

# Is It Still the Economy? The Responsibility Attribution for the Economic Crisis in Russia 2014-2015

Elena Sirotkina Andrey Semenov Margarita Zavadskaya

LCSR Research proposal

*Margarita.Zavadskaya@EUI.EU*

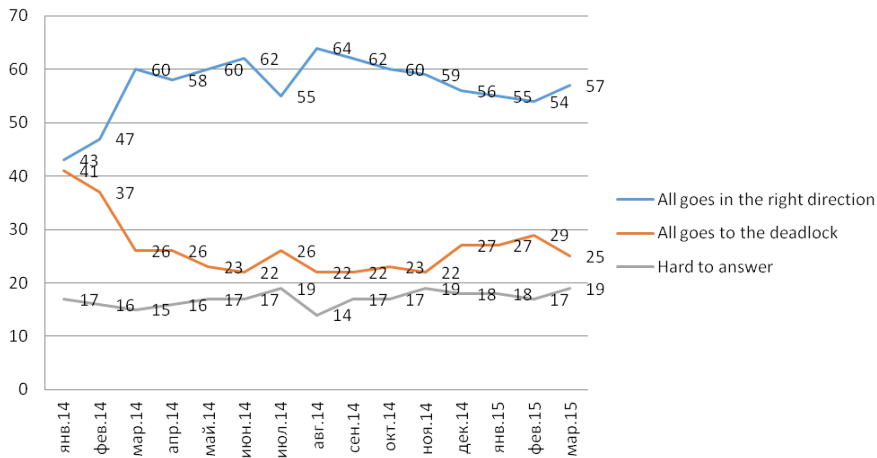
April 10, 2015

# Outline

- 1 Initial puzzle
- 2 Research question
- 3 Explanatory model and hypotheses
- 4 Research strategies
- 5 Challenges

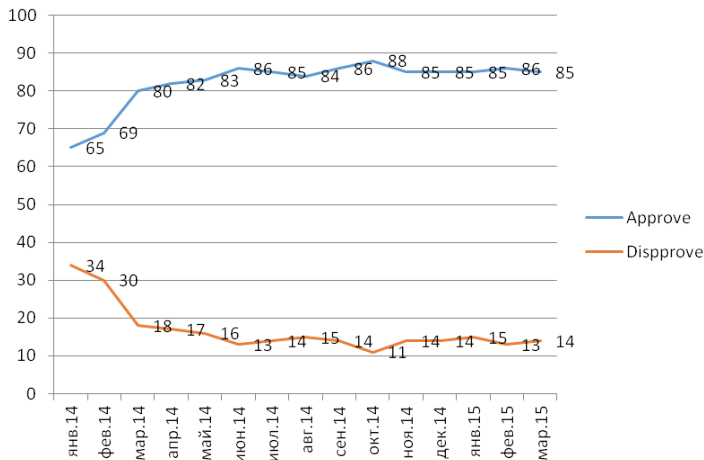
# Initial puzzle: Vladimir Putins teftlon rating in course of 2014-2015 crisis

Figure 1. Assessment of the situation in the country. Source: Levada Center polls



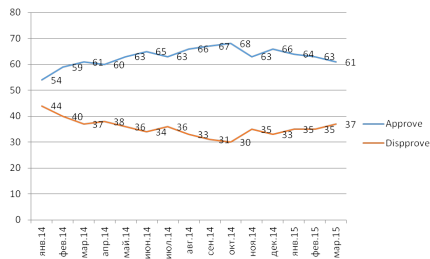
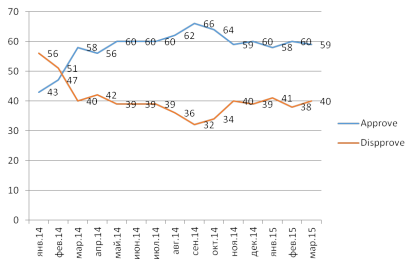
# Initial puzzle: Vladimir Putin's teflon rating in course of 2014-2015 crisis

Figure 2. President Putin's approval rating. Source: Levada Center polls



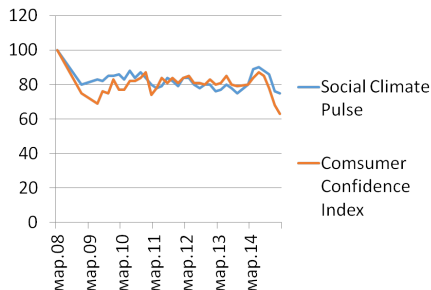
# Prime-minister and government ratings have avoided blaming and shaming ...so far

Figure 3. Government approval ratings. Source: Levada Center polls



# Initial question and possible answers

- Why despite deterioration of socio-economic conditions the authorities at large (including United Russia party) have not become a target of blaming and shaming apart from faithful protesters?
- The usual answers are the post-Crimean euphoria and anti-Western consensus, conservative turn and exposure to TV and state-leaning media that provide people with pre-existing frames.



# What does the theory say?

- Voters tend to punish governments for underperformance and economic failures (Key 1964, Tufte 1978, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000, but see Singer 2010).
- The model is relevant to non-Western and low-income democracies: Remmer studied 21 presidential elections in 12 Latin American countries and came to conclusion that results provide some support for the view incumbents pay the price for short-term economic setbacks (1991:785).
- **Does the behavior of Russians indicates the irrelevance of economic voting reward-punishment model?**

# Research question(s)

- Do voter/citizens punish autocrats and their minions?
- In order to punish them they have to attribute responsibility.
- How does the responsibility attribution work under electoral authoritarian conditions?
- Is it the lagged effect of economic downturn or mass media effects compensate for relative economic losses?



