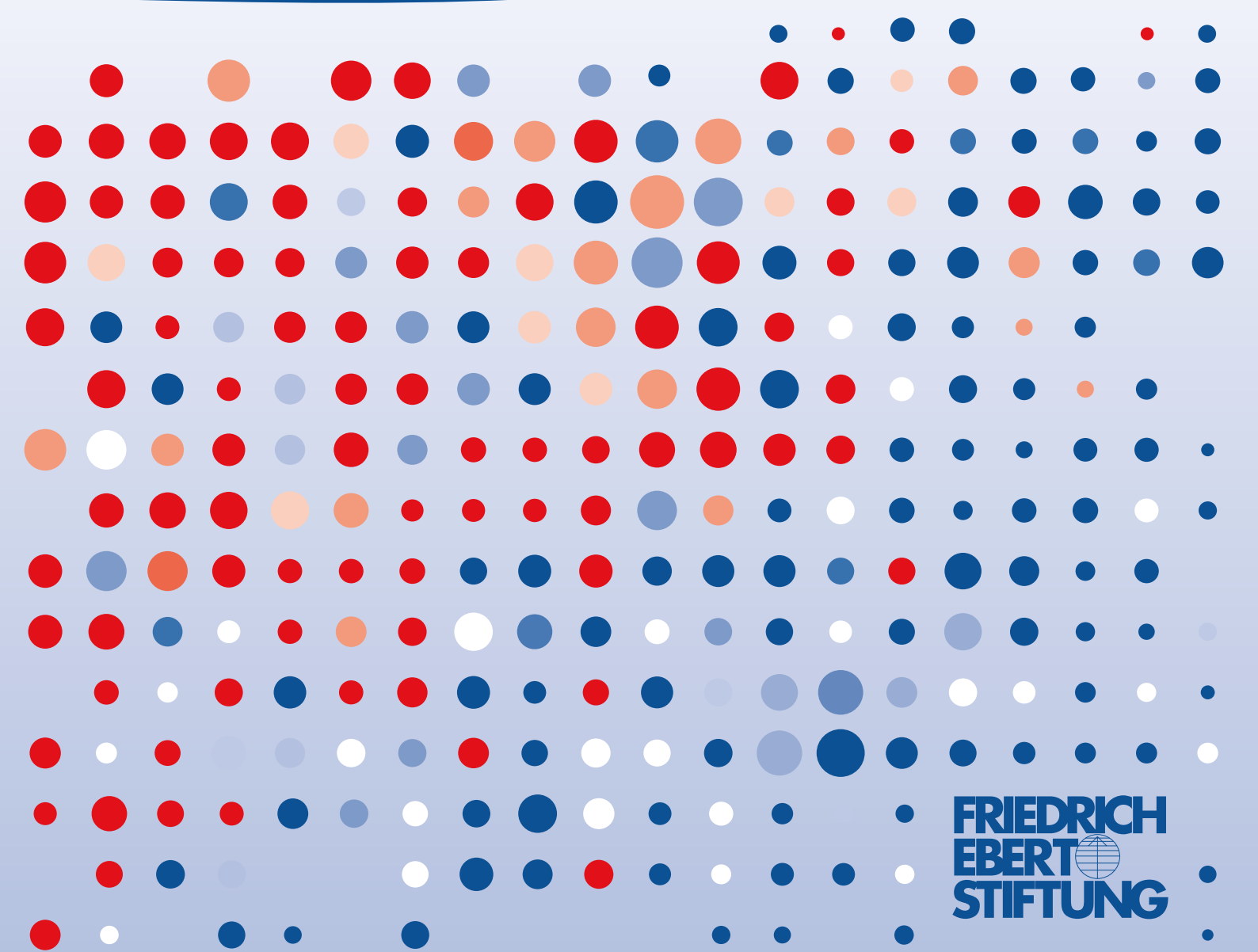
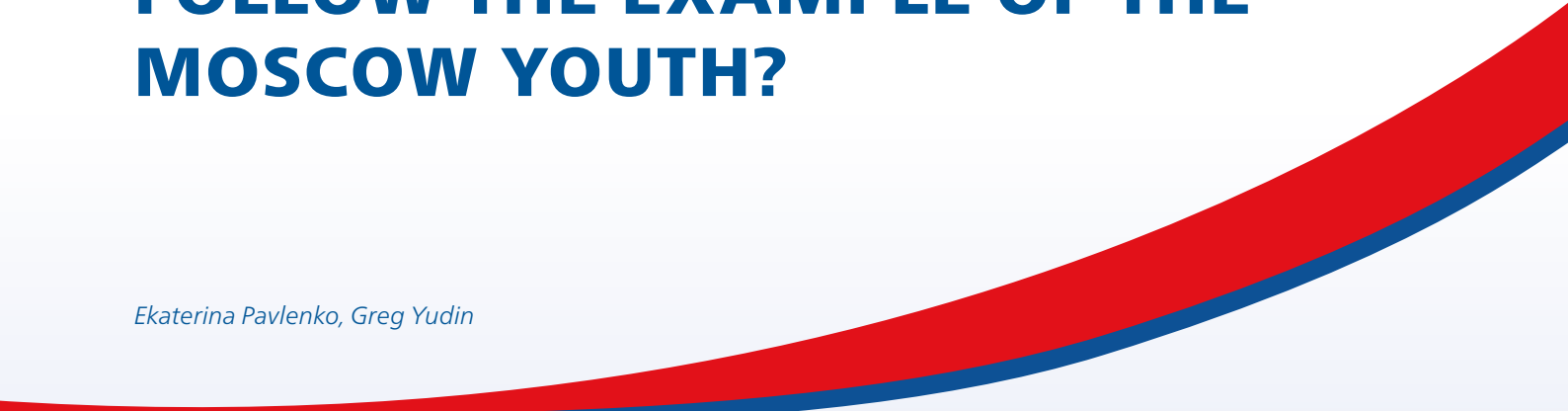




