

# SWINGS IN PERCEPTION OF AUTHORITIES IN THE BEGINNING OF 2010-S

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The paper discusses the results of the last stage of an empirical study of the swings in authorities' perception that have taken place since electoral campaign of 2011–2012 in Russia. The poll contained a number of open-ended questions that were processed with the help of scaling technique together with SPSS package for the standard questions. These data were compared with the previous results since 1993. Our analysis has shown that public perception divides into three periods. The first stage includes 1990-s when political optics of Russian society was very unfocused: one and the same respondent could trust one politicians, sympathize to others and voted for the third. The second stage is characterized by consolidation of society towards authorities. Images of power in different generational, gender, professional and regional groups were very similar. This stage abruptly finished in 2010. The third stage started in 2010-s. Consolidation of society was damaged in the beginning of this period that resembles the 1990s with their contradictory authorities' images. Though, analogy is not complete.

One of the reasons for such changes in relations between citizens and authorities was arrival of a so called generation of 00-s to politics. Political socialization of this generation whose have taken place in stormy 1990-s. That is why their political picture of the world formed as extremely unstable and chaotic.

We have fixed some positive swings as well, For instance we have found values of activism that rooted in public mind in the third period. Citizens also express their desire to subordinate laws. Tycoons disappeared from the public space. Negative changes include the decline of army's prestige with simultaneous growth of intelligence influence.

*Key words:* political perception, images of authorities, citizens.

## Introduction

In no country citizens love authorities while the latter recon with them only after mass protests. In Russia relations between citizens and authorities are always influenced by a high level of emotions. Our authorities either ignore citizens or look offended by them. Citizens rarely trust and respect them but continue to elect them and show readiness to subordinated an elected power. During long history of the

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country these interrelations are filled with strong feelings and are not guided by rational interests.

### **Description of the study**

About two dozens of years my colleagues and I observe the character of citizens' and authorities' relations. We are interested in what citizens see in authorities and power, what kind of power images do they have and what factors determine these images. This study was started in 1993 and continues until now.

The last stage of the study was carried out at the Chair of Sociology and Psychology of Politics, Department of Political Science, Lomonosov Moscow State University in spring-summer of 2013. The study was both quantitative and qualitative. We have carried out a survey in which a questionnaire included a big number of open-ended questions. Answers on these questions were processed with a scaling method. A survey was made in 8 regions of Russia: Moscow, Moscow region, Chelyabinsk, Voronezh, Saratov, Tomsk, Krasnodar regions and Bashkortostan.

The sample consisted of 898 respondents. The sample is not representative for the country as a whole but it is representative for each of 8 regions. The study also included deep interviews and projective tests, but in this paper we will discuss only the results of the last survey which we compare with our previous results [*Shestopal E. Theoretical and methodological problems...*, 2012].

### **Some theoretical presumptions of the study**

Before discussing the results of our study we will focus on some essential theoretical issues that lay in the basis of our interpretation model.

**Political perception** has some specific traits that make it different from other forms of perception [*Psychologija politicheskogo vosprijzija, 2002, Pishcheva 2011, Preanjakova, 2000*]. *First*, it is directed on evaluative interpretation of political power and leaders rather than on simple reflection of objective reality. *Second*, political perception differs from a general one by more cohesion of cognitive and emotional elements. *Third*, it is mediated mainly by Medea. And *the last* it is effected by values, stereotypes and attitudes of public.

