

Democracy vs. Political Leadership in Russia: the Conflict of Normative Attitudes and the 'Real World' Politics

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Context (1): political regime transformation and its factors

The political regime in Russia has been continuously transforming for more than twenty years.

A variety of assessments & explanations: the macro-level factors (the erosion of institutions, a misfortunate choice of principal political actors, drawbacks of the division of powers prescribed in the Constitution, the heritage of previous times, etc.).

Micro-level explanations dealing with individual behavior and value attitudes, especially those based on empirical research, have been much sparsely investigated.

Developing a comprehensive understanding of the current political processes requires matching the institutional change (be it erosion or anything else) with the value attitudes of the population.

The possible gap between the assessment of normative ideas and real political practice could mean that the population agrees with democracy as a form of governance but doubts or even disbelieves in its functioning under the Russian political conditions.

Context (2): public perceptions of political regime

The question of matching the normative perception of democracy – as an ideal, abstract form of governance – and the assessment of its real functioning in Russia.

Russian political culture - democratic or non-democratic?

What is the role of public political attitudes in the development of an authoritarian trend?

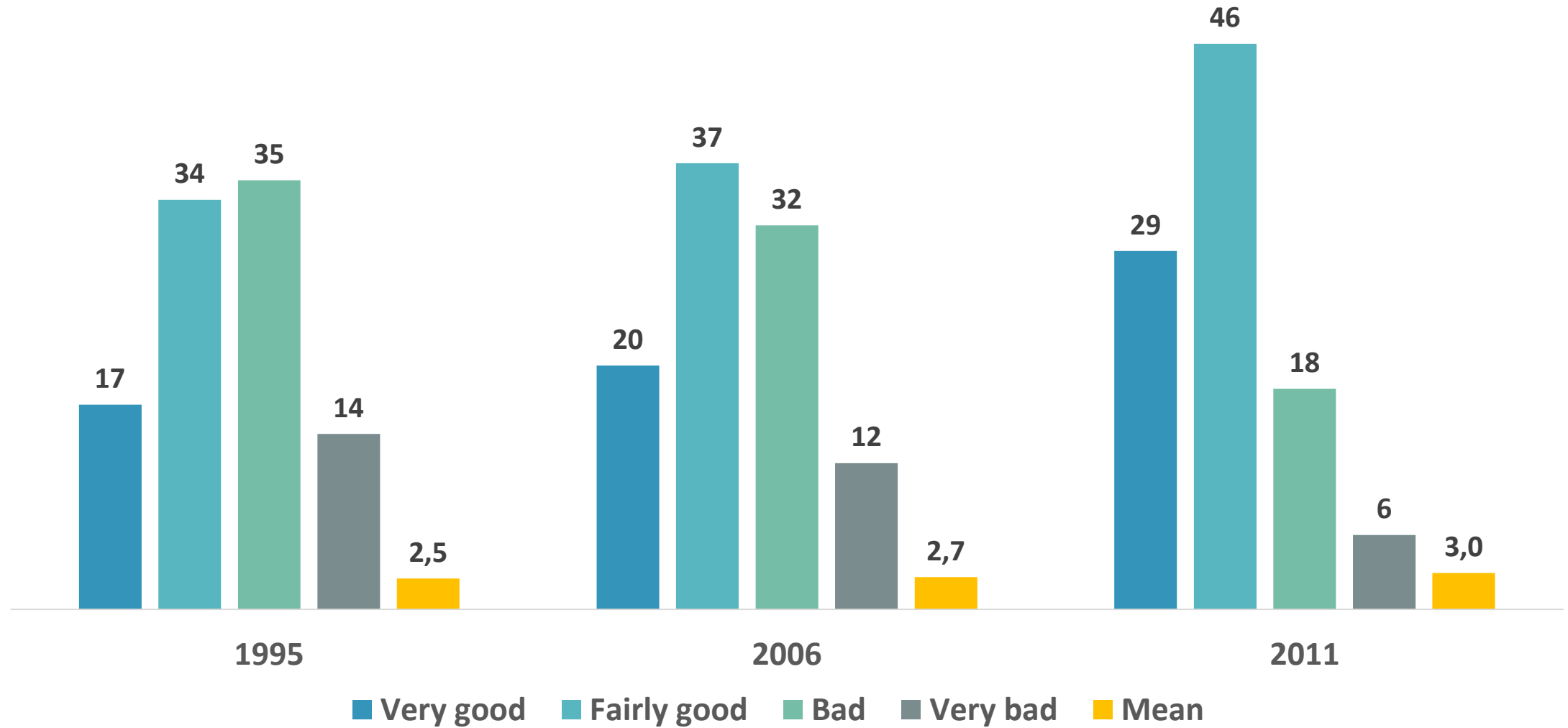
Under what conditions citizens support the violation of the established democratic procedures, and under what – no?