THE LOCOMOTIVE OF CHANGE:

WILL YOUNG GROUPS IN RUSSIA FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE MOSCOW YOUTH?

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Over the last two years, Russian public opinion researchers have been increasingly interested in the differences between age groups. For many years, respondents were relatively homogeneous in their answers to the pollster's questions, but recently there has been a new trend: many key indicators show divisions between age groups. After the events of spring 2017, when, surprisingly, a lot of teenagers took part in protests against the prime minister, experts tend to explain these age differences by a new generation entering a political scene.

Most significant political differences (from the reaction to the police using force in Moscow in summer of 2019 to the support for the lifting of Putin's presidency term limits) can be actually seen between "the old and the rest" rather than between "the young and the rest". However, it looks like the young groups have been drifting away considerably from the old ones on a whole number of issues, and this trend is hard to ignore.

The attempts to understand the direction of changes among the young groups lead to the search for their source where these changes are most numerous. Since public life in Russia is highly centralized, Moscow could be that source. Can we say that the youth of the entire country of Russia will soon follow the example of the young groups in Moscow?

There are two studies that can help us answer that question: "Russian Generation Z: their attitudes and values" done by the Levada Center for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and our own project entitled the "Image of the future through the eyes of the youth: inequality and mobility" that we did for the Boris Nemtsov Foundation.

1500 respondents aged 14 through 29 took part in the "Russian Generation Z: their attitudes and values" survey. 53% of them were female, and 47% were male. The Friedrich

Ebert Foundation formalized questionnaire was translated into Russian. It covered a variety of topics, such as education and future plans, work, political views and involvement in political life, free time, and new technologies in everyday life. Only 3.4% of the respondents were from Moscow, with almost equal gender breakdown – 27 men and 24 women. In Moscow, there were more respondents in the upper (25-29) age range and fewer in the lower one (14-20) than the average for the sample. Meanwhile, the highest percentage of the youngest (14-17) respondents came from localities with the population below 10,000 residents. This may lead to bias in data interpretation. The low number of respondents from Moscow is another limitation for the analysis. When examining differences between groups using Z-, T- and chi-square tests, a significance level of 0.1 is used, which is above the standard of 0.05, and therefore some differences can be hypostasized.

