**Russian Political Apathy: Chicken or Egg?**

1. **Russian Political Culture: Keenly Disillusioned**
   * Russia has made efforts towards a democratic political culture
     + Russia is in transition
     + Russia is caught between two worlds geographically and politically
     + Most Russians (70%) regret the breakup of the USSR and many (47%) would like a return to the Brezhnev Era.
   * The transition to a market economy has impacted political culture
     + 50% would support the return of state-owned industry
     + Russians want what all people want: the opportunity to get rich without being exploited by the rich. They want an even playing field.
     + Market reform and democracy: correlation, causation, and disillusionment
   * James Gibson’s study of Russian political culture draws three conclusions:
     1. People want democracy so long as it benefits them personally
     2. Russians are concerned with majority rule more than with minority rights
     3. Young, educated, and urbanites are more likely to support democratic values
   * **History Matters**: the prospect of People Power has cried wolf
   * **Faith Matters**: most Russians tend to see democratic values as remote and unattainable. They are cynical about authority figures (sans Putin with 70– 80% approval).
   * **Perception Matters**: Russians tend to associate democratic reform with the dissolution of the USSR, the breakdown of economic order, and the deterioration of social and economic safety nets.
   * **Institutions Matter**: to what extent is the Russian system structurally predisposed to creating a democratic political culture?
     + Democratic culture cannot thrive so long as Oligarchs, Mafiosos, and Putin continue to consolidate power.
2. **Political Socialization**
   * The Soviet model of political socialization was akin to the PRC
     + Propaganda
     + ‘Mass movements’
   * Education: from class struggle and international solidarity to deifying the rich and ultra-nationalism
   * Media: promotes nationalism while closely monitoring life in the CIS
   * Voting: Russians are skeptical about the power of the vote, but they vote.
   * Russian agents of socialization send mixed messages:
     + Freedom, democracy, and equality
     + Order and stability
3. **Political Participation**

* Russia is a large, diverse federal state. Political participation varies by region, resources, opportunities, etc.
* Rules of articulation have not yet been established in new Russia
* Political Apathy
  + A surge of activism followed *glasnost*. Quickly Russian citizens began to feel that their efforts were futile.
  + In the absence of a dominant ideology, Russians are willing to accept a one-party system under United Russia. This is not because United Russia is beloved or because Russians feel as though they are part of the party; ordinary Russians no longer care who controls politics. They want to be left in peace to work for their own survival/enrichment.
  + 72% of Russians say they do not feel protected from abuse by the police and other law enforcement agencies.
  + 80% agree, year after year, that "ordinary people cannot influence decision-making in Russia."
  + Apathy and de-politicization cannot last long. Perhaps the predictability of elections during the Putin years *causes* apathy
  + Perhaps apathy has played a paradoxically positive role, marginalizing the most radical Communists and Fascists
  + The average Russian is paying less attention to politics and delving deeper into his own personal, everyday endeavors
* Russians are psychologically engaged. They are political animals. They watch TV and read national newspapers. They debate…endlessly. They have remarkably high internet usage rates.
* Voter turnout:

**Parliamentary Elections**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1995 | 64% |
| 1999 | 62% |
| 2003 | 56% |
| 2007 | 64% |
| 2011 | 60% |

**Presidential Elections**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1991 | 75% |
| 1996 | 70% |
| 2000 | 68% |
| 2004 | 64% |
| 2008 | 70% |
| 2012 | 65% |

1. **Civil Society**

* Russian civil society is developing because citizens need to organize and cooperate since the government fails to serve them. Putin resists this trend.
* Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE)
  + Most powerful interest group in Russia
  + Goals: subsidies and protection, contract and law enforcement (to their benefit), reasonable regulation, fair/low taxes, maximized opportunities for foreign trade, WTO membership (2012)
  + RUIE arbitrates between government and business. They have Putin’s ear (and maybe more?). But Putin is in control. He once shunned RUIE by not meeting with them for almost a year.
* Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FITUR)
  + Successor to Soviet All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions
  + 95% of union workers belong to FITUR
  + Weak compared to RUIE. Poorly-adapted to free-market.
  + Unsuccessfully combatting deteriorating wages and conditions in the post-Soviet era.
  + FITUR is nominally independent of governmental control and is committed to fight for workers’ rights. In practice, the clientelism inherent in Putin’s Russia renders FITUR weak
* League of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers
  + Started in 1989 when 300 women protested Gorbachev’s decision to end student deferments from military conscription
  + Fight against hazing and soldier labor in construction battalions
  + Chechnya: visit wounded soldiers, free POWs, clarify casualty statistics
* "Dissernet" – just one example of informal networks to support local initiatives and expose corruption and injustice through social media. Dissernet uses crowdsourcing techniques to research and analyze signs of plagiarism in the dissertations of elite politicians.
* Rusini.org - provides training and crowdsourcing resources for grassroots initiatives in Russia’s regions.
* Association of Russian Lawyers for Human Rights
* All-Russian Society for Environmental Protection
* Center for Business Ethics and Corporate Governance
* Putin’s War on Civil Society
  + 2012 law compels a wide range of organizations to register as "foreign agents". Russian civil society has resisted with admirable solidarity. Not a single organization complied.
    - Russia sued 10 organizations and threatened to sue others for failure to register. LGBT rights organization Coming Out won the case filed against them
    - In the heat of the Ukraine crisis, a 2014 law allows the government to place NGOs on the "foreign agents" list by fiat.
    - Amnesty International, a "foreign agent" is monitoring.
  + According to a meeting of NGO leaders at the 2014 Salzburg Global Seminar, Russian CS faces two fundamental and interrelated challenges:
    1. "Difficult for Russian NGOs to reach broad segments of the population, who remain mired in a submissive and paternalistic relationship with the state.
    2. NGOs are struggling to cope with deepening levels of repression against Russians seeking the active exercise of their rights as citizens."

1. **Conclusions**

* Election turnout is good. So…?
* No history of democracy. But history is not destiny.
* If Kuznets is right, a middle class will emerge, which might demand to be heard.
* If Kuznets is wrong and the poor get poorer while the oligarchy consolidates further, mayhem could ensue.
* More political party competition might increase political participation
* Print and internet is mostly free. TV and radio should follow.
* Maybe just a matter of time…