Should a popular leader have to quit his or her office at the end of the last legal term or should he or she rather stay in power, even if it breaks the law in a direct or indirect way?

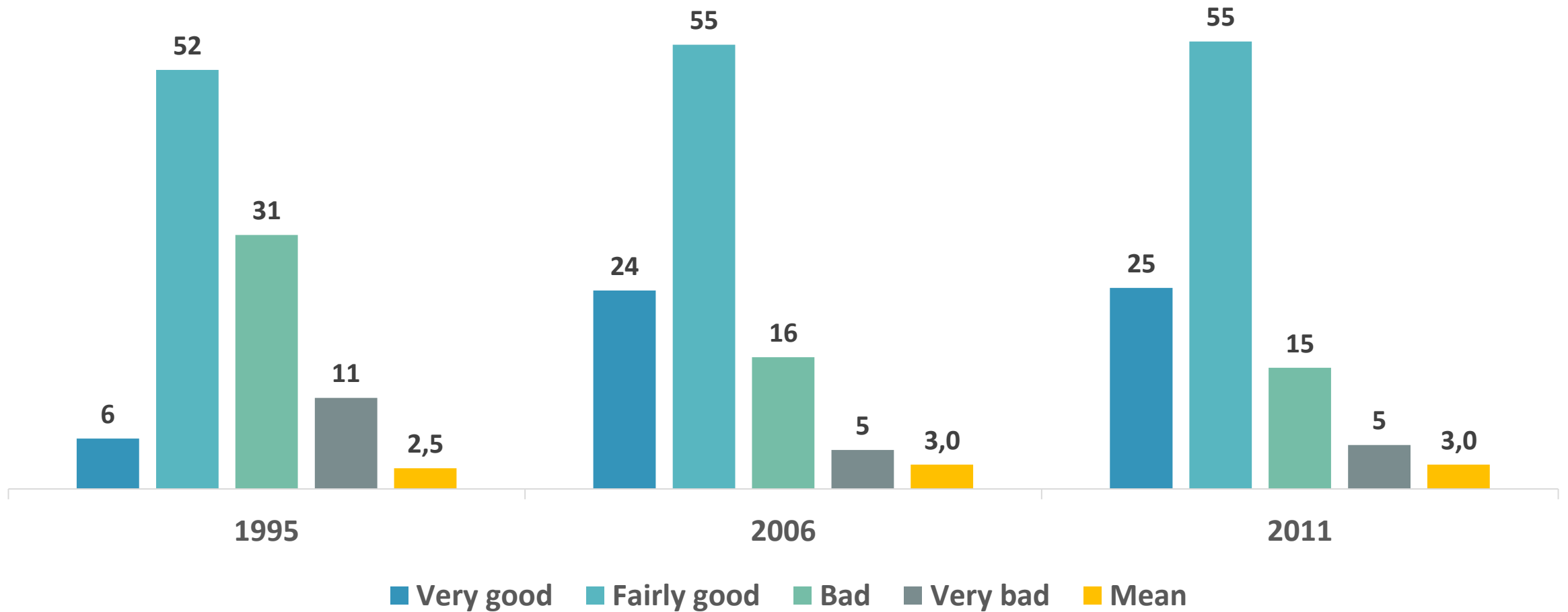
What is more important for the citizens, an “effective” leader or a leader following the legal procedures?

To what extent do existing political institutions resonate with the values shared by large groups of Russians?

