “many ordinary Westerners love Russia not as a state but as a culture and a people.”

Fifty-two percent of respondents favored sanctions against Russia due its aggression in Ukraine, while 34 percent were against. The FGs demonstrated a certain breadth and depth in understanding relations between Russia and the West and the place of Russia in the world. Typical statements were, “it is going to be complicated,” “people in Russia don’t know how to achieve better relations,” and “Putin’s interests contradict the interests of Russia internationally and generally.” There was a fair amount of criticism of Western politicians’ indecisiveness toward the Kremlin, with the participants pointing out that “they are afraid of Russia’s collapse leading to more crime, drug flows, Islamism.” Notably, a majority of survey respondents in the United States and Germany agreed that the Kremlin meddled in the American and German elections, but fewer than half of those in Britain thought that its meddling affected Brexit. This may reflect the fact that at the time of our survey, there was not much reporting in the Western media about Kremlin interference in the Brexit vote. Regarding the Kremlin’s manipulations in general, the FG participants pointed out that “we cannot afford to have so many Russians living in the United States and supporting Putin, but America is passive.”

As to potential Western support for the Russian democratic transition, FG participants recalled “a history of success of cultural projects through forming proactive groups in Russia” and humanitarian aid in the 1990s. Some claimed that “the West helps through its very existence, so that people have a chance to see that life can be different,” that “there can be, more importantly, not so much material abundance but freedom.” They also wondered if a way could be found to stop the Putin’s cronies’ corrupt capital flow to the West: “Even if theft in Russia continues to a degree, this ban alone would make Russians bathe in gold.”

The importance of the 2012 divide

The new Russian emigration believes strongly that Putin’s rule is a major obstacle to Russia’s development. This is a critical understanding for them. The FGs revealed the opinions of those who have been a part of this dynamic: “I was twenty-two in 2000 and I voted for Putin; I feel responsible and am now totally against

Putin, especially after Nord-Ost,⁶⁵ and that’s why I feel Russian here.” This remark could be an indicator of a new Russian democratic identity formation in diaspora in relation to significant turning points in recent history. The FGs in particular confirmed the idea that the year 2012, with its new crackdown on democracy, represents an important historical divide that illustrates the growing politicization of the Putin Exodus.

To trace this, certain differences were tested during the survey analysis between the sub-wave that arrived before 2012 (Cohort A) and the group that came in 2012 or later (Cohort B). Cohort A represents 43 percent of the total sample; Cohort B represents 57 percent. Some differences between them can be seen through the survey demographics: there is a larger proportion of highly educated but still relatively young people among those who have left Russia since 2012, as well as more active mid-career professionals. By comparison, among those who emigrated before 2012, there are more young people with just a high school diploma who left Russia with their parents.

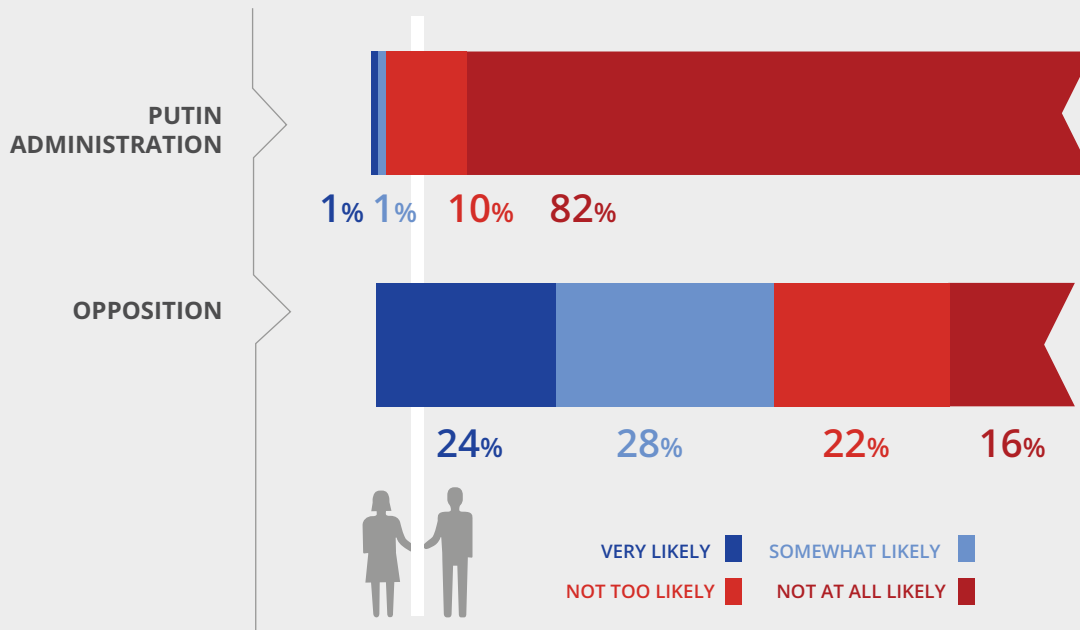
Interestingly, while “general political climate” and “lack of political rights and freedoms” in the bottom figure on p.29 are the top push factors for both Cohorts A and B, their frequency practically doubles in Cohort B. We consider it a clear sign of the politicization of the Exodus after Putin’s return as president in 2012. The pursuit of education as a motivating factor goes down from position 1 for Cohort A to position 8 for Cohort B. This can indicate a growing concern with Russia’s political and economic problems overshadowing simple career considerations; in other words, a growing prevalence of push factors over pull factors. From 2012, there is a significantly greater proportion of those who left their “economically comfortable life” in Russia, with “general economic situation” as the main reason for leaving dropping from position 2 to position 4. Interestingly, “religious repression” stays at position 12, though it is mentioned more often by Cohort B representatives.