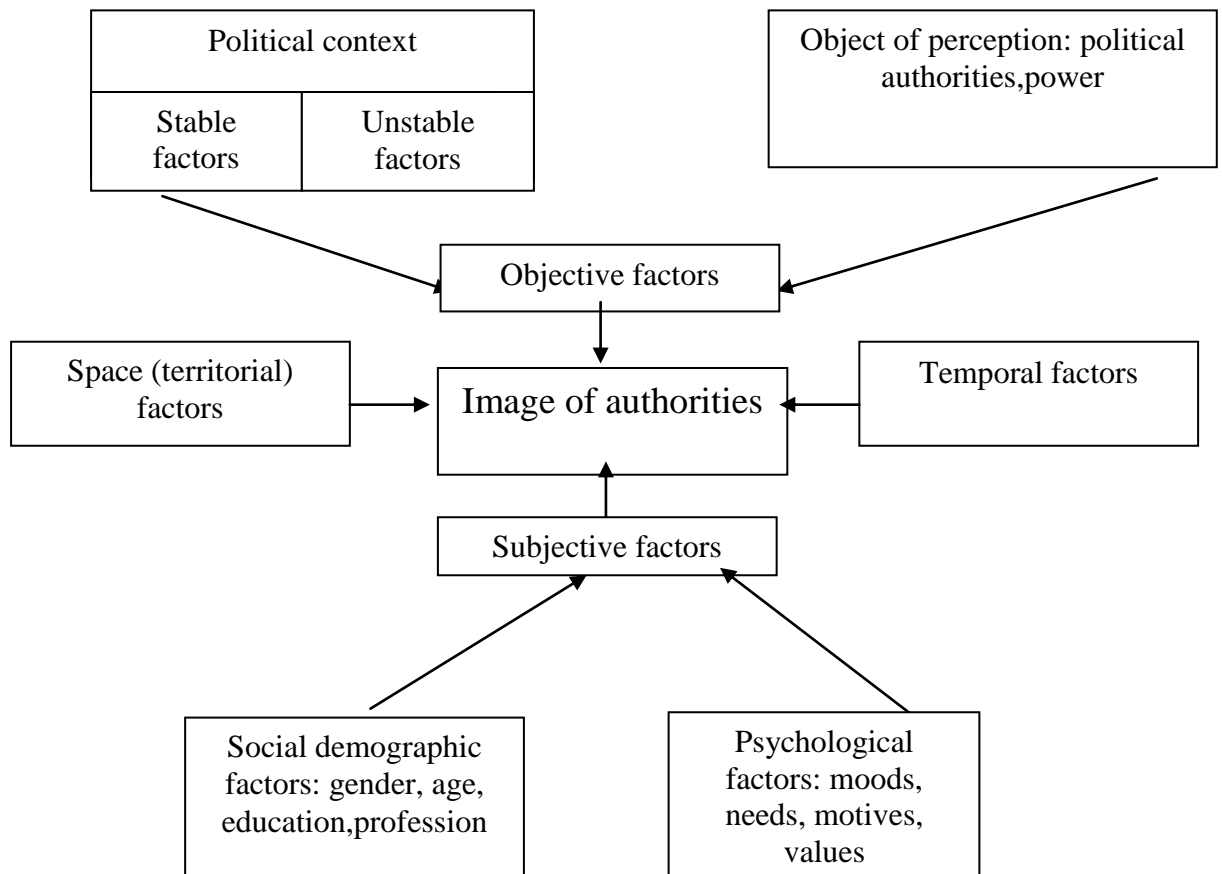
If political perception is a process of reflection of parties, leaders, state etc. in public mind, the main "bricks", which constitute this process, are **images**. In psychology image is tackled as a generalized

picture of the world that is a result of processing of information that comes to us via senses [Gregory, Richard. "Perception" in Gregory, Zangwill (1987) pp. 598–601, Alan S. & Gary J. (2011). *Perception, Attribution, and Judgment of Others. Organizational Behaviour: Understanding and Managing Life at Work Vol. 7*].