# How do Russians attribute political responsibility?

## Identity?

No economic voting in Russia (Rose 2011)

2008-2009 crisis did not have any impact on V. Putins and D. Medvedevs political support (McAllister and Whyte 2011)

versus

## Economic rationality?

Considerable effect of the financial crisis of 2008-2009 on Russians political attitudes, particularly those who were touched by the crisis (Chaisty and Whitefield 2012)

Russians have always evaluated political leaders primarily based on the objective economic indicators, rather than charismatic leadership or cultural specificity (Treisman 2011)

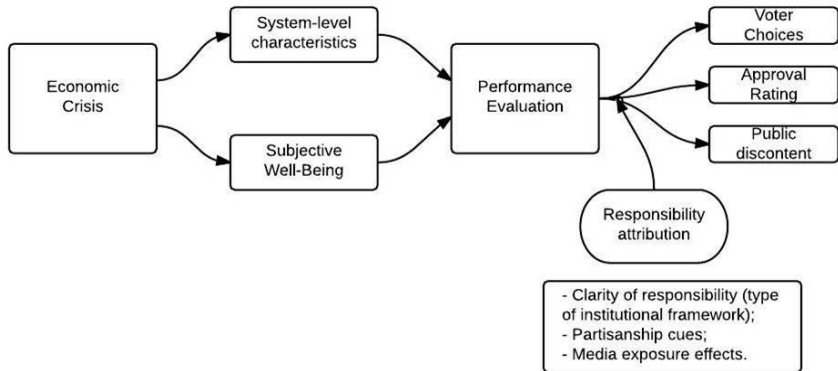
# How do Russians attribute political responsibility?



# Main argument

- authoritarian equilibrium rests mainly on **lies, fear, or economic prosperity** (Przeworski, 1991: 58)
- exposure to mainstream media altered responsibility attribution from government to the West and sanctions

# Responsibility attribution model



- *H1*: More exposure to the mass-media will lead to more critical stances towards foreign actors and authorities and less negative assessments of the domestic actors and authorities.
- *H1a*: Source of information affects the responsibility attribution.
- *H1b*: Less knowledge (incomplete information) leads to more reliance on the mass-media shortcuts and, therefore, less precise responsibility attribution.

## 'Business class' option: Survey experiment (Hobolt and Tilley 2012)

- ① Allows for more rigorous causal claims
- ② But is costly
- ③ Individual-level mechanisms

## 'Economy class' option: Survey experiment (Treisman 2011)

- ① Less costly
- ② But fewer prospects for proper causal inference
- ③ Only aggregate-level estimates

# if Business class option

## Dependent variable(s)

Attribution of responsibility to different actors and authorities that varies from 0 to 10, where 0 stands for no responsibility at all and 10 - for maximum degree of political responsibility for a particular policy. The list of actors and institutions divided into domestic (government, ministry of finance, central bank, president, political parties, parliament, business groups) and foreign authorities (EU, USA, international business groups).

Three types of current policies:

- economic policy (per capita income, standards of living)
- education policy (secondary and tertiary)
- migration policy (labor market etc.) The time-span: February-June 2015

## if Economy class option

Dependent variable(s) Presidential ratings (following Treismans time-series approach) are available in Levada-center monthly reports:

<http://www.levada.ru/31-12-2014/vozmozhnye-rezultaty-prezidentskikh-i-parlamentskikh-vyborov>.

These ratings are a regular, face-to-face survey conducted by the Russian Center for Public Opinion Research (VCIOM) until 2003, and then by its successor, the Levada Center.

The time-span: 1993 - 2015



# Independent variables

## Option 1.

We drew three main correlates of different ways of responsibility attribution for various policies:

- Exposure to the mass media
- Partisanship (which political party/leader would you support?)
- Basic knowledge of political actors and authorities
- Assessment of current economic situation
- Socioeconomic control variables (age, gender, education, income, employment)

## Option 2.

Major political events (wars in Chechen Republic, Georgia, Ukraine, Olympic games, major economic crises 1998, 2008, protests in 2005, 2011-12). Macroeconomic indicators: unemployment rate, inflation rate in consumer prices, capital outflow that are available at the Federal Service for National Statistics (<http://www.gks.ru/>).

- Choice of research strategy?
- Definition of economic crisis?
- Sensitive topic

Thank you!

Corresponding author: Margarita.Zavadskaya@EUI.EU

This report was presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> LCSR International Workshop “Social and Cultural Changes in Cross-National Perspective: Subjective Well-being, Trust, Social capital and Values”, which will be held within the XVI April International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development.

April 8 - 10, 2015 – Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

[www.lcsr.hse.ru/en/seminar2015](http://www.lcsr.hse.ru/en/seminar2015)

Настоящий доклад был представлен на V международном рабочем семинаре ЛССИ «Социальные и культурные изменения в сравнительной перспективе: ценности и модернизация», прошедшего в рамках XVI Апрельской международной научной конференции НИУ ВШЭ «Модернизация экономики и общества».

8-10 апреля 2015 года – НИУ ВШЭ, Москва.

[www.lcsr.hse.ru/seminar2015](http://www.lcsr.hse.ru/seminar2015)