The Putin Exodus group has high qualifications in general, but Cohort B has more people with degrees, especially terminal ones. At the same time, for this part of the sample, fewer of the degrees are obtained in applied sciences and more in the social sciences and humanities. More of those emigrating later said they are “very interested” in Russian politics and stated their “right liberal” views, whereas the number of those with socialist, monarchist, and nationalist views is lower. Cohort B members expressed stronger beliefs that life

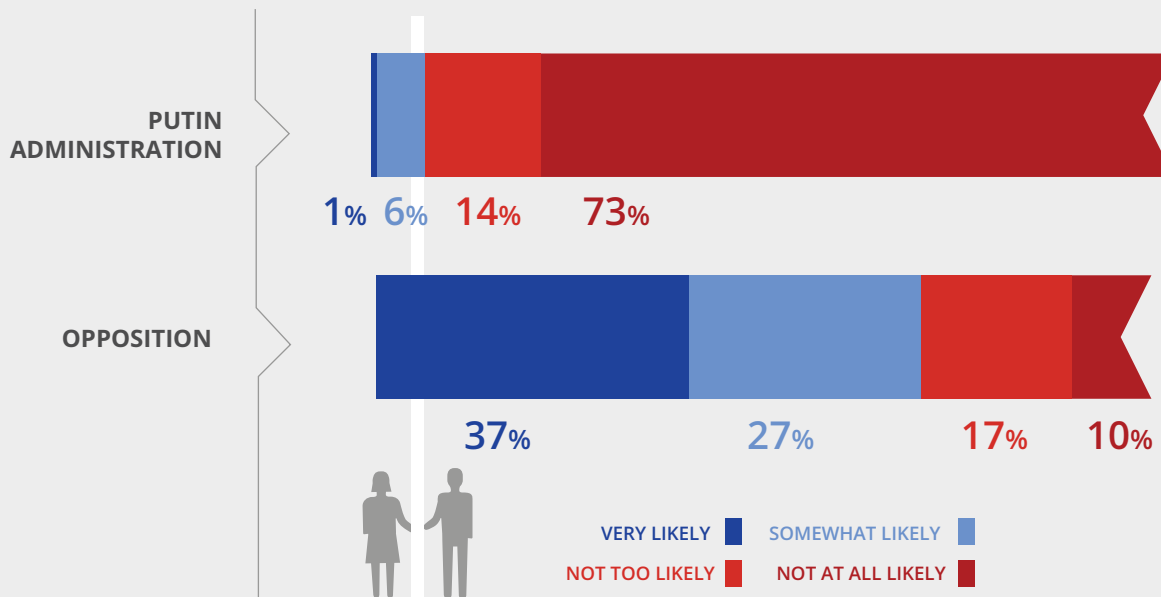
65 The mishandling of the “Nord-Ost” theater terrorist attack by Putin was particularly mentioned by Boris Nemtsov, the assassinated opposition leader, as a turning point in his attitude toward the Kremlin’s internal politics.

SUPPORT FOR THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION VS. ANTI-PUTIN NON-SYSTEMIC OPPOSITION

“ HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ACTIVITY IN SUPPORT OF THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION/A RUSSIAN OPPOSITIONAL FORCE? ”

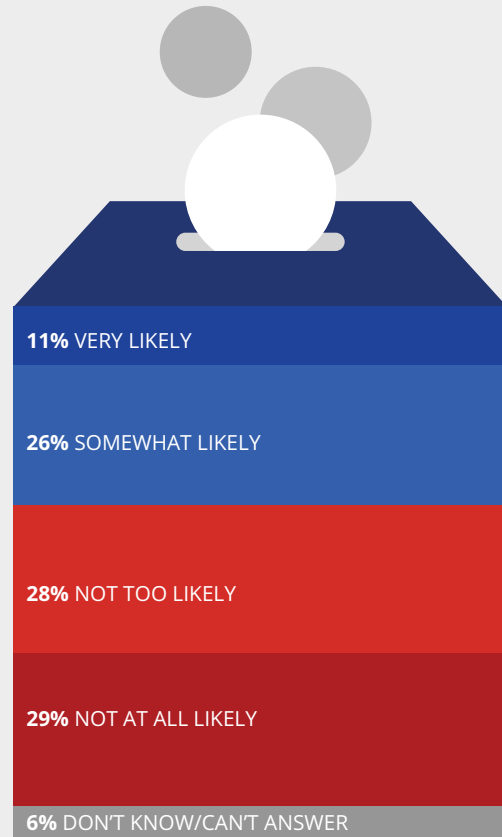
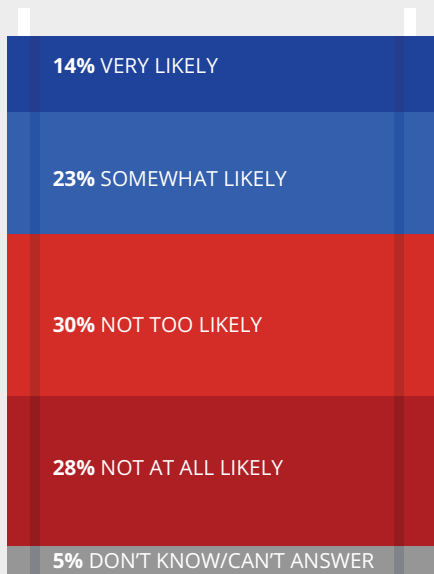


“ HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE PUTIN ADMINISTRATION/ A RUSSIAN OPPOSITIONAL FORCE TO YOUR FAMILY AND/OR FRIENDS? ”



SUPPORT FOR THE ANTI-PUTIN NON-SYSTEMIC OPPOSITION

“ HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO OPENLY PARTICIPATE
IN AN OPPOSITIONAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN? ”



“ HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO DONATE TO
AN OPPOSITIONAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN? ”

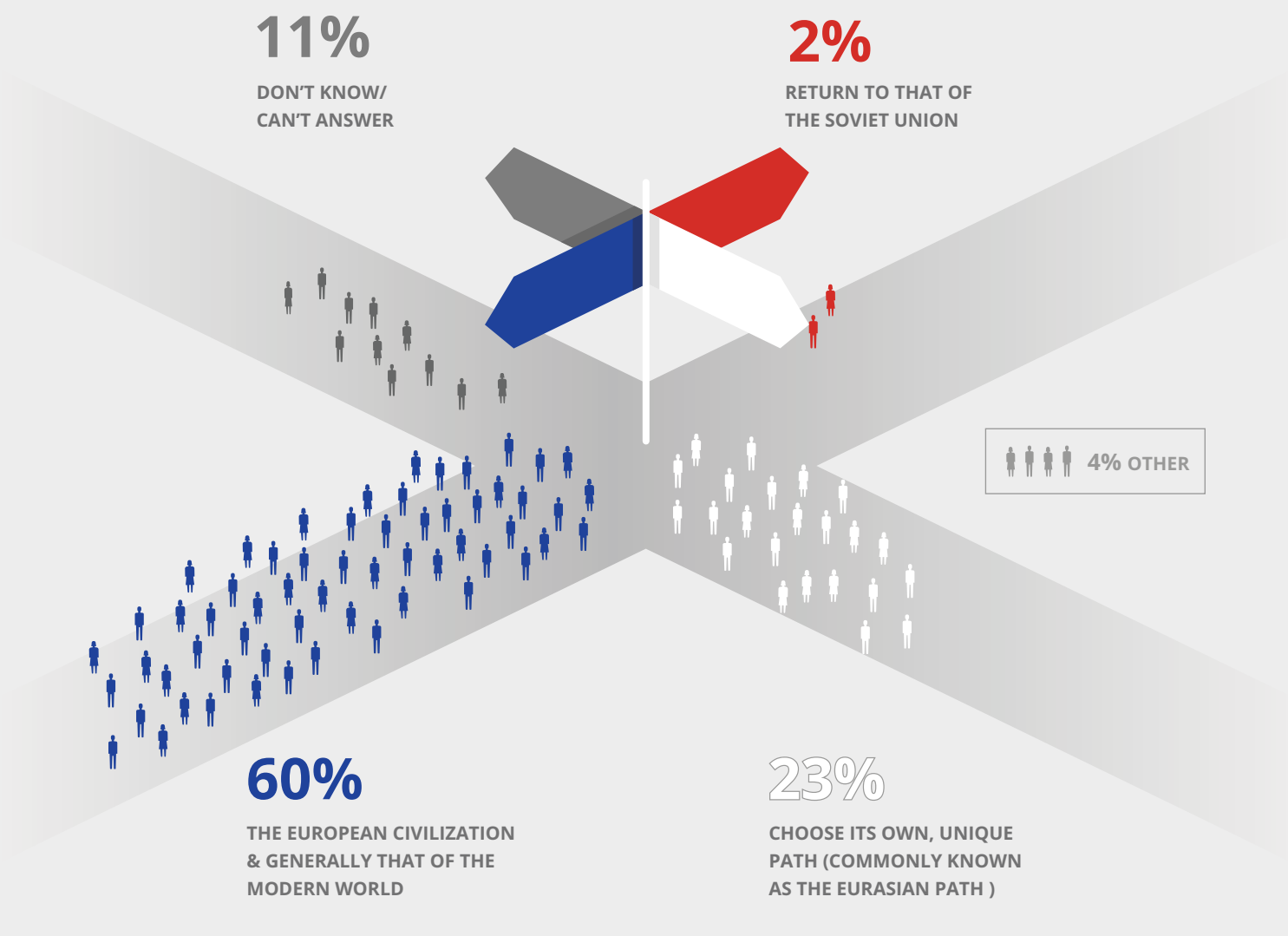


in Russia has deteriorated and that the economy will continue to decline. At the same time, more of them compared to Cohort A have plans to return to Russia should the situation change for the better. While some in Cohort B think that economic improvement in Russia may prompt their return, more think that it is political rather than economic improvement that would encourage such a decision.