In contemporary Political Psychology one will find a few works on general theory of political perception. There are of course some exceptions, for instance works of K. McGraw [Milton Lodge; Kathleen M. McGraw...1995]. Scholars usually focus on perception of single political objects, mainly candidates in particular electoral campaigns [Parker-Stephen, E. 2004, Stanley Feldman and Pamela Johnston Conover, 1983]. One can also find such objects of perception as political risk, parties and their leaders, different actors of international relations, corruption etc. Only few authors address to general theory of political perception and try to analyze general and unique in perception of different political phenomena, describe psychological mechanisms of political perception [Psychologija političeskogo vosprijztiija, 2012; Granberg, D. 1985, Granberg, Donald, Kasmer, Jeff, Nanneman, Tim, 1988; Granberg, Donald, 1995].

**Image of authorities** as any other one is on one hand – reflection of real characteristics of perception object, i.e. authorities. One can call these characteristics **objective** components that for a great deal define the contents of the image. On the other hand - an image is a projection of expectations of citizens' perception. One can find in the image their needs and motives, concepts, attitudes, expectations, emotions and demands to authorities. These components can be called **subjective** ones. Political images will change along with changes in psychology of a society including such characteristics of the subject as gender, age, education, region etc. (see picture 1).

### **Picture 1. Factors, determining image of authorities**



### Structure of the image

An important moment for understanding of political perception is its' **structure analysis**.

**First**, we start our analysis of image structure from allocation of two levels of the image: **rational** and **unconscious** [Bukreeva,2013]. Rational components of the image reflect those of its' characteristics that the subject is aware of. For instance in images of authorities citizens can quite rationally accentuate their demands to them or to explain their reasons to trust them. Rational level of political perception is mainly determined by cognitive mechanisms. As on an unconscious level of perception emotions predominate, and individual is not aware of them. So, our respondent often can not explain his relation towards authorities even for himself, not to say about his explanations to other people. Even when an individual gives such an explanation it is not always a trustworthy one, because of a rationalization. As our previous studies have shown [E.Shestopal, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012] in situations of political instability citizens can not form rational attitudes toward politics and in their choice they are guided mainly by emotions.

**Second**, according to Ch.Osgood's conception, accepted in contemporary psychology, we can distinguish in the image similar to structure of personality such scales as

- **attractiveness-unattractiveness,**
- **strength-weakness**
- **activity-passivity.**

Presence of **strength** parameter increases attractiveness of political image. Using this parameter we receive an additional instrument which helps us to sift those characteristics that have undeniably positive meanings but without strength cannot be used for forecast. The same is true for parameter of activity that is connected with implementation of power credentials. Strength and activity are as a rule realized by respondents. But they can be revealed and fixed on an unconscious level as well.

**Third**, one can allocate and study separately **visual** and **verbal** structure elements. Image as one can see from its' origin, is connected with visual perception of information. Perception of visual information was always important but in contemporary politics with the wide spread of Internet and TV, that are aimed in visualization of politics, this element dominates. We have to note that by their nature visual elements of perception are unconscious. That is why their analysis necessitates special methods that could help us to extract and interpret these unconscious structures. In our study we used for this purpose projective tests, method of unfinished sentences and other psychological tools.

**Fourth**, an important moment in evaluation of this or that **real** political object by a person is its' comparison with an ideal prototype[Smulkina,2013]. Political perception needs a kind of value etalon that enables the process of evaluation. So to evaluate a real power or authorities a person compares it with an image of ideal power, or the power that it should be. Revealing of this ideal prototype permits us to make our analysis more precise.

**Fifth**, in transforming societies, as G.Diligensky correctly pointed [Diligensky,1996,p.46] political objects are better studied through the system of attitudes as they are more mobile than values, believes or other elements of a perceiving personality[Lennart Sjöberg1998,pp. .137-152]. In psychological literature it is accepted to allocate three elements in the attitude: **cognitive, affective and behavioral**. For us it means that in the image we should find out not only cognitive elements( verbalized by individual and as a rule those that he is aware of) but also

affective ones that are rarely acknowledged as well as behavioral elements that are closer to an act.

