
**“I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE QUALITY OF REPRODUCTION...”: RUSSIAN STATE
DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY IN THE EYES OF YOUTH MOVEMENT ACTIVISTS IN TVER’**

Elena Karmalskaia, Tver' State University

translated by Anna Borodina

This paper explores the impact of young people’s participation in socio-political youth movements on their attitudes toward state demographic policies in Russia. It focuses on young men and women who are (or used to be) participants in one of three socio-political youth movements that are active in Tver’: (1) *Nashi* (Ours), (2) The Active Youth Union (*Soiuz Aktivnoi Molodezhi*, or *SAM*), and (3) The Communist Youth Union of the Russian Federation (*Soiuz Kommunisticheskoi Molodezhi Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, or *SKMRF*). The participants of those movements are high school and university students; they are also potential parents, the primary target group of state demographic policy. This research hypothesized that youth movement participants’ support for state demographic policy would be directly connected to the ideology embraced by the movement they participated in. Data was collected during field research in Tver’ (February-March 2008), during Sociology coursework at the Center for Women’s History and Gender Studies, under the auspices of the collaborative project, “Youth organizations, voluntary service and the restructuring of social welfare in Russia.” (This was a collaborative research project conducted by Dr. Julie Hemment of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Dr. Valentina Uspenskaya and Mr. Dmitry Borodin of the Center for Women’s History and Gender Studies at Tver’ State University, and undergraduate students of the departments of Sociology and Political Science at Tver’ State University, Russia.) Before presenting my analysis of interview data, I provide a little background on the situation in Russia and on state policies designed to regulate it.

Background

The contemporary demographic situation in Russia can be hardly defined as ideal. It is characterized by low birth and high mortality rates, huge natural losses and the aging of the Russian population, by a huge gap between the life expectancy of men and women and great changes in the sphere of sexual and marital relations.¹ According to statistics cited by the pro-Putin party United Russia (*Edinaiia Rossiia*), the population is declining on average by 80,000 people annually. If this does not change, the Russian population may decrease from the present day 142,7 million people to 138 million people by 2012 and 120 million people by 2030; in another 40 years the population may decrease to 80 million.² Furthermore, the average family size is decreasing: according to the 2002 census, only 15% of Russian families have 2 children. Less than 3% of families have three children or more while almost half of Russian families are childless.³ However, recently, there have been reports of birth rate increases. For example, according to statistics the Tver’ regional birth rate is slowly increasing: in 2007 there were 700 more babies born than in 2006. Such instances are usually attributed to the successful political course of President Putin.

Sociologist V.I. Perevedentsev argues that although the media interprets such data as evidence that the birth rate is increasing, such claims are mistaken and stem from journalists’ ignorance about demographic matters. According to official state statistics, in 2002 the aggregate birth rate index in Russia was 1,286 while in 2005 it was 1,287.⁴ This means the average Russian woman gives birth to 1,3 children in the course of her life. However, to maintain the current population level requires 2,1 births per woman. This is further evidence of the fact that the population receives misleading information about the demographic situation in the country.⁵

¹ V.I. Perevedentsev. Russia’s demographic prospects. In: *Sotsis*, №12, 2007. P. 58.

² See official website of the “United Russia” party / www.edinros.ru

³ “Pivotal national projects” / <http://rost.ru/projects/health/p07/p71/a71.shtml>

⁴ Russia’s Demography Yearbook, 2006. P. 93.

⁵ See V.I. Perevedentsev . Op. cit. P. 59.

In the last several years, the Russian government has sought to regulate the demographic situation by several means. This research focused on three of the most significant measures adopted by the state: (1) The introduction of financial incentives or “maternity capital” (*materinskii kapital*), worth 250,000 rubles (approximately \$10,000) to women who give birth to or adopt a second or subsequent baby,⁶ (2) The “Affordable Housing” project⁷ and (3) Proposed legislation that seeks to restrict access to abortion, announced in December 2007.⁸

According to the official website of the pro-Putin United Russia party, the implementation of the above-mentioned projects has been fairly successful. However, the attitudes of young people (potential parents) toward the projects may not support this claim. For instance, one recent survey indicates that only 132 women out of 1,239 respondents gave a positive answer to the question, “Would the possibility of receiving maternity capital (250,000 rubles) have any impact on your decision to become a mother?” Meanwhile, 1107 respondents (89%) gave negative answers to the same question.⁹

Attitudes of youth activists toward state demographic policies

In all, nine semi-formal interviews were conducted. Respondents were selected by means of the snowball strategy and ranged between 18-26 years old. Respondents were members of one of the following Tver'-based youth movements (I interviewed three representatives of each):

Nashi (or, The Anti-fascist democratic youth movement *Nashi*) is an all-Russian movement with 39

different types of activities. *Nashi* participants present themselves as “Putin’s generation” and actively support his political course. Founded in the spring of 2005, the Tver’ branch of the movement was quite active until it was disbanded in January 2008.