Given the differences between the cohorts, one can rightly wonder whether Cohort B's growing political awareness can be translated into political persuasions and even some sort of political involvement. The survey shows that Cohort B is more interested in following the Russian news “very closely” (57 percent compared to 43 percent for Cohort A). It is obvious that its connection with people in Russia through social networks is also stronger, though this may be due in part to the

GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS RUSSIAN POLITICS

“ WHICH HISTORIC DIRECTION SHOULD RUSSIA CHOOSE? ”



group’s shorter period of time away from Russia. In this regard, it is significant that Putin’s disapproval rate and the visibility of the non-systemic opposition, including the political fight of Alexei Navalny, are higher for Cohort B. Further, in terms of political participation, Cohort B members are more likely to anonymously donate to or openly participate in a campaign

of anti-Putinist forces. Compared to the earlier cohort, more of them believe that popular protests can actually cause political change. In terms of passive political resistance, more Cohort B members were planning to protest Putin’s “self-reappointment” by boycotting the March 2018 presidential election in Russia.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ This is true of the London and Berlin samples only, as the question reflecting Alexei Navalny’s idea of an election boycott was added to the questionnaire after the NYC and San Francisco Bay Area surveys had been completed.

Is Russia's future bleak?⁶⁷

Many respondents think that the situation in Russia can only become worse economically, culturally, and politically. FG members have made statements like, “Today’s country is just a not fully collapsed Russian empire,” “Russia has outdated arms and is hardly a superpower, as the Syrian affair proves,” and “Russians may not accept democracy; there may be a civil war with Western soft intervention seen by some as aggression.” The picture is not entirely pessimistic, though: Considering Russian society’s passive and atomized condition, being aware that “generations of free people are needed to breed citizens,” many Putin Exodus members believe that “these are the younger Russians who give hope, since they don’t know the previous limitations.” Many FG participants said they believe in “slow, positive changes in the course of twenty to thirty years,” thanks to the “global standardization of social goals and values.” They said that, in this sense, “the new generation is closer to anywhere in the world, so this may lead to organic changes in Russia.”

Evaluating the political behavior of ordinary Russian citizens today, most survey respondents think that “the majority of Russians have no interest in politics and want no changes” (57 percent). This pessimism is countered by the 28 percent who believe that “the majority of Russians have good will but the regime will not allow for changes.” Considering a national idea or ways into the future, only 23 percent (less than surveys conducted in Russia show) said they think that the country “should choose its own, unique (Eurasian) path,” while 60 percent stand for “European civilization and generally that of the modern world.” Only 2 percent suggest a return to the path of the Soviet Union. Quite contrary to the Kremlin imperialist and revanchist world outlook, many FG participants said they think that “Russia can become like Ukraine, the Baltic states, or Eastern Europe.”

It can be concluded from both the survey and the FG responses that politics is decisive for Russia’s future: 77 percent of survey respondents do not believe that positive economic change in Russia is possible without political change. The FG members mentioned a spectrum of scenarios, from “only a revolution will help” to “soft transition of power,” but generally agreed that only the end of Putin’s regime with subsequent lustrations will

lead to things like “a real federation without blind submission to the center,” a drastic reduction in corruption in which “Russian money works inside Russia and for Russia,” or “Russia finding its optimal place in the world without confrontation and isolation but with its own voice.” Some participants think that a radical political change would be worth the country’s “ceasing to exist in its current form” when “its sheer size strips the people of the sense of responsibility.”

The FGs were a helpful source of views on the Russian human capital loss. Surprisingly, some participants thought that the brain drain is overrated and that Russia will recover from the effects. At the same time, the New York and Berlin FGs somewhat doubted the quality of the “lost brains” since “many new immigrants are stupid Putinists...waving the St. George ribbon.”⁶⁸ Overall, however, it was agreed that immigration to places like the San Francisco Bay Area and the loss of active entrepreneurs can be labeled a brain drain. As an important point, the FG respondents pointed out that “it is too bad that the West doesn’t care whether it gains from the Russian brain drain.”

The new Russian émigrés are generally very positive about maintaining their connections with Russia, and they do care about its future. It is to be remembered that, due to their dim view of Putin’s policies, 88 percent of the respondents currently have no plans to go back to the country, with only 5 percent willing to return if the economic conditions improve while the political situation remains the same. However, 13 percent said they would consider going back to Russia following political improvements, even if the economic situation remains the same.