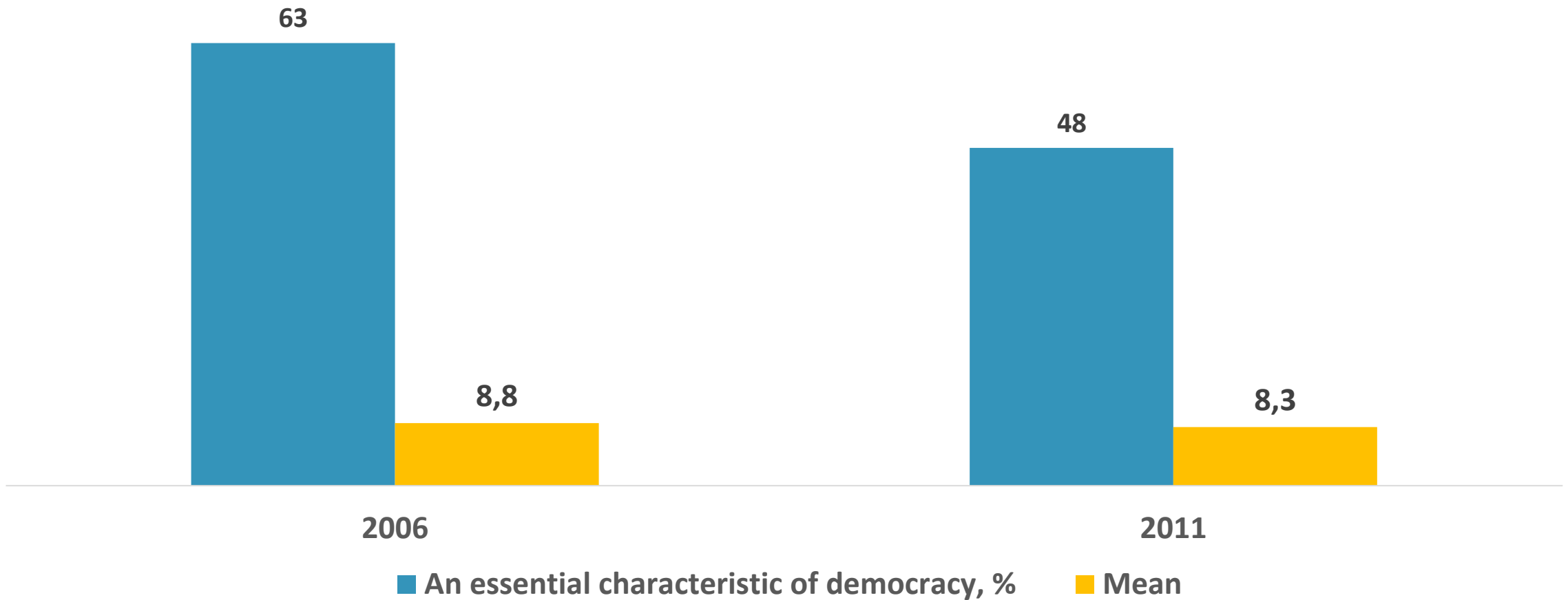
Political System: Having a Strong Leader (Russia, WVS)



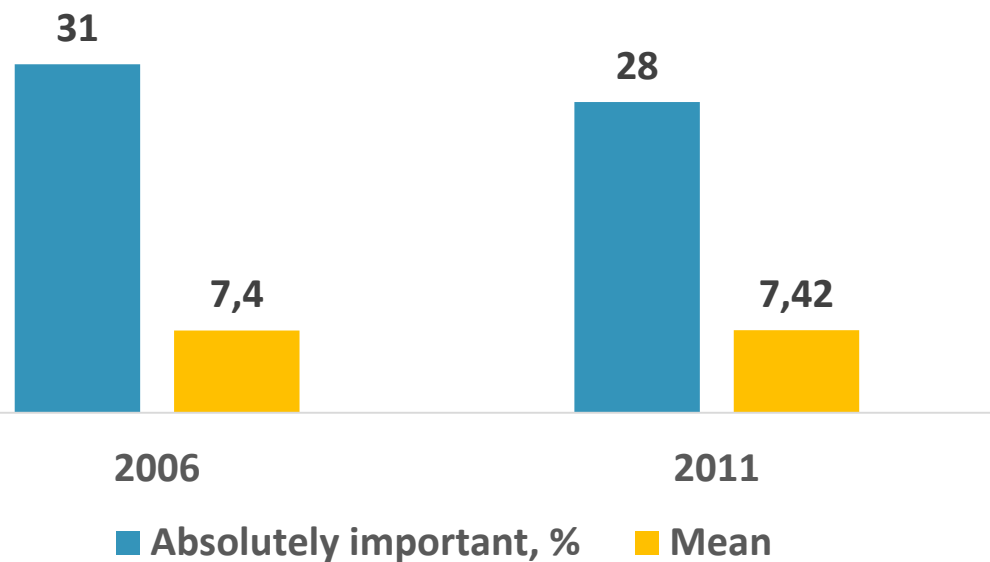
Political System: Having a Democratic Political System (Russia, WVS)