The Communist Youth Union of the Russian Federation claims to be a self-governed civic youth organization, however in fact it is the youth branch of the Russian Communist Party, which in most cases opposes the policies of *Edinaiia Rossiia* and President Putin. This organization operates throughout the Russian Federation and the Tver’ branch was established in 2000.

The Active Youth Union (*SAM*) is a Tver'-based movement bringing together Tver’ high school and university students. It was officially registered on October 26, 2007, shortly before municipal and Russian Parliamentary elections. Although this movement presents itself as “non-partisan” it can be considered to be pro-United Russia; articles in the movement’s official newspaper express their support for this political party and besides, the movement is supported by the municipal and regional authorities.

Three different questionnaires were developed to correspond to each movement. The first set of questions was devoted to the movement itself; the respondent was asked to describe the movement in which s/he participated or used to participate and to explain his or her motivation for joining the movement. Respondents were also asked whether they actively participated in the movement’s activities and shared its ideology.

It emerged that all respondents had participated in their respective movement for a considerable length of time. The *Nashi* activists I interviewed had participated in the movement for between 6 months- 2 years; members of SKMRF for between 1-5 years; participants in *SAM* had been involved for the least

⁶ The maternity capital provision was introduced as part of the law, “On additional measures of state support for families with children” in 2006, under the auspices of the National Priority Project, “Health.” The right to maternity capital, has been granted to the following groups of the population: Women who have given birth to (or adopted) their second baby since January 1, 2007; women who have given birth to (or adopted) their third or subsequent babies since January 1, 2007; or men who are single parents adopting their second, third or subsequent babies in the event of a court decision on child adoption (this came into force on January 1, 2007). There are restrictions placed on these funds however; they must be spent either on housing, on the child’s future educational needs, or must be put toward the mother’s pension. See Paragraph 1 of Article 3 of the Federal Law “On additional measures of state support for families with children”.

⁷ “Affordable and Comfortable Housing for Russian Citizens” is one of four so-called National Priority Projects, introduced by the Putin administration during 2005 to extend forms of social welfare. The project aims to dramatically increase housing stock by way of new construction, and to extend the mortgage system [JH].

⁸ Until 2003, Russia had very liberal abortion laws. A series of restrictions introduced during 2003-4 placed significant restrictions on this right. This recent legislation appears to extend these restrictions by sharply reducing the list of medical and social conditions regarded as valid reasons for abortion upheld by the political and medical establishment [JH]. Interestingly enough, the list of “social conditions” for abortions has been greatly scaled back. Whereas formerly factors such as unemployment and poverty were held to be valid reasons for abortion, now only incest and rape remain on the list. See www.edinros.ru. The official name of the legislation is order N.736 is, “On approving the list of medical conditions for artificial pregnancy termination” (introduced 3 December 2007). It is supported by several State Duma representatives and by the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁹ See “Mother and baby” / <http://www.2mm.ru/vote/9/result>

time, since the movement was only recently founded. All of the *SAM* participants I interviewed had joined the movement when it was first founded and were still participating in its activities at the time of the interview. As one respondent put it, “we first learned about this movement last fall - right before the election campaign” (David). All of the respondents were either active supporters of their movements or held certain positions in them:

“In my organization I am a member of one of its governing bodies, the regional committee” (Vika, *SKMRF*).

“I have participated in nearly all the movement’s events” (Shurik, *Nashi*).

“At first I just participated in the movement’s activities, but later we tried to organize a couple of events ourselves” (Inga, *Nashi*).

“I am now engaged in a promotion group project” (Nastya, *SAM*).