Countering propaganda and fear

The FG discussions provided a wealth of new themes for investigation that do not quite fit the subsection headings above. Some of them can be grouped together as celebrating fear and passivity: “The first emigration dissolved, so ours may be useless in the long run,” or, “Today’s Russian mainstream is ‘gopota.’”⁶⁹ But many themes encourage understanding and proactivity. The FGs brought forward metaphors like, “We are Russia in reserve,” meaning that émigrés hold the key to a better

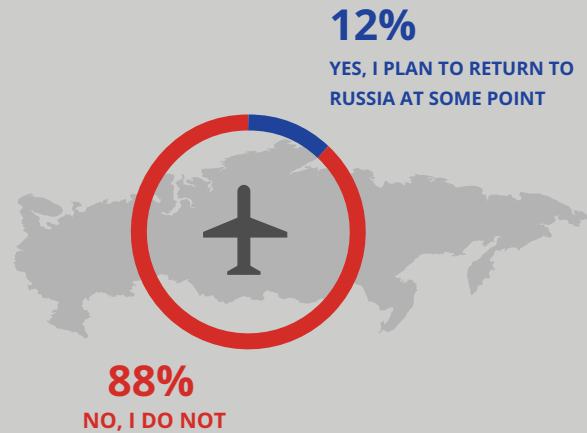
67 As a drastically pessimistic scenario, in October 2017, the human rights activist Pavel Chikov famously sketched out ten points regarding the new Putin’s presidential term. Pavel Chikov, “Putin’s Next Term in Office- A Short Political Forecast,” *Rights in Russia*, October 10, 2017, <http://www.rightsinrussia.info/advisory-council/advisory-committee/chikov-25>.

68 The symbol of the World War II victory hijacked by the Kremlin for the purposes of political control.

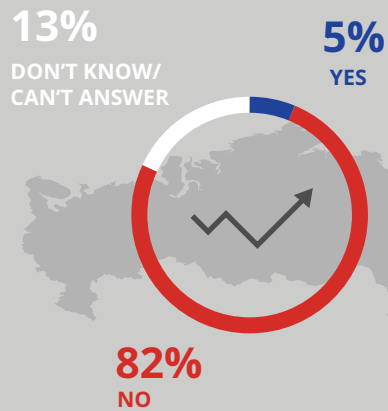
69 *Gopota* is a pejorative stereotype describing a particular subculture in Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics to refer to young men or women of lower-class suburban areas coming from families of poor education and income. Tatyana Nikitina, *Толковый Словарь Молодёжного Сленга*. (Moscow: Издательство АСТ, 2007), 256.

FUTURE PLANS

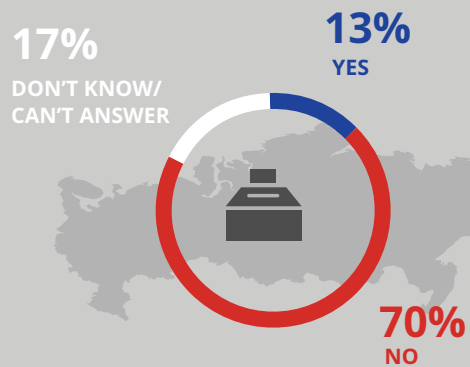
“ DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE PLANS TO RETURN TO RUSSIA, OR NOT? ”



“ WOULD YOU CONSIDER RETURNING TO RUSSIA IF **ECONOMIC** CONDITIONS IMPROVED BUT THE **POLITICAL** SITUATION REMAINED THE SAME? ”



“ WOULD YOU CONSIDER RETURNING TO RUSSIA IF THE **POLITICAL** CONDITIONS IMPROVED BUT THE **ECONOMIC** SITUATION REMAINED THE SAME? ”



country through democratic politics. In a future follow-up study, it will be important to understand how the balance between such passivity and activity is changing. In addition to the comparison between Cohorts A and B, an increasing politicization of Russians in the United States and Europe is taking place, as one can observe through media and social networks analysis. As an example, the Congress of Russian Americans is now countered by anti-Kremlin informal groups of Russians and Russian-speakers living in the United States. Evidence is growing that they are trying to self-organize on democratic grounds in line with Western values of freedom and justice.

The FG participants pointed out that the Kremlin's propaganda manipulations in the United States and Europe are becoming more systematic: "Although I know only fifteen Germans who support Putin, my trainer regularly lectures us on how Russian politics is right; often love of Russia is connected to anti-Americanism and the myth of multi-polarity." It is understood that the Russian diaspora in the West is multifaceted and a part of it directly or indirectly serves the Kremlin's strategy of disrupting Western democracy and world stability in order to sustain an archaic "rule over an ex-empire." Discussing active steps to counter the Kremlin's manipulation of the Russian diaspora while demonstrating reservations about freedom of speech, FG participants supported the idea of somehow disarming the Kremlin's media actions that harm both Russian immigrant communities and the interests of their host countries. A more concrete suggestion, however, was made targeting some members of the diaspora, especially those who emigrated before 2000: "Putin support would evaporate if such Russians were stripped of their Russian passports."