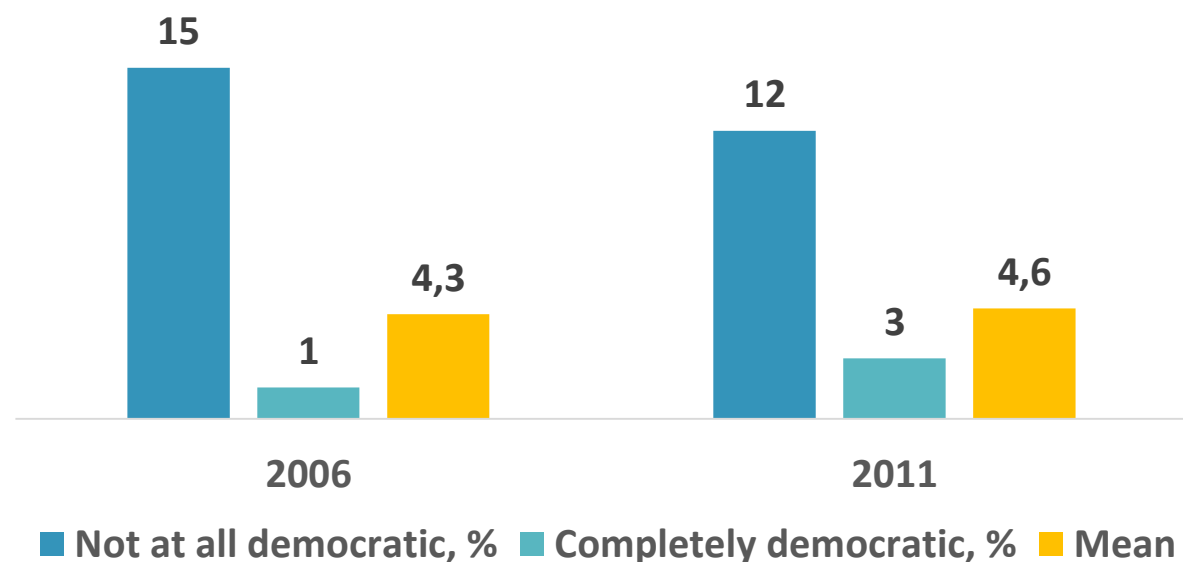
Democracy: People Choose Leaders in Free Elections (Russia, WVS)



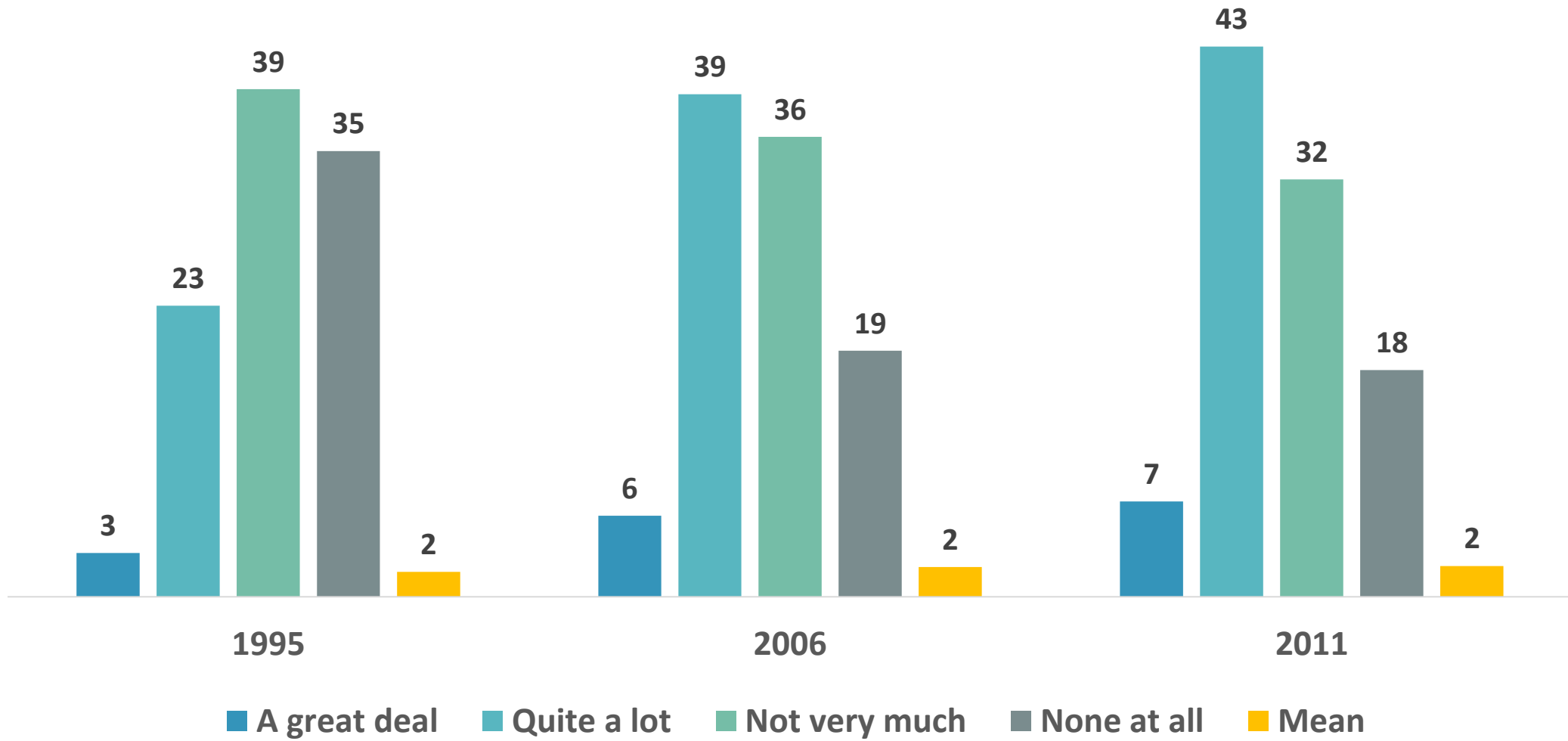
**Importance of Democracy
(Russia, WVS)**