As regards people’s motivation, all of the *SKMRF* participants reported they were mainly motivated by the movement’s ideology, as the following comments reveal:

“I joined [the *SKMRF*] when I was a third year student; by that time I already held the relevant views. I was deeply concerned about Russia’s destiny, what would happen to my country, so to say... I was also concerned about the lives of deprived people, especially pensioners who have to survive on their miserable pensions. This is how I joined the organization: first I developed a certain worldview” (Vika).

“Actually I liked the ideology, read a couple of books – I liked those books. Then I went deeper and then realized that I was missing something – one should not only read but also do something. This is why I have joined the movement. I found it and joined it” (Alexander).

“Well, first, I was attracted to Marxism, Russian history and Soviet history; I decided that I should find

some organization to match my interests” (Vladislav).

Unlike the more explicitly ideological participants of *SKMRF*, *SAM* participants emphasized their desire to gain new experience and to improve their employment prospects:

“Well, honestly speaking, they said we all would get jobs; it’s very important. Besides, we may get internships at the city administration... it sounds rather tempting. As far as I know, this is why most people have joined this organization” (Sanya)

“You learn lessons from real life, acquire real experience – not just how to live, but how the world is organized. When you try to accomplish something, you realize how you can actually do it, you learn about existing societal structures, you get to understand how, say, power is maintained, how the business community actually operates These are applied tasks you have to learn and later you can implement them more professionally at some company or organization, or right here, at our organization, as an employee and expert” (David).

“First, you acquire a certain experience – not only communication skills. I am quite a sociable person myself, and I don’t need such experience, but I can also acquire professional experience. Next year when I graduate from the university, things will be much easier for me because I have already participated in some projects, I’ve already done something myself. Besides, it may be easier to find a job with *SAM*’s help – it seems quite real, doesn’t it?” (Nastya)

The second important thing for *SAM* participants is self-realization and the opportunity to help other people. As one respondent put it,

“[I like] also the fact that you can help others, yes. As a high school student I used to participate in various performances so it’s not something totally new for me” (David).

“This is a youth association, a youth movement which brings together young people, the young generation of Tver’ and Tver’ region so that they can enhance their potential. A kind of a meta goal is to teach them how to work in a team, not on their own” (Sanya).

Nashi participants are motivated both economically and ideologically:

“[I joined] because this organization supports Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin” (Shurik).

“But they promised us... well, they did not promise that we’d definitely get the chance to enter graduate school; we had to earn it so it was a good incentive to do it” (Inga).

Nashi’s attitude to Vladimir Putin is also interesting. The movement participants initially called themselves “Putin’s generation” so they were assumed to be loyal to Putin’s political course (including the campaign to improve the demographic situation in Russia). Interview analysis has demonstrated that former participants of *Nashi* movement positively evaluated Putin as a person; however, interestingly, they did not like the above-mentioned state measures aimed to increase the birth rate.

E.K.: Please, tell me, why did you decide to join this movement, what was so attractive to you?

Shurik: Because this organization supports Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

E.K.: Does it mean that you support United Russia?

Shurik: It means I support Vladimir Vladimirovich”.

Respondents’ evaluations of Putin’s activities seem to be rather contradictory, recalling the famous Russian saying: “The Tsar is good but the boyars are bad”. This argument can be supported by the following interview excerpts:

E.K.: Have you heard about the maternity capital policy?

Roma: Yes.

E.K.: How would you characterize this political measure; is it effective?

Roma: Not at all! I kind of talked to many people about this issue – even

with those... what are they called? Not politicians but political scientists, not with so many, rather with a few... They said that someone from the higher echelons of power just needed money so they simply slipped this document into the pile of other documents, he signed it and that was that! This money means nothing. It is not given directly to mothers, right? So... I think it’s not effective.

E.K.: You said: ‘They slipped this document into the pile of other documents and he just signed it.’ Do you mean that Putin signed the document without even reading it?

Roma: Why? He read it... He may have not completely understood it though; anyway there is something wrong with it! If Vladimir Vladimirovich had started to do this himself, he would certainly have finished it. He would have done it well. This is just my personal point of view.

E.K.: But Putin seems to have started it all...

Roma: Well, of course, he has started it, well, I don’t know... may be, he started it but did not finish it... I may be wrong though”.

Shurik: The [housing – E.K.] problem actually remains unsolved. Vladimir Vladimirovich once said he would solve it; he undertook a few measures and then - nothing!