The "Image of the future through the eyes of the youth: inequality and mobility" study was conducted in three regions of Russia (as well as in Armenia, Belarus, and Ukraine): Moscow (10 interviews with students who moved there to attend a university), Nizhny Novgorod (5 interviews with university students and a focus-group of secondary vocational education students), and Irkutsk (5 interviews with secondary vocational education students and a focus-group of university students). Its main goal was to study the effects of inequality on young people's chances and strategies, as well as their social and geographic mobility. When talking to Moscow youth, the main topics were the necessity of moving to Moscow for their education, the differences between Moscow and their home region, and how moving improves their chances for success. It is important to note that no people who lived in Moscow since childhood have been surveyed. All respondents were

TABLE 1. **Adhesion to conventional reasoning.**

The table shows averages values (5 – totally agree, 1 – totally disagree), as well as the percentage of "fives" in every group. Arrows indicate notable differences between Moscow and other groups.

	Size of locality					
	Moscow	500 + thous.	100-499 thous.	10-99 thous.	Up to 10 thous.	Total
The income gap between the poor and the rich must be reduced	4.0 41%	4.1 54%	4.1 53%	4.2 54%	4.2 58%	4.2 54%
The share of state-owned assets in business and industry must be increased	2.8 ↓ 16% ↓	3.3 ↑ 25%	3.3 ↑ 24%	3.5 ↑ 31%	3.6 ↑ 34% ↑	3.4 28%
The state has to bear more responsibility for providing for everyone's needs	4.2 ↓ 47% ↓	4.4 65%	4.4 65%	4.6 ↑ 68%	4.5 ↑ 67% ↑	4.5 65%
Competition is a bad thing, as it exposes the worst in people	2.1 ↓ 6% ↓	2.9 ↑ 20%	3.0 ↑ 21%	3.2 ↑ 30% ↑	3.3 ↑ 31% ↑	3.1 24%
Hard work usually leads to a better life	3.9 37%	3.9 41%	4.0 45%	4.1 51%	4.2 55%	4.0 47%

between 19 and 23 years of age. 4 of them were female and 6 were male. All 10 were university students (6 out of 10 attend more prestigious universities with high barriers of entry).

These two studies with different research questions used different methods of acquiring data from different groups of young people. On the one hand, it helps us understand and explain some of the trends better. On the other hand, it means that there are significant limitations in the way they can be compared or used to mutually complement one another – we will make references to those limitations below.

The data gathered as part of those two projects does not definitively indicate whether there are any radical differences between young groups from Moscow and other regions. There are no fundamental differences between residents of Moscow and those living elsewhere on many topics, from their world view and life strategies to their assessment of

the situation in the country and political preferences. At the same time, it would be wrong to think about young groups as a homogenous entity. Nevertheless, we are going to show three main areas where there are some noticeable differences.

Liberality. According to the Levada Center, while 15% of respondents in Russia as a whole believe that their views are “liberal”, their share in Moscow is up to 32%. But the details here are more important than some formal attachment to an ideology (as it is rather artificial in the current situation in Russia). Moscow residents are different from other groups (especially those from villages and small/medium-size towns) in their views on the need for the state to be more active and their moral assessment of competition.

Among Moscow residents there is also a noticeably higher percentage of those who do not agree (by selecting “1” or “2”) with the statement that “Russia needs a leader who

TABLE 2. **Assessment of priorities for the Russian government.**

The table shows averages values (5 – totally agree, 1 – totally disagree), as well as the percentage of “fives” in every group. Arrows indicate notable differences between Moscow and other groups. Only the categories where Moscow differs significantly from other groups are shown in the table.

	Size of locality					
	Moscow	500 + thous.	100-499 thous.	10-99 thous.	Up to 10 thous.	Total
Strengthening national identity	3.7 ↓	3.9	4.2 ↑	4.1 ↑	4.2 ↑	4.1
	34%	41%	48%	46%	53%	46%
Strengthening national security and military power	3.8 ↓	4.1	4.3 ↑	4.2 ↑	4.4 ↑	4.2
	35% ↓	53%	57% ↑	55%	66% ↑	57%
Advancement of women	3.8 ↓	4.1	4.2 ↑	4.2 ↑	4.3 ↑	4.2
	24% ↓	46% ↑	51% ↑	53% ↑	54% ↑	50%
Reducing unemployment	4.3	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6
	58% ↓	75%	70%	74%	77% ↑	73%

TABLE 3. **Experience and plans of living abroad.**

Arrows indicate notable differences between Moscow and other groups.