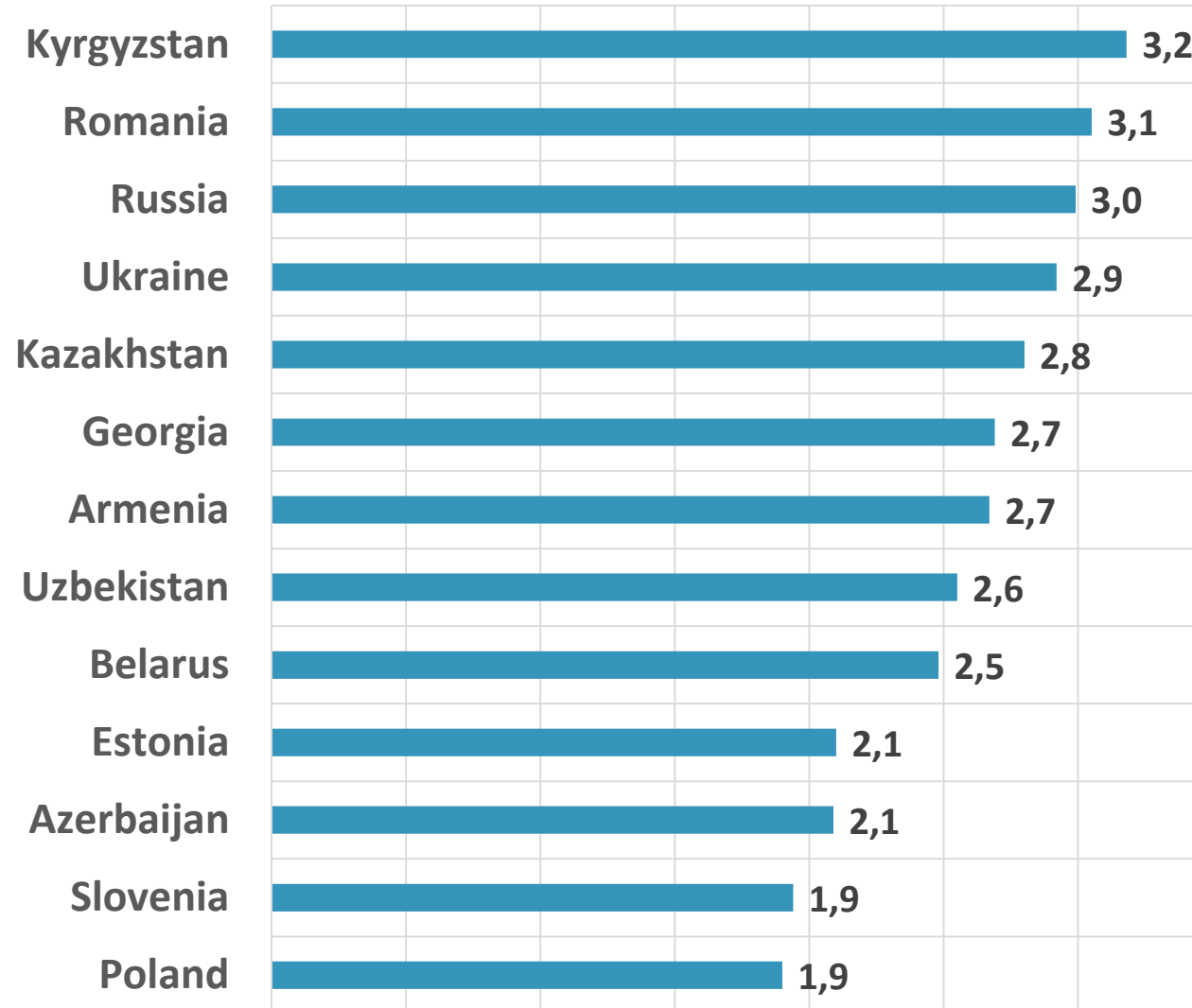
**Democraticity in Russia
(WVS)**