Some new émigrés realize that a way to oppose the Kremlin's false patriotism is to fight what specialists

would call revanchism or resentment, a term useful for describing a post-imperial syndrome. In addition to this, the FGs demonstrated that a new type of counter-imperialist feeling projected into the future is being formed, namely "a nostalgia of a free Russia." This feeling resonated with some respondents' fears of a "migrant syndrome," specifically referred to by members of the San Francisco Bay Area FG, understood as "a distortion, with time and distance, of the image of Russia to the worse." Other major recurring themes that point to a blending of cosmopolitan personal achievement and social responsibility, including democratically-understood Russian patriotism, are those of "active position in life," wider entrepreneurship, and understanding freedom as not being free. "We can do something to change Russia...the refrigerators [of Russian consumers] becoming empty will help to fight the Kremlin TV," FG participants observed. "We can use our authority on social networks"; "The recent Moscow municipal elections are a positive outcome"; "Let's support small steps to little freedoms, then expect a big one."

As a sign of proactivity, the FG participants eagerly responded to invitations to complement the discussed themes with those of their own choice. They expressed great interest in a continued conversation about their lives in the new countries, questions of citizenship, their children's future, and integration into the new society while "remaining Russians." Serious issues, especially for those in New York and Berlin, seem to be their lack of involvement in the political life of their new countries and the problem of "political representation, which is very poor even compared to the Ukrainians, not to mention the Chinese, and the Hispanics." The sense of weakness of intra-Russian ties in diaspora is overrun by a desire "to matter and do more for the new country," alongside continued support for the ideals of freedom, justice, and democracy.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

In the previous section, while describing research findings, we made some suggestions as to why certain percentages come up in the survey results and what they mean for analyzing the specifics of the Putin Exodus. In addition to that, the FG participants' perceptions are very telling to convey the difference. They confirm the surveyed population's young age and higher qualifications compared to the previous emigration waves. Both the FGs and the survey suggest that the new émigrés demonstrate a higher degree of social criticism and a better awareness of what is going on in the global world.

There is an interesting combination of new political, economic, and cultural factors highlighted by the study. On the one hand, there is a strong pushing driver of growing political repressions and fear under Putin's regime. Some personal FG stories testify to physical and economic threats that the people saw or felt before they left Russia. There is a growing use of the refugee immigration channel since the bright and critical are unwelcomed by the Putin's regime.

On the other hand, the attractiveness of the destination countries is more often associated with better prospects of talent application than with improving personal economic prospects as many point out that the employment situation and financial security back in Russia was generally not a problem, "not like in the 1990s." However, given certain individual financial security before leaving the country, it was not a dominant theme during the FGs, the fact remains that two thirds of entrepreneurs in Russia have closed their businesses since 2013 and many joined the emigration⁷⁰. Even more so, the unifying positive driver for the new wave is the importance of freedom for Russians.

Culturally speaking, the new émigrés are characterized by a new level of tolerance to otherness, including LGBT, closer affinity with the western ideas of personal freedoms and global humanism, and better communicative skills necessary for integration into open democratic societies. In general, the new emigration is based

more on cultural and entrepreneurial motivations rather than traditional economic or purely political ones.

The ways to adapt in the new countries are also different from the previous waves. At the time around the collapse of the Soviet Union, the massive refugee and repatriation mechanisms with strong Western governmental support were at the core of adaptation. Now Russian émigrés are or have to be more entrepreneurial and individualistic. They realize that they should be open and proactive in job search or wider community life. Their life strategies in general can be seen as woven into or representative of the new patterns of postindustrial intellectual migration which is slowly changing the global society.

As the data in the research findings section shows, the degree of interest of the new Russian immigrants in US, British, and German, as well as Russian, politics is quite high and going up from the first to the second cohort. Apart from being overwhelmingly anti-Putinist, as we discovered, almost three-quarters of the survey participants approve of the "non-systemic" opposition in Russia, preferring it to the "systemic" liberal Yabloko party—not to mention the Kremlin puppet parties. We cannot be sure if this takes place just because they get their news mostly from easily available "oppositionist" sources like Meduza and Rain TV. What is more likely is that there is an interplay between what they choose as news channels on the basis of their views at the moment of emigration and the current effects of such media. This, as well as continuing communication with Russians in Russia, may well facilitate their critical stance towards Putin's Russia. In this respect, one can argue that we are dealing with a certain politicization of this population.

The politicization of the Putin Exodus continues as new civic initiatives emerge. One of them is the strong reaction of a bunch of Russian émigré organizations to Putin's cyberwar against western democracies.⁷¹ In general, in the last year or so, new phenomena have become more easily observable regarding civic

70 Yulia Krylova, *Corruption and the Russian Economy: How Administrative Corruption Undermines Entrepreneurship and Economic Opportunities*. (Routledge, 2018).