E.K.: What kind of measures can the state undertake in order to improve the demographic situation? I mean, Vladimir Vladimirovich is still there, right?

Shurik: The President’s power and the Prime Minister’s power are two different powers.

E.K.: You mean, he can’t do anything because he’s the Prime Minister?

Shurik: As the Prime Minister he can do certain things, he does have power. Besides, as they say in the U.S.A., (then-presidential candidate Dmitry) Medvedev is a Putin’s puppet. Well, I think, something may still happen”.

The above-mentioned interviews demonstrate that participants' arguments are rather contradictory. On the one hand, these informants believe that Vladimir Vladimirovich sticks to his promises. On the other hand, they negatively assess state demographic policy, blaming anybody but the former Russian president for it.

In my view, the degree of attachment participants feel to their movement has to do with the way they envisage the future. According to the interviews participants think about their futures mainly in the context of their movements:

"... as regards my membership in the organization, I don't plan to cancel it" (Vika, *SKMRF*).

As I have already mentioned, *SAM* participants also believed that their movement would help them get a good job. *Nashi* participants were not asked the question of whether they saw their future lives connected to the movement, because *Nashi* was officially dissolved in January 2008. Instead, they were asked the following question: "Do you think the *Nashi* movement has a chance of reviving in Tver'?"

"In any case as for Tver' and other cities – Orel, Vladimir and the other cities – I can't recall the list at the moment – it will never revive" (Shurik).

"The movement has performed poorly in terms of its organization. Those who used to attend its events as supporters will probably not do so again" (Inga).

"I am not sure. This movement used to be rather powerful when Vasiliy Yakemenko led it; he kept the movement under his thumb and so people stuck together. Now, I think, it won't revive. The team is different, the leader is different" (Roma)

Some respondents also shared their opinions about why the *Nashi* movement collapsed:

"Well, first, the Tver' movement collapsed for three reasons. First of all, and this was actually the main reason, a Moscow girl came here to teach us how to run our lives. And so she did! In six months, half the commissars quit their jobs, and the other half was simply fired. In another six months, only the most tol-

erant people remained – those who really cared about their membership in the movement. As a result, the Tver' movement was dismissed a month before the elections although in Russia in general it was disbanded after the elections. It all happened because of this nasty girl. Besides, it seems to me that some of the local *Nashi* leaders pissed off the *Nashi* leaders from Moscow and they insisted on the dissolution of the Tver' movement. And last but not least, they say that our region was not active enough. That's total bullshit! Our region was the most active; we recruited about one million participants. The majority of those who participated in the Moscow-based events were from Tver'" (Shurik).

"There was a conflict among the movement leaders... One of them was responsible for the movement ideology and some other activities, I can't recall at the moment... All in all, two of the leaders fell out. One of them was rather hot-tempered, and another one was from the Caucasus [sic]. I mean, there was a conflict of interests, they insulted each other, and there was a real fight between them. Then, the folks at the movement headquarters finally decided that all of the former leaders should be dismissed. Well, the Tver' branch was not big and active enough; we could not simply let go of 1,000 people and immediately find another 1,000 who would be willing to actively engage... When you ask your leaders concrete questions and they either refuse to answer, or give really strange responses, it becomes rather difficult to do anything and run the movement. After that, I stepped back a bit and observed all these events as an outsider. The events were failing one after another and as a result we got what we got" (Inga).

"It seems to me that the people who were running the movement at that time... they did not feel like working. They were simply not interested in what they were doing; they just wanted to get paid. And when they

didn't receive any money, the movement collapsed. To be honest, they did not do anything at all. And, besides... they just did not find it interesting enough" (Roma).

The next set of questions focused on state demographic policy. Movement participants were first asked to characterize the Russian demographic situation in general and then to identify the most acute problems. According to *SKMRF* participants, the main problem was the decreasing Russian population:

"In my opinion, it [the demographic situation – *E.K.*] is just catastrophic. One has to struggle with it, that is, to increase the birth rate and decrease the death rate and so on and so forth, because otherwise the Russian population will die out and our territory will be inhabited by the Chinese or someone else" (Vika).

"I should say that, first of all, we are now facing the political and social genocide of our people" (Alexander).