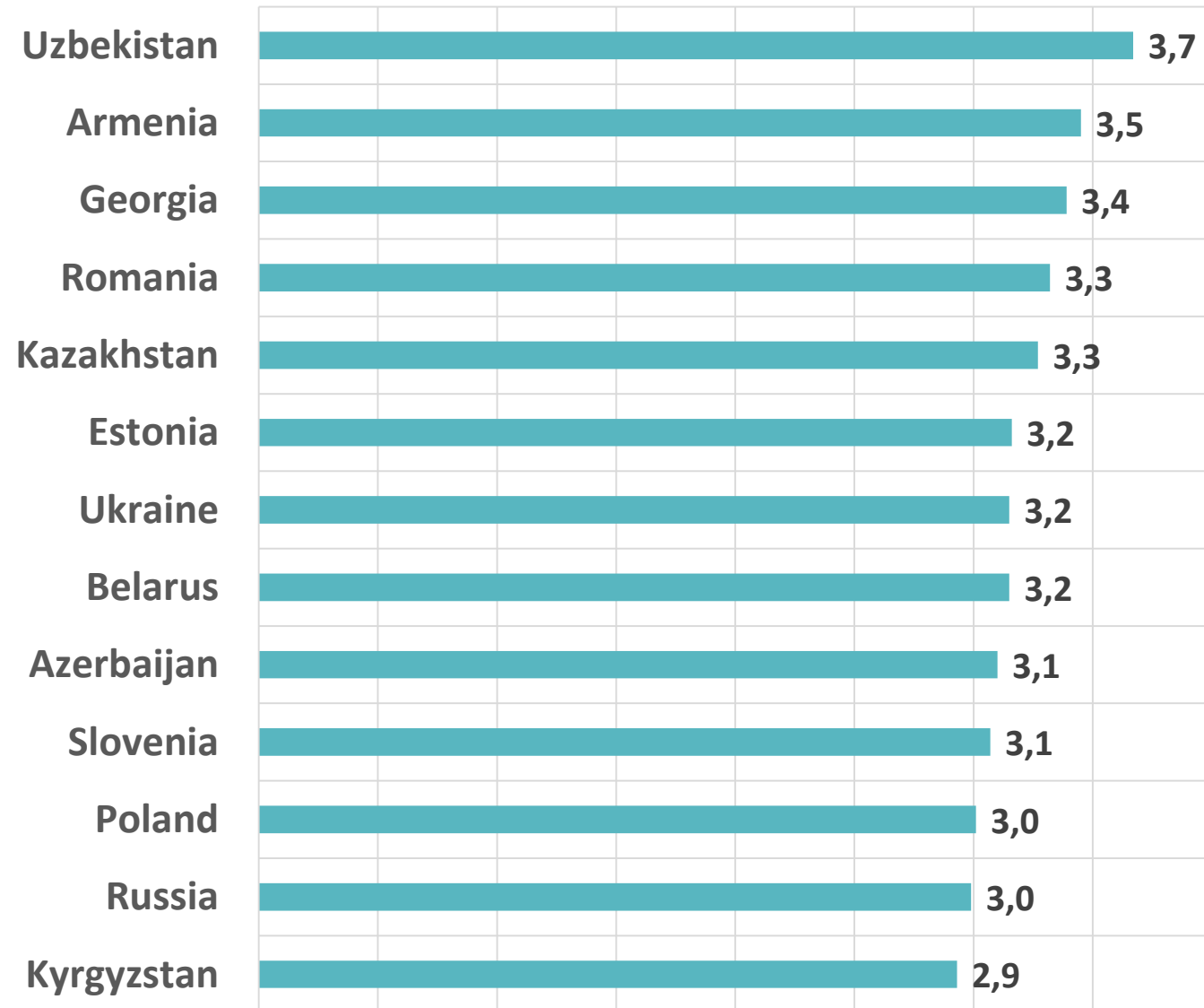
Confidence: The Government (Russia, WVS)