71 American Russian-Speaking Association for Civil and Human Rights, Russian-Speaking Community Council, International Indigenous Fund for Development and Solidarity "Batani", "Statement for the Press," Facebook, December 19, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y3m8kugu>. This is a continuation of the stories about Kremlin's Facebook manipulations involving the diaspora: Kate Conger and Charlie Savage, "How Fake Influence Campaigns on Facebook Lured Real People," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2018, <http://tinyurl.com/yc2guql8>; Nicholas Fandos and Kevin Roose, "Facebook Identifies an Active Political Influence Campaign Using Fake Accounts," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/yaxf9cra>

The new emigration is based more on cultural and entrepreneurial motivations rather than traditional economic or purely political ones.

engagement of some Russians living in the United States or Germany who try to oppose global illiberalism.⁷² This relates our research to the prospects of developing new Russian emigration studies when a wider range of research methods can be employed. As we explored some of these possibilities through personal communications in the course of the project, apart from surveys and focus groups, these methods can range from expert interviews to consultations with Russian community leaders, and from social networks analysis to specific case studies.⁷³

Despite the clearly expressed pessimism about the future of Russia under Putin, there is a sense of some engagement and hope. At least part 'ly this can be explained by the new émigrés being not just better-informed in the age of the Internet and more frequent travel, but being culturally and psychologically more representative of the wider Russian society compared to the 1990s emigration. They do not use the niche ethnic emigration or “mail bride” channels as much, rather capitalizing on a wide range of occupational expertise which has widened across the whole Russian society in the post-Soviet period. Today, a broader range of not only professions, but also political views, cultural and religious frameworks, and Russian regions themselves feeds the Putin Exodus.

While they are more representative of the entire Russian society than before, one may still want to differentiate the recent émigrés and those planning to emigrate from most of the Russian population today.⁷⁴ Quoting known theories, the historical process has been pushing this growing proportion of the Russian

society up the Maslow's hierarchy of needs from survival to self-expression as well as along Inglehart's cultural map of the world toward the cluster of open democratic societies.⁷⁵

Policy recommendations

The Putin Exodus, the most recent wave of Russian emigration, is growing in significance. It has serious implications both for the internal policies of the United States and its partners, and for international efforts in defense of liberal democracy and geopolitical stability.

The Kremlin's revanchist agenda represents a growing threat to transatlantic security. Today, this problem includes the issue of Russian emigration as well. This emigration represents a loss of human capital for Russia and its hopes of developing an advanced economy. So long as the Kremlin pursues aggressive policies, this emigration is a net plus for the West as it has no interest in a thriving Russian economy as a sturdy basis for Kremlin aggression. But a Russia that turns away from revisionism would have a need for the talents of its émigrés; and the West has an interest in the prosperity of such a Russia. This argues for encouraging the maintenance of contacts between the émigrés and their country of exodus.

Another consideration is that a small portion of the Russian emigration is sympathetic to the Kremlin efforts to disrupt the liberal democratic order; and the Kremlin is certainly sending agents to join this emigration. The West should be mindful of this challenge, but careful not to overreact. This is not a major threat, but a manageable intelligence matter.

The Putin Exodus holds additional opportunities for the West. First, the overwhelming majority of the new Russian émigrés, as reflected by the studied group, are comfortable in the global postindustrial culture and have a strong allegiance to liberal democracy. For North America and Europe, this makes them politically and economically integrated and natural allies in fighting global authoritarianism. Second, the Exodus holds

72 “Декларация оргкомитета Форума русскоязычных европейцев в Германии,” *Snob*, September 1, 2017, <https://snob.ru/profile/8356/print/128534>. Speaking of Britain, it is known as a place not only for Putin's cronies but also for his fierce opponents. But so far, this fact has less to do with the new grassroots civic engagement of the Russians in the United States and Germany.

73 In preparation of this report, although this is not included, we looked at the cases of the New York City Russian Forum for Freedom and Justice, “The Immortal Regiment” movement vis-à-vis the State of New York legislators and the “Addresses to President Trump” from opposing parts of the Russian diaspora in the United States.

74 Compared to the Russians in Russia, as reflected by the national polls conducted by Levada Center, this group stands more for decentralization of power, is more pessimistic about Russia's situation since Putin's return in 2012 and looks more for alternative solutions to Russia's problems.

75 There are doubts whether Inglehart's idea of post-materialist progress is valid in the age of new populism. However, it is useful for better sociological understanding of the Putin Exodus relative to the place of Russia in the world.

a huge potential for building a post-Putin progressive and friendly Russia. In particular, its later cohort can vastly contribute to the Russian political discourse in favor of a more open society in Russia.

Based on the existence of these threats and opportunities, we offer the following set of policy recommendations.

- 1. Say “the Kremlin,” not “Russians.”** In analyzing and responding to Moscow’s aggressive policies, Western political institutions and media should distinguish between Russia’s leadership and the Russian people. The Kremlin’s thousand crony families are already increasingly separated from Russian society and from Russia as a country in the minds of Russians, both at home and in the diaspora. It is not enough, however, to just wait for this separation to develop on its own to our satisfaction. US and European lawmakers, political executives, the media, and the analytical and intelligence communities should be proactive in turning the discourse about a “Russian investigation” or “Russian aggression” into a discourse that separates the people from the government. It should be stipulated whenever possible that it is the Kremlin and its proxies that disrupt, corrupt, and trade fears, not Russia or Russians.
- 2. Bring the Exodus closer to the core of West-Russia relations.** Western governments should more fully recognize the growing weakness of the Kremlin’s political and socioeconomic system.⁷⁶ As a sign of that, in interactions with Russian authorities, the corresponding role of the Putin Exodus should be clearly marked. No lies about the insignificance of the brain drain, no hypocrisy concerning freedom of business, human and property rights, or repatriation of human capital should be accepted. Nor should bluffing about Russia’s military and politics might be left unanswered when the Kremlin manipulates audiences in the West. Western governments should also make it clear to the Kremlin that it has to stop its political repressions, lest Russia lose its future through more emigration.
- 3. What to do with the Exodus at home?** Western governments and societies should embrace the new Russian immigrants, as they represent a valuable resource for advancing political democracy and liberal economy. The immigration process for them should be made faster and