Participants of other movements also mentioned some of the economic and moral problems affecting the demographic situation in Russia:

"Poverty is our main problem. This where we should start, I believe. All of the business and industries in the country are located in the two centers [referring to Moscow and St. Petersburg, *JH*]... Nowadays everyone wants a good career and totally forgets about family values. Migrant workers are also a big problem. Be it legal or illegal migrants - it does not make a big difference so far." (David, *SAM*)

"As far as I can see, the demographic situation is improving in our region as it is in Russia as a whole. There are acute problems, however... Not all citizens can afford a second child. This is important. People should be capable of providing for a second and third baby, as they used to be able to before" (Sanya, *SAM*).

"The most serious problem is the small population, the fact that so few people live in remote villages" (Shurik, *Nashi*).

"They always say on TV 'there are too few children, too few children, we must make children'... well, basically, yes, we must populate Russia, there are many underdeveloped regions. We must populate the country, that's true. But when they say that we don't have many children in Russia, I think, it's a lie: wherever you go, you come across little children!" (Roma).

Respondents' evaluations of Russia's demographic situation varied from "catastrophic" to "stable". *SKMRF* participants provided the most negative assessments. Interestingly enough, some male respondents refused to answer the question concerning the future of demographic policy, claiming that they were not competent to answer it. The answers of other respondents can be summarized as follows:

The demographic situation will further deteriorate

"I think it will get worse. This upsurge [increase in the birth rate] under Putin can be explained by the unnatural decline in the birth rate during the 1990s.¹⁰ ... women held back from having children, hoping that living standards would improve. When things did improve under Putin's administration, things relaxed, resulting in a small birth rate increase. However, the general trend is downward. It's like the aphorism: 'People in Russia are born as in Europe and die as in Africa.' After this upswing, the birth rate will decrease again." (Vladimir, *SKMRF*)

The birth rate will rise in the short term, but then it will fall again

"At first these 250,000 rubles may improve the situation for children, but then people will get used to it

¹⁰ Cf: "The birth rate slightly increased as compared to the hardest year 1999 – shortly after the default – as a reaction to the biggest decrease of the birth rate in the end of the last century" // Perevedentsev V.I. Op. cit., P. 59.

and it [the increase] will eventually grind to a halt” (Roma, *Nashi*)

“First there is an upswing in patriotism, then it dies down. It’s probably the same for demography”(Alexander, *SKMRF*)

Interestingly enough, only *SAM* participants provided an optimistic prognosis:

“Given the positive trends in Russia’s economic development, I think that the demographic situation in this country will be OK.” (Nastya, *SAM*)

“There is no doubt that the demographic situation will be improve, because life itself is getting better.” (Sanya, *SAM*)

Besides this, respondents were asked a number of questions devoted to the aforementioned state policies that aim to foster the birth rate (maternity capital; the Affordable Housing project and the legislation that aims to restrict abortion). This part of the questionnaire consisted of the following questions: Has the respondent ever heard of the above-mentioned state policies measures; do they consider them efficient or not; do they have any recommendations to improve them?

Maternity capital

Eight out of nine respondents had heard about this policy; indeed, one third of them mentioned it in connection to Russia’s demographic situation before the interviewer actually asked them about it. Only one respondent considered it effective:

“I think that it could provide a good incentive for many people and give them some hope for a better future” (Sanya, *SAM*).

Some respondents believed that the policy is good, but not good enough:

“Well, basically it’s not bad. Of course, the birth rate was lower before this law was adopted and now the population will produce more children; however, it’s not enough, I believe” (Alexander, *SKMRF*)

“Well, it could be [an incentive for a woman to have a baby, *E.K.*]” (Shurik, *Nashi*)

However, negative assessments prevailed:

“Well, I don’t know, it seems rather doubtful to me that 250,000 rubles, to be received by the woman three years later, even if it is raised in line with inflation...I really doubt that 250,000 rubles will provide an incentive to have babies” (Vika, *SKMRF*).

When criticizing the maternity capital policy the respondents first stressed that this amount was pretty small:

“What do they offer now, about 270,000 rubles, right? You can’t even buy an apartment with this money with our prices. They calculated this sum according to an ideal, a standard, but the market price is much higher...OK, you could put the money into a good education, but you could only pay for a year with this sum. This is especially problematic for Moscow” (David, *SAM*).

Second, movement participants said that the maternity capital policy seemed rather intangible and phantasmal (*prizrachno*) to them:

“It looks rather phantasmal to me. All the documents [it involves], some mysterious instructions to follow...of course this won’t turn out to be a stimulus” (Vladislav, *SKMRF*).