	Size of locality					
	Moscow	500 + thous.	100-499 thous.	10-99 thous.	Up to 10 thous.	Total
Never travel abroad	44% ↓	56%	62% ↑	76% ↑	78% ↑	66%
Sometimes travel abroad (once a month or less often)	34% ↑	34%	27%	19%	16% ↓	25%
Often travel abroad (several times a month)	16% ↑	8%	8%	2%	4% ↓	6%
Have never been abroad, but plan to go for half a year or more to study and intern	39% ↓	27%	29%	26%	23%	27%
Have never been abroad and no plans to go for half a year or more	57% ↑	68%	67%	71%	74% ↓	70%
Have a strong desire to emigrate	18%	10%	10%	8%	7%	9%

would rule the country with a strong hand for the common good” – 39% vs 16% for the sample. At the same time, in Moscow 20% totally disagree that “it is the duty of every citizen to vote” (vs 11% for the sample in general and 8% in small towns and rural areas). Presumably, the very idea of coercion causes protests in this group.

Moscow residents generally hold similar views on the state policy priorities to everyone else’s (environment, guarantees of human rights and freedoms, fight against corruption, and economic growth are among the top choices for all groups). However, military and patriotic themes are less popular in Moscow. At the same time, residents of the capital are less concerned with the rights of women and unemployment; supposedly, these problems are less relevant in Moscow.

22% of Moscow residents consider the rule of law to be among the top three priorities (12% for the country in general), while 12% consider it to be the main priority (3% for the country in general).

Cosmopolitanism. According to the Levada Center, Moscow residents are more involved in global processes and open for intercultural communication. They are more likely to have friends from other cultural groups (see Table 5 below).

They have more experience of visiting other countries in the past and planning their future trips abroad. Young people usually have a relatively strong desire to spend some time living abroad, and even with that factor in mind, Moscow people are more prone to various forms of international communication (Table 3). They are more likely to believe that experience of studying or working abroad increases their chances to find a good job (57% of respondents in Moscow gave it “4” and “5” vs only 43% for the entire sample).

In terms of identity, the Moscow group is less likely to set

Russia in opposition to “the West”, “Europe” or “the rest of the world”. Here, 33% are proud of being citizens of Russia vs 48% for the sample in general (giving it a “5”). 46% consider themselves Europeans vs 20% sample average (“4s” and “5s”). 47% call themselves “citizens of the world” vs 32% in the sample (giving it a “5”).

Reaction to the word “West” is also generally calmer in Moscow. It should, of course, be noted that this is about the discursive social construct overloaded with meanings, and, subsequently, the corresponding questions measure response to this specific construct. Here, 14% say that they are always aware of belonging to “the Western culture” (vs 6% for the sample in general). 40% note that “the Western countries are democratic states governed by the rule of law, and they are a development example to follow” (vs 25% for the sample). Also, people in Moscow respond calmer to the word “Europe”: 57% fully or mostly agree that Russia is a European country (39% for the sample). 69% declare that they share “European political values of freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights” against 47% sample average. They are more likely to hold the Russian government accountable for the conflict between Russia and Europe (39% vs 19% for the sample), even though young people, much like the Russians in general, tend to blame the US (57% in Moscow and 60% in the entire sample).

It is reasonable to interpret these results not as actual “sharing of values”, but as living in the media environment where the words “West” and “Europe” are not used in the entirely negative context.

Civic participation. According to the Levada Center, the Moscow group is even more critical of the Russian government than the respondents in general. Only 8% have enough faith

TABLE 4. **Identity.**

The table shows averages values (5 – totally agree, 1 – totally disagree), as well as the percentage of “fives” in every group. Arrows indicate notable differences between Moscow and other groups.

To what extent do you consider yourself...	Size of locality					
	Moscow	500 + thous.	100-499 thous.	10-99 thous.	Up to 10 thous.	Total
Russian	75% 4.6	66% 4.4	67% 4.4	72% 4.6	73% 4.5	69% 4.5
European	20% 3.1	9% 2.4	9% 2.3	5% 2.1	5% 2.0	7% 2.3
A citizen of the world	47% 3.8	28% 3.3	36% 3.5	32% 3.4	20% 3.2	32% 3.3
A resident of your region	75% 4.7	64% 4.4	68% 4.5	69% 4.5	75% 4.6	69% 4.5
A resident of your town	77% 4.6	70% 4.5	74% 4.5	76% 4.6	77% 4.6	74% 4.5

in it (21% for the sample). They display somewhat lower trust towards the army and the church; these differences are particularly obvious if compared with the group of those living in small towns and rural areas.