### **Discussion of the results of the study 2013**

Our previous studies have shown that Russian authorities has been perceived very differently in different periods of Post-Soviet development: everything was in a process of change - institutes o power, rules of the game and personal composition of power. Citizens also changed while acquiring political experience.

Up to 2010 these changes had a gradual character. But in our study of 2010 for the first time we have fixed a substantial swing of values and images [*Shestopal E.2011*]. Changes in values and images preceded to those important changes in real politics of 2011-2012. It is worth o saying that in this period authorities nether made great deeds nor made fatal mistakes that can explain such a transformation of social moods.

Let us start from those constants that continue to determine the background of citizens' perception of authorities. First of all one must note that in 2013, the same as before, power and authorities are perceived extremely negatively in emotional dimension. That means that respondents dislike authorities and on occasion call it bad names. The paradox that we mentioned in the very beginning of this paper preserves: people negatively evaluate power but they eagerly subordinate it. On the first place they are ready to subordinate laws, on the second – the state, on the third – the bosses. In our last study of 2013 there were 91% of respondents who are ready to subordinate power of laws. This is a historic maximum since 1993. It means that emotional hostility of authorities, alienation from them does not cause rejection to subordinate.

I believe that constants described before connect our time with 1990- and even earlier time.

But there is a lot of new developments. We shall describe them and try to explain. The first point to mention is a growth **of the value of political activism** (see table 1).

**Table 1. Are you ready personally to take part in...?(you can give more than one answer)**

	<b>993</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>996</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>000</b>	<b>003</b>	<b>010</b>	<b>013</b>
In elections as a voter	2	2,3	4	7	3,6	0,6	9	<b>0</b>
In a rally to support some party or movement		4,9	0		7,6	,6	3	<b>2</b>
In a strike		4,9			3,6	3,6	0	<b>6</b>
In election as a candidate		9,8			3	0		<b>8</b>
nowhere				7	1,9	9	1	<b>0</b>
Do not know			1		,5	,4		

The given data show the growth of readiness to vote (more than 20% in comparison with 2010). Only in 1996 – a year of presidential elections mobilization was higher. It means that democratic system that presupposes elections and civic engagement is rooted in the society. This is one of the important results of political development.

Besides voting we see the growth of other forms of political activity, such as rallies (from 13% in 2010 to 22% in 2013) and strikes (from 10% to 16%). The last parameter reached its' pick from 1993. Even in hungry 1990-s there were less people ready for strikes than now. Probably in that period strike were regarded by people as not a "right way" of industrial disputes because in the Soviet time they were absent. But the most surprising was the growth of the number of the probable candidates in elections of all levels (38%). It is even more surprising if one takes into account the decline of reputation of the current deputies and their elected bodies. But this fact supports the conclusion that electoral system became not only habitual but valuable and desirable to citizens.

We also asked our respondents a question: what kind of politicians obtain more power? (see table 2).

**Table 2. Who among politicians, in your opinion, obtains the most power in contemporary Russia? (you can give more than one answer)**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013</b>
President	79,7	24	92
Prime Minister	-	26	30
Presidential administration	59,5	6	25
State Duma ( lower chamber of the Parliament)	24,9	5	20
Federation Council( higher chamber of the Parliament)	17,7	2	9
Government	39,2	6	18
Interior Ministry, Intelligence		14	51
Governor		3	13
Local, municipal power	25,7	3	7
Court	20,3	3	15
Procuracy	28,7	3	18
Army	15,6	1	7
Political parties	9,7	5	14



other			7
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It is not surprising that the President is regarded by respondents the most influential figure. But not all is so simple. Function or role does not automatically determine political influence.

In 2010 Prime Minister Putin was more influential than President Medvedev. It can be interpreted in that way that personality means in Russia more than status. But in 2013 Prime Minister Medvedev seems to have more power than his predecessor Putin in 2010 either because Putin was able to increase the influence of this status or citizens started to see all the political actors in 2013 as more mighty.