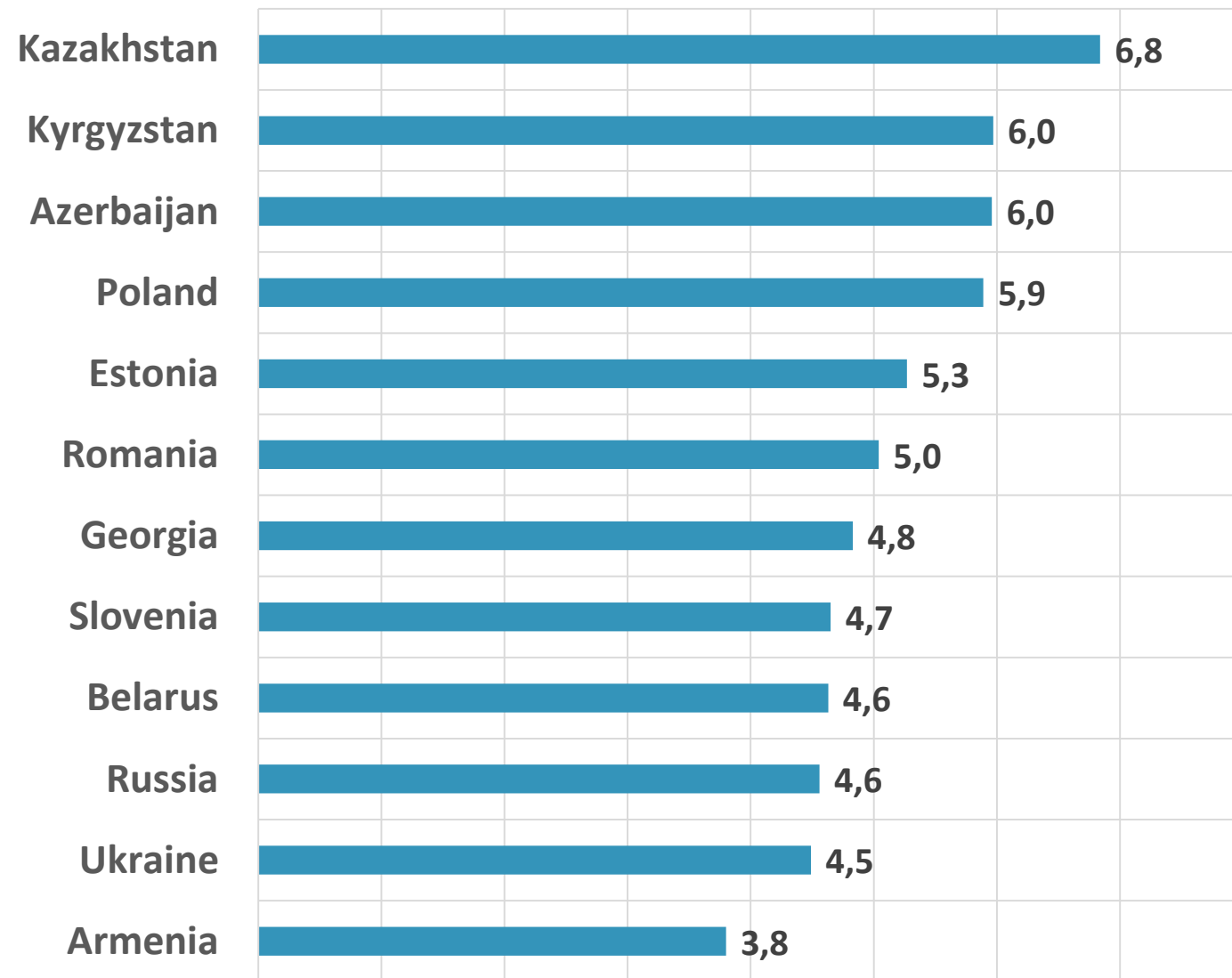
Political System: Having a Strong Leader
(Post-communist countries, WVS, wave 6, mean values)



**Political System: Having a Democratic Political System
(Post-communist countries, WVS, wave 6, mean values)**



Democraticness in your own country
(Post-communist countries, WVS, wave 6, mean values)



The goal of the project

The project is aimed to define to what extent and, what is more important, under which conditions, Russians would produce a gap between the normative and real understanding of democracy.