Residents of Moscow differ somewhat from other young groups that are extremely depoliticized. There is a group here that is highly interested in politics (14% vs 6% for the sample), and only 20% admitted that they never discussed politics (37% for Russia in general). This is definitely due to the fact that in Moscow the political life is more intense, and all the main opportunities for a person to get involved in politics are in the capital. The data shows that 8% of the Moscow respondents say they are already involved in politics (while in the rest of the sample this value is close to zero). 39% noted that they signed petitions (22% in general). 12% took part in political campaigns online (11% for the entire country). Moscow also boasts a much better readiness for being politically and environmentally responsible: 34% have this experience or are ready for it (12% for the country). Although civic responsibility level in Moscow is not high, proximity to public political processes and movements gives rise to politically active groups.

Why are the sentiments of the Moscow youth different from those of the youth in the regions?

Heterogeneity of social environment in the capital. The population of Moscow is more heterogenous in many ways. There is a well-developed network of public places (including bars that are often used for community meetups, as well as cultural and educational events) and public events. Moscow residents spend more time in bars, coffee-shops, and clubs. 17% of respondents say they do it often (vs less than 10% in other cities). In Moscow only 20% of young people never go to such places while in the other localities it ranges from 30% in bigger cities to 52% in towns with populations under 10,000. University students, especially those who move to Moscow to study and live in dormitories, encounter a wide variety of life stories and trajectories. As noted above, the Moscow youth are more likely to interact with different

cultural environments than the youth from other localities.

Social mobility and agency. Certain living conditions in the capital have led to persons developing more agency and self-awareness and stimulated their willingness to act individually, in other words, to view themselves as the source of actions capable of going beyond inertia-based trajectories, to change both their future and the world around them.

The respondents from our study say that Moscow gives them the widest range of opportunities:

« Depending on what you want to do, there may be a special city just for you. Moscow is the best option, as it has almost everything you might need

F, 21

People go to Moscow looking for a better life. According to our study, students agree that Moscow (and partially Saint Petersburg) has the “leading universities.”

« The strongest universities are in Moscow. That is why I decided to send my application forms to several Moscow universities at once. It is also the center of our country, so that is where all the life is

M, 23

Moscow is associated with a better quality of life. The Levada Center data partially confirms it: young people from Moscow are more likely to say that they have more affluent friends (78% in Moscow vs 65% and less in other localities), more money than their peers and in general believe that their social status is higher more often than young people from other cities and localities. 63% of Moscow residents said that

TABLE 5. **Being in the culturally diverse environment.**

Arrows indicate notable differences between Moscow and other groups.

	Size of locality					
	Moscow	500 + thous.	100-499 thous.	10-99 thous.	Up to 10 thous.	Total
Friends of different nationality	90% ↑	75%	71% ↓	66% ↓	68% ↓	71%
Friends of different religion	88% ↑	67% ↓	64% ↓	54% ↓	53% ↓	61%
Friends speaking another language	69% ↑	53%	46% ↓	46% ↓	40% ↓	47%
Friends with a different social status	84% ↑	66% ↓	69%	60% ↓	55% ↓	64%

they could afford relatively expensive things (even though not a car or a flat), while only 36% and fewer people from other cities said the same. In a sense, it might mean that they feel safer and that opens up more opportunities for them, as they do not have to worry about their basic needs. The sense of being safe is confirmed by the fact that the youth in Moscow are less scared of unemployment (34% seriously fear it in Moscow vs 52% for the sample), terrorism (39% seriously and 37% somewhat fear it vs 53% and 21% for the entire sample, respectively), becoming a victim of physical violence (28% seriously and 44% somewhat fear it vs 39% and 31% for the sample, respectively), and local or global war (37%, while 60% of the entire sample are greatly scared of it).