It is clear that the President is a Number 1 figure. Prime Minister should be number 2 by theory. But in our case the second place is occupied by “siloviki” representatives of police and intelligence (all special forces except the army). The army divides the last place with municipal power (in spite of a high rating of defense minister S. Shoigu). Powerful influence of both chambers of the Parliament, procuracy and courts as well as Presidential administration have grown. But even more important that criminal structures and oligarchs who were very visible among powerful political actors in 2000 – now disappeared. It does not mean the real absence of their influence but they became less visible to public. One can interpret this as a success of authorities who have shown their ability to clean their image from defamatory communication.

The role of political parties is an important issue. Though parties are not in the center of power image of our respondents but they became three times as visible as in 2010.

Support of the parties have grown but each party has its’ own story. One parties are strong due to ideas, others have high electoral support, the third ones do not have many followers but they have few opponents. Table 3 give data that permit us to put together different parts of this mosaic.

**Table 3**

**1. Please, tell us ,ideas of what political parties do you share?  
(you can give 2-3 variants of answer)**

**2. What party would you vote for if Parliamentary elections takes place next Sunday?**

**3. Which party you will not vote for under any conditions?**

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
1. «Communist party	22.8	13.4	20.7
2. «United Russia»	33.4	29	27.1
3. «Liberal democrats»	15.0	6	27.3
4. «Just Russia»	14.1	6.3	8.7
5. «Yabloko»	9.2	4.8	15.8
6. «Right forces Union»	2.8	0.4	12.4
7. «Civic Platform»	14.8	8.7	12
8. other( <i>name what</i> )	2.6	3.8	1
9Do not support any party	22.7	20.3	5.5
99Do not Know	5.0	6.5	7

Let us notice that first of all support of ideas and values of the party does not automatically determine voting for this party in elections. And the second moment: electoral behavior is effected not only by positive feelings of party supporters but also by intensiveness of negative feelings of its' opponents.

Now we shall look at the images of particular parties. So, **United Russia (UR)** in spite of the severe criticism in 2011 managed to preserve its 'positions in terms of ideas and in electoral s sense while its 'enemies are rather influential as one can see from the answers on the third question. The number of foes is bigger only in LDPR. But UR has substantial reserves though it has numerous problems with it's perception.

Though the **Communist Party (CP)** has more enemies than friends but it still has a stable ideological influence.

**Just Russia (JR)** has a low level of recognizability, but is highly trusted due idea of social justice, used by this party in it's name. If to look at their electoral potential they are not very good in using their ideological reserve : number of their opponents is larger than number of supporters.

“**Yabloko**” and “**Right forces Union**” look clear outsiders in the eyes of citizens and similar to LDPR have lost perspective. We also can notice that leaders of “The Civic Platform” was unable to use their ideological resource. They did not float their competitive advantage of a “newcomer” in politics and weakness of their rightwing rivals though they have a good ideological potential. One of the factors of their electoral success was the growth of liberal moods in society during last years( see table 4).

**Table 4. How would you define your political preferences?**

	1993	1995	1996	1997	2000	2003	2010	2013
liberal	4,2	14,9	10,9	11,3	13,4	7	17	20,4
socialist		10,6	10,9	3,3	8,4	5,8	10	9,7
archist		2,1		1,7	2,5	1,2	3	1,4
democrat	33,3	17	31,7	21,7	27,6	24,5	33	30,4
patriot				15				
nationalist				5		3,4		
radical	4,2	14,9	2	1,7	2,5	2,1	3	1,3
conservative	20,8	6,4	5,9	15	12,1	4,8	10	10,2
communist	25	27,7	6,9	3,3	7,1	12	7	7,2
apolitical	8,3	4,3	27,7	20	19,2	20,2	16	14,8
other	4,2	2,1	5,9		4,2	3,7	2	5,7
Do not know						14,5		

As the data show no one political ideology has such a growth as a liberal one. They have reached in 2013 their historical maximum. Though democrats keep their dominant position with 30,4%. The concept “democrat” includes a variety of meanings. Socialists have lost their supporters. Conservatives did not increase numbers as well as communists. They stay nearly at the same level.