We have chosen to concentrate on only one element of the democratic political regime – **political leadership**.

Through political leadership, we can study the scope and possible reasons for the discrepancy between the normative ideas and real functioning of democracy in Russia.

Political leadership can also be a tool to study the methods of political elites' recruitment, decision-making processes, and the accountability of authorities to the citizens.

The hypotheses

H1: We expect a positive relationship between a desired type of leader and likely approval of the violation of democratic procedures. An efficient, energetic, "authoritarian" (in the Russian political context) leader who cares about the population will enjoy the greatest support, rather than a representative of a different type of leadership.

H2: Factors of foreign policy orientation, attitude to the role of religion in society, the origin of the security agencies will (not) significantly affect the approval of the leader holding the office after the statutory period.

- On the one hand, the "effectiveness" of a leader can be understood through the lens of people's welfare: if the leader delivers revenue growth and stability, he is considered to be "effective", and is entitled to a further stay in his post.
- On the other hand, since 2012 more and more space in Russian political agenda is given to the issue of "traditional values", and since 2013 – to foreign policy. If we assume that the value of well-being has gone into the background in comparison with concerns about morality and foreign policy, the part of the "efficiency" of a leader can be explained with his stand on the role of religion in society and foreign policy orientation. In addition, as a rule, in recent years, these factors are strongly associated with the occupational origin from power structures.

The approach (1)

We include in the analysis both the universal elements of democratic procedures, and specific Russian features, normally associated with the movement for democracy in the domestic political context.

The first group includes accountability and collegiality that we operationalize in factorial nature of vignettes through political decision-making (collectively / individually), responsiveness to the interests of local communities (as opposed to carrying out the policy of the Centre) and obstruction of the limitation of own power.

The second group consists of factors such as age, professional background (connections with the power structures), stand to the role of the religion in society, priority in social and economic policy (social populism or tough economic reforms), the foreign policy views (Russia as "European country" or "sovereign world power").

Variations of these factors will create images of several types of political leaders, which we can then bind with different levels of (dis)approval of the re-election / reappointment beyond the statutory period. This research project aims to identify the importance of the various factors of political leadership in resolving the conflict between the normative notions of democracy and the functioning of the political institutions.

The research problem appeals to an interdisciplinary theory of modernization (Inglehart, Welzel, 2011), used in political science and political sociology.

The approach (2)

Factorial design technique involves the presentation to each respondent with a limited number of “vignettes” (up to 16, describing situations close to real life), in each of which the respondent is invited to say if she approves or disapproves when politician stays in his seat longer than the statutory period, depending on the different characteristics of both the respondents themselves and the politician described.

Selection and calculation of the total sample in accordance with one of the existing plans (full factorial, D-efficient quota) (Dülmer, 2015) allows to randomize the appearance of the specific characteristics of political leaders in the vignettes for each respondent. Due to the random distribution of factors, we obtain information about the simulated causal relationships regardless of specific parameters of polled sample.

Randomized allocation of factors between specific situations and respondents will allow

- a) to model behavior of the citizens in relation to the whole range of types of political leaders and their characteristics even using a non-representative sample,
- b) to establish the importance of different characteristics of a politician for the public justifying the retention of the office longer than statutory period.

The benefits of the experimental approach

- A new approach to study political leadership – no published research
- Does not require huge resources – a volunteer project, can be extrapolated to other countries' samples.
- Experimental design permits to check the multifactorial model of causal relationships without any additional burden on respondents, that allows more in-depth explanatory conclusions and at the same time maintain the quality of information received from respondents.
- Factorial survey method makes it possible
 - to compare the importance of different factors in the description of the personality of a politician.
 - to provide the respondent with not normative aspects of a democratic regime, but the situations close to real life.
 - unlike conventional mass survey, it is possible to model the causal processes and draw conclusions not only about associations (correlation analysis), but also the power and direction of causality between the normative and behavioral attitudes in mass political behavior.

Data and methods

1. Descriptive and multivariate analysis of the data of comparative international and regional surveys (WVS, EVS, ESS, WCIOM, POF);
2. social experiment using vignette method in a factorial-design survey in 2 major Russian cities and 2 regions:
 - to reveal the