Meanwhile, many students who came to Moscow follow plans to develop their trajectory further and continue their education abroad. The Levada Center studies show similar trends. 39% of Moscow respondents plan to study abroad versus 29% of those in other cities. When living abroad, young people encounter different cultures and lifestyles, which broadens their horizon and helps them view the otherness as something normal.

It is important that, compared to residents of other regions, residents of Moscow have a much better idea of how their moving to another country could look like (both temporarily or permanently) and what they need to do to make it happen. Even though many respondents from the sample in general state their desire to study or intern abroad, they rarely understand what specific steps are required for that. Moscow respondents, especially if they already moved to the capital from another region, are more concrete in that sense: symbolically, foreign countries look “closer” to Moscow.

Social mobility and personal independence, a desire to improve and stabilize one’s level of life, act independently and build one’s own path may be indicating a high agency — having great ambitions, being able to set goals for oneself and reach them, while overcoming obstacles, seeing oneself as an independent actor with one’s own views, wishes, and opportunities.

Media Consumption. Over the last two years, media consumption (along with age) has been a critical factor creating division between respondents on key issues. These two factors are connected: younger generations use more sources of information and, therefore, depend less on television as they form their worldview. Among the Moscow youth this general trend is even more evident: according to the Levada Center, 39% of Moscow residents do not watch TV at all (vs 27% for the entire sample and 20% in towns and villages with a population under 10,000).

Overall, the Levada Center study shows that people who do not watch TV are significantly different from those who do, when it comes to political indicators. For example, among those who do not watch TV 28% do not trust the president (13% among those who do watch TV), 16% have participated

« *I would love to be rather... to be able to earn enough money. But if I succeed, I would also like to be useful for the world. And in Izhevsk I would be somewhat useful, but not as useful as I would be if I became a teacher somewhere else, where kids are more prepared for it. If Izhevsk had a better infrastructure, if people appreciated me and I had a higher salary, I'd work there, sure. But that is, unfortunately, not the case. Moscow is a good place, but I would like to try something different there. I want to try teaching in another country, see what it is like and then come back to Moscow. This is my motherland, after all. And my motherland is important to me. Anyway, anything is possible*

M, 20

in political campaigns online (9% among TV watchers). Deeper immersion in global media flows encourages greater political involvement, and Moscow residents are at the forefront in this trend.

What forecasts can be made based on this analysis?

The two studies that we used here were not designed to examine the differences between Moscow residents and people from other regions: this would require a different sample design. The results are more of a hypothesis to be checked by further research. Although the available data does not allow us to confirm the existence of major differences between Moscow residents and people from other regions, it is still possible to carefully argue that many of the new transformational trends that are common in the young groups, are, in turn, even more pronounced among the Moscow youth. They are eager to interact with representatives of other countries and cultures, they dislike coercion, they are ready for civic participation and show a desire to build their own trajectory. These peculiar features can be explained by a more diverse cultural environment in Moscow, their connection to a variety of media flows and, most importantly, their experience of independent action and a better understanding of geographic and social mobility.

These trends have a good chance of spreading if three main conditions are met.

- Firstly, the media environment becomes notably more diverse. TV has lost its monopoly and obviously recedes into the background. If this trend continues without being artificially interrupted (for example, by restricting the Internet access or suppressing non-state media online), many Moscow attitudes have a chance to spread across the country relatively quickly.
- Secondly, the desire to gain experience of living abroad and get involved in intercultural exchange (shared by many young Russians) is currently limited by the lack of internship/study opportunities. Other cultures and countries need to become “closer” and open for interaction.
- Thirdly, the scale of inequality between Moscow and the rest of the country today is so great that for many young people the only way to get their agency and achieve their goals is to move to Moscow. Unless this situation changes, the lifestyle in Moscow will differ more and more from that of the rest of the country. It will also slow down the rate at which Moscow practices “leak” out into other cities and may soon even lead to their rejection.

As the capital of the country, Moscow will undoubtedly remain the source of new behaviors and worldviews. However, it may either become the locomotive of change or a cultural ghetto that the rest of the country is opposed to, politically and culturally (as is the case in Turkey). Which path will Russia choose? It is still an open question.

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IMPRINT:

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Russland

Jauski Boulevard 13/3 109028 Moscow | Russia

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