But the most curious result concerns nationalists. On the background of a real growth of nationalism and xenophobia people are not ready to identify themselves as nationalists publicly.

None of our respondents confessed that he is a nationalist or even a patriot. It means that in contemporary Russia nationalism is still publicly socially undesirable form of political behavior. There is also a definite decline of the number of apolitical citizens. Development of Russian political system resulted in three years in 2% decline of those who abstain from politics.

If to look at the picture in general, it decays into three clear periods. **The first** includes 1990-s. In this period political optics was pretty misfocused; the same respondent felt sympathy to one politician, trusted another and voted the third. This period of “political astigmatism” was finished in 2000 with first Putin’s Presidency and stability that he was able to achieve.

Starting from 2000 **the second stage** started in 2000: society consolidated its’ vision of authorities. Images of power and authorities were rather similar in people of different generations, gender, professions and regions. This stage abruptly finished in 2010.

The **third stage** started in 2010 and is going until now.

One of the reasons in the change of relations of authorities and citizens one can name generation of 2000-s, coming to politics in 2010-s. Their political socialization took place in stormy 1990-s. Picture of political world of this generation was molded in a period of extreme instability and uncertainty. On one hand their political beliefs were effected by official democratic rethoric that they have absorbed from the very beginning. On the other hand this picture was not coherent with real political practices that they observed. This cognitive dissonance pushed people for protest in Sacharov Street and Bolotnaya Squary in 2011-2012. They voted for oppositional politicians like Navalny and Roizman in 2013. Though these people do not define all Russian politics, their presence in contemporary politics have changed our political landscape.

The second reason for such rapid change of political optics of Russian society was connected with fact of destruction of state Medea monopoly. Printed media and TV that was under control of authorities faced in 2000-s competition from Internet. Authorities until now are unable to influence citizens affectively via these new forms of political communication. This factor have effected not only generation of 2000-s but older age cohorts as well.

This new stage in some way resembles the first period of 1990-s by a high level of mismatch of images of authorities. There is no total analogy, of course. One can speak of new positive trend as well as of new challenges. The positive side of this new stage is saving of integrity of political system after a stress of 2011. It important, as in case of the clash similar to the beginning of 1990-s, the country can collapse. Dangers are also quite clear : instability instead of development can cause serious shocks when citizens unable to satisfy simple needs destroy everything around. Today we see that this danger becomes quite real. Images of authorities that we study – is a reflection of people's feelings and moods that permit us to make judgments of possible forms of behavior.

We can fix for instance localization of discontent in different segments of political field. On one hand we can see the growth of right-wing, liberal segment, that unites educated middle class. Their protest is caused by desire to have more political representation. Their discontent is determined more by rational interests than emotions. In this strata of

society for the first time in 20 years we fix a thesis of inefficacy of authorities.

The majority of society is still loyal to authorities though now they are also not happy with them. They expect from authorities social justice. Their demands are moral rather than political. These people are ready to subordinate their bosses, follow laws. The state is a highest value for them but only in case that power is just.

But there is the third segment that like a volcano is now sleeping and only episodically reveals itself in Manezhnaya square, in Kondopoga and Sagra, in events in Birjulevo – this is radical nationalism. This protest is based on emotions, that are psychologically very bright and attractive to those of people who are till now are loyal to authorities

The beginning of a current electoral cycle became a turning point to Russian politics. Authorities, on one hand managed to save the political system and, on the other hand – to change and reform it under the pressure of a society. But this process is not completed. If it stops once more and authorities will not keep initiative in their hands, this initiative will go to the arising new opposition. Power is ready to deal with liberals, but one can not exclude that they will be opposed not by people from Bolotnaya, but by people from Birjulevo.

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