smoother. This can be done even as we recognize that the Kremlin will send agents such as Maria Butina to the West as part of the diaspora. Russian immigrants should be studied on different levels and their voices should be heard regarding their lives in the new countries, as well as regarding Western and Kremlin politics. Targeted research, including that of social networks, will help distinguish behaviors instigated by the Kremlin from those that can be remedied on the basis of a fuller adoption of democratic values and a better understanding of how freedom of expression in the West works. The problem of Kremlin agents among the immigrants is a manageable one for law enforcement and intelligence officials. It should not be exaggerated or allowed in any way to complicate the smooth adjustment of the immigrants to life in the West.

For the EU countries specifically, immigrant culture study and policy planning should draw attention to the anti-refugee moods of some Russians connected to the new right-wing, populism-driven weakening of democracy. As to the Russian media operating in the West, while adhering to the principle of freedom of speech, the law should be utilized to counter Kremlin propaganda. One way to do it is by labeling Russian television channels as supported by the Russian government. Certain new media actions should be actively presented to the public as harming both Russian immigrant communities and the interests of their host countries.

- 4. Engaging the Russian diaspora.** North American and European state politicians, legislators, and wider communities should make better sense of the non-systemic opposition in Russia that is increasingly supported by the new Russian émigrés. While this opposition justifiably avoids direct material and political support from Western governmental and other organizations, it deserves their greater moral support, especially since it fights for universal progressive values in an era of “post-truth” and regressive populism.

The Prague Spring idea “For our freedom and yours!” should be revisited by those who officially represent Western democracies. They should engage Russian community leaders and the diaspora media to counteract global illiberalism and cyber warfare, and discuss the future of Russia as a free, just, and prosperous nation.

⁷⁶ After the 2018 presidential elections, the new economic problems, crackdown on Internet freedom, and especially the “pension reform,” demonstrate a new decline in Kremlin politics and its popularity.

- 5. Further steps: better understanding, more targeted actions.** The results of this project, even in combination with other research, provide only a glimpse of what is critically important. A further study of the Putin Exodus supported by comprehensive official demographic data, large representative random sample-based surveys, in-depth interviews, as well as media and social networks analysis will allow researchers and analysts to fully grasp the essential aspects and prospects of the new Russian emigration. A more detailed mapping of the Exodus will help us see who exactly is influenced by Kremlin disinformation and to what political effect this influence is being used. This mapping will also facilitate engaging the Russians in the protection of democracy and stability. Finally, such an advanced study will help channel the progressive values and political zeal of the new Russian emigration to build a better post-Putin Russia.

Conclusion

Our study suggests that the Putin Exodus is composed of highly educated and socially aware individuals—lending support to the idea that this is in fact a “brain drain.” The study also indicates that this emigration is composed of people who identify with the values that have made the West prosper.

The results suggest that so long as authoritarianism and politically connected economic privilege continue in Russia, talented people will continue to leave. The study also undermines the notion peddled by the Kremlin that Russia represents a distinct civilization with its own distinctive values, stressing communal advantage over individual liberty and well-being.

In short, the study suggests that the emigration can be a bridge between the West and a Russia that is not destined to be authoritarian. The political views of this group are encouraging. So is their continued interest in Russia. Russians, not the West, will determine the future of Russia. But the values and activities of these émigrés provide reason to hope that future may be one that includes cooperation and comity between Russia and the West based upon the values that have produced extraordinary liberty, prosperity, and peace since the end of World War II.

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Ambassador John Herbst is the director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. Ambassador Herbst served for thirty-one years as a foreign service officer in the US Department of State, retiring at the rank of career-minister. He was the US ambassador to Ukraine from 2003 to 2006. Prior to his ambassadorship in Ukraine, he was the ambassador to Uzbekistan from 2000 to 2003. Ambassador Herbst previously served as US consul general in Jerusalem; principal deputy to the ambassador-at-large for the Newly Independent States; director of the Office of Independent States and Commonwealth Affairs; director of regional affairs in the Near East Bureau; and at the embassies in Tel Aviv, Moscow, and Saudi Arabia. He most recently served as director of the Center for Complex Operations at the National Defense University. He has received two Presidential Distinguished Service Awards, the Secretary of State's Career Achievement Award, the State Department's Distinguished Honor Award, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Distinguished Civilian Service Award. Ambassador Herbst's writings on stability operations, Central Asia, Ukraine, and Russia are widely published.



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