“It [250,000 rubles, *E.K.*] won’t be given directly to these mothers in cash, right? So... I don’t think it will work” (Roma, *Nashi*)

“All in all, it’s not at all clear how this money will be actually transferred to the bank accounts of universities and schools; it’s not clear how they will technically do it...For instance, it certainly wouldn’t encourage me to have a baby because, first of all, our country is very unstable. Today they say we will receive maternity capital, but nobody knows what will happen tomorrow” (Inga, *Nashi*)

Third, there are certain limits to its usage:

“Once again this money is given for certain purposes, for education and housing, you’re not free to use it as you choose” (Inga, *Nashi*)

Affordable housing

The majority of respondents knew about this project – only two of them said that they were not well aware of it.

“Honestly speaking, I don’t know exactly what the “Affordable Housing” project is all about” (Alexander, *SKMRF*).

Only *SAM* participants rated the program’s effectiveness highly:

“I am absolutely sure it will be effective” (Sanya)

“Sure. Yes. It is really good” (Nastya).

The opinions of other the respondents were either negative (Vika, UCU RF: “... in my view, it’s a huge burden for low-income families”), or extremely negative:

(*speaking with irony*): “Oh yeah, sure, it’s an absolutely marvelous project! No sooner had it been launched than housing prices doubled! What a successful government project! (*laughs*) This “Affordable Housing” project is a bad joke (*profanatsiia*), from what I’ve heard about it. The government should sort out all these shadow housing schemes, and check the activities of the parasitic construction companies which speculate on housing and build elite town houses and apartment buildings in the Moscow region. It should make new laws and ensure social guarantees. Instead, it declares that it’s going to build houses, fill them with school teachers...and this is it, the rest of population will get nothing! It is all about PR, it’s the imitation of Western methods of communication between the government and the public. The project is already bankrupt” (Vladislav, *SKMRF*).

(*Laughing*) “Affordable housing is for those who are already well-established, with huge salaries or personal connections.” (David, *SAM*)

(*Laughing*): “It’s a really nice stand-up comedy joke .. those who still believe in Santa, and the affordable housing project” (Inga).

Thus, regardless of their movement affiliation, the majority of respondents strongly doubted the effectiveness of this project.

Restrictions on abortion

This policy seems to be the least well known; unlike the policy on maternity capital, or the “Affordable Housing” project, it has not been widely publicized in the media. Only one respondent had heard about it from her university professor. However, discussion of this policy inevitably provoked general discussion about respondents’ attitudes to abortion, including its moral aspects.

“If a girl gets pregnant, she must first think about her baby. If she delivers a baby and this baby is disabled, I mean, it’s still a living person and may have a full life... well, maybe, not a completely full life but still, it’s already alive, so... This is a real person and no one has a right to terminate her or his life” (Alexander, *SKMRF*).

However, most respondents were against this policy:

“Well, first of all, I would like to talk about my general attitude toward the prohibition of abortion. I have an extremely negative attitude toward the prohibition of abortion... I think that nothing good will come of it” (Vika, *SKMRF*).

“It is a vivid example of a clumsy Soviet approach to a serious problem. Psychological and economic problems can’t be solved by blind administrative means. I think it is a stupid idea” (Vladislav, *SKMRF*).

“Nothing good will come of it” (Inga, *Nashi*).

Some respondents were convinced that the restrictions placed on legal abortion would lead to an increase in the number of illegal abortions:

“It will increase the number of illegal abortions, it won’t achieve anything else” (Inga, *Nashi*).

“Abortions will continue anyway – either illegally or in some other way” (Roma, *Nashi*)

“It seems to me that the number of illegal abortions will considerably increase” (Vika, UCY)

Professional demographers believe that the prohibition of abortion, which is zealously supported by several deputies of the Russian State Duma and Russian Orthodox Church activists, is totally useless in terms of increasing the birth rate. According to Perevedentsev, “When the ban on abortion of 1936 was lifted in 1955, the birth rate did not decrease. This means that the population was already well-adapted to this prohibition policy”.¹¹

My analysis of interview materials demonstrates that respondents do not consider state demographic policies effective. However, they have different opinions about economic stability and living standards in Russia. *SAM* participants are fairly optimistic about these issues:

“Given the country’s economic development and positive trends I think that the demographic situation in our country will be O.K.” (Sanya)

“The standard of living in Russia is getting better. When you have money, when you understand that you can afford to buy bread, butter and sausage, then you realize that you can provide for a baby – so, why not have one?” (Nastya)

SKMRF participants believed that the economic situation in Russia is far from stable:

“Again, one needs to have a sense of stability. It’s important for young people, for those Russian citizens who want to have babies. You need to be confident that your children will get affordable medical services

and a good education. I mean, no one hopes to study free of charge anymore, but you hope at least they will be able to go to university. And again, you must be sure that you make enough money to provide for your baby. It seems to me that many young families want to have a decent life and to be able to afford to buy good things for themselves. When you have a baby, you’ll have to limit your budget anyway, right? So people want those limitations to be as insignificant as possible. It seems to me that it is all about income level and a sense of stability... Although they say that we’ve attained economic stability in this country, it seems to me that people retain a sense of economic crisis from the 1990s; besides, as prices shoot up, how can you feel stable?” (Vika)

Interestingly enough, *Nashi* participants seem to agree with these arguments:

“The standard of living in Russia is very low” (Roma).

“... First of all, our country is economically unstable” (Inga)

All movement participants believed that resolving this problem and increasing the birth rate requires a whole set of different policies.

“A whole set of measures should be undertaken; no one will be happy with that miserable pittance” (David, *SAM*).

“The methods should certainly differ from those stupid, clumsy Soviet methods. We need to build a civil society!” (Vladislav *SKMRF*)

“In order to make demographic policy more efficient, so that the number of births exceeds or is at least equal to the number of deaths, it is necessary to guarantee high levels of economic well-being” (Vika, *SKMRF*).

¹¹ Perevedentsev V.I. Op cit. P. 64.

“That’s why it’s necessary to improve the economic situation somehow, to introduce additional social benefits. Maybe benefits for working mothers which might stimulate them to have more babies and would mean they could afford to raise their babies (even if they are single parents), to buy them food, and clothes and so on.” (Inga, *Nashi*)

“It’s also necessary to make changes in the labor laws. When women on maternity leave are unprotected in terms of keeping their jobs, or when employers discriminate against women with little children – what will these women do then?” (David, *SAM*)

“I can put this in general terms: new jobs, affordable childcare facilities. Funds should be provided to support families with little children. All these things could substantially increase the birth rate.” (Sanya, *SAM*).

In the course of discussion, respondents frequently mentioned or implied the concept of “reproduction quality” (*kachestvo rozhdaemosti*), implying that they were concerned by the question of which sectors of the population would have more babies:

“I am deeply concerned about the quality of reproduction: who are those parents? They are girls who have recently graduated from technical colleges; they married young men who may not even have decent full-time jobs. They operate according to the principal: if they pay me here today, I’ll work for them; tomorrow they’ll pay me there, so I’ll run there. I mean it’s totally unstable. Those girls stick to these men and start bearing their children. They don’t understand that in ten years the men will abandon them and they will be enjoying the burden of raising the whole, to put it crudely, bunch of kids. So who will those children be when they grow up? The same kind of people as their parents were! It seems to me that there’s only a very

small chance for these people to ever accomplish anything in their lives although there may be exceptions, of course. Nowadays one can study and work at the same time, it is possible to survive, no doubt about that. However, later there may be problems. Affluent (*obespechennye*) families usually have their babies later and no more than one baby per family because they want to do their best for their only child.” (Inga, *Nashi*)

“For us, children are more than just children. When we have one, we cheer and celebrate; we want our children to be good citizens and to have families; we want them be intelligent and well-educated.” (Nastya, *SAM*)

“Any woman can give birth to a baby, but only a few can bring them up properly and educate them.” (Shurik, *Nashi*)

Nashi participants were also asked about their attitudes toward abortion and contraception, since the movement is notorious for its anti-contraception views and negative attitudes toward abortion. Take, for example, the “I Want Three!” campaign, which encourages young people to have three children. Another example of the expression of these views was found in an edition of the *Nashi* movement paper, *Nashe Vremia*. Here, the (anonymous) author threatens readers that Russia is about to die out, citing the dubious statistic that every second woman has already had an abortion. The article goes on to claim that Russian men are becoming impotent at the age of 30, and that contraception is sent to Russia by foreign villains, whose foul purpose is to prevent the reproduction of Russian citizens.¹² However, when questioned on these topics, respondents did not seem to share these ideas:

E.K.: Do you share these beliefs?
Shurik: No.

E.K.: But you participated in the *Nashi* movement, didn’t you?

Shurik: Yes, I did, but I wasn’t a commissar, I was just supporting a few aspects of their activities, that’s all.

¹² “Demografiia-rody naroda”, *Nashe Vremia*, №3(9) 2007. P.4

E.K.: Does this mean that only commissars share the movement's ideology?

Shurik: Commissars studied the Manifesto, they prepared for something and they had to do it for some reason. It's 'either-or': they either accept it or pretend to accept in order to stay in the movement. They may take it seriously though but it's...

E.K.: Hardly possible?

Shurik: Yes.

Inga: There were lots of leaflets scattered around our office. According to Putin's plan, the movement was supposed to be state-affiliated. As I remember, there was one leaflet depicting a boy and a girl holding hands. It was a scary picture: one child symbolized the country dying out, two children symbolized equality, and the ideal was three children, with bright sunshine and so on. I mean, on the one hand it is certainly good, so simple, to have a kid and all... However, given our conditions of life, having children becomes a luxury. I recently heard on the *Evropa Plus* radio station... one man said that having children was more expensive than maintaining a prestigious foreign car. It's a kind of a male comparison (laughs), but it's true, indeed. A prestigious car is expensive but child-related costs are still higher.

E.K.: Does this mean that you don't completely share the movement's ideology?

Inga: Personally, I'm not ready and don't actually want to have a baby at the age propagated by the movement because...

E.K.: And what age does the movement recommend?

Inga: Well, it's not specified. However, logically speaking, who is the movement's target group? It's mainly senior high school students and university students. When you get older, you either become a full-paid movement leader or... well, when you are 27 it seems stupid to keep participating voluntarily in all the numerous meetings. To have babies when you are 27, moreover, to

have three or more babies at such a young age... what would you do with them, then? Personally, I don't think that kind of propaganda is good for people at that age... it could be a good message for the future though.

Conclusions

First and most strikingly, my analysis has shown that youth movement participants' loyalty to state demographic policy does not depend on their movement affiliation. Regardless of which movement they belonged to, most respondents did not believe in the effectiveness of existing state policies aimed at improving the demographic situation. In their view the Russian state should develop and implement a whole set of measures in order to improve the demographic situation in the country. These measures might include economic and ideological policies. Economic measures include, but are not limited to, additional social benefits, more generous allowances for pregnant women etc. Some of the ideological policies respondents suggested include the revival of family values and the creation of civil society.

Second, gender seemed to play a crucial role in shaping respondents' attitudes toward demographic policy issues. Two thirds of respondents were men and one third were women. The women had more negative attitudes toward measures to restrict abortion, and none of them considered maternity capital an incentive to have babies.

Third, according to the respondents of this research, Russia's demographic situation is mainly affected by the following issues:

- *the general economic instability in Russia and people's uncertainty about their future;*
- *the low standard of living, accompanied by the rising costs of housing and real estate, food-stuffs, basic necessities etc.;*
- *the destruction of family values;*
- *an orientation toward the one-child family model.*

Finally, respondents emphasized what they referred to as the "quality" of reproduction; that is, they believe that Russian society needs fully-functional, or accomplished (*polnotsennykh*), civic-minded (*soznatel'nykh*) people. Some respondents believe that maternity capital can negatively affect the quality of reproduction, because it may encourage socially marginalized low-income women (e.g., alcoholics, drug-users, etc) to have more babies, thus reproducing poverty.

According to respondents, Russia's demographic situation is deteriorating due to the declining birth rate; in their view, the Putin administration has not had a significant impact on the demographic situation in the country.

List of respondents

- №1. Vika, aged 21, *SKMRF*.
- №2. Alexander, aged 18, *SKMRF*.
- №3. Vladislav, aged 26, *SKMRF*.
- №4. David, aged 20, *SAM*.
- №5. Sanya, aged 21, *SAM*.
- №6. Nastya, aged 20, *SAM*.
- №7. Shurik, aged 18, *Nashi*.
- №8. Inga, aged 21, *Nashi*.
- №9. Roma, aged 19, *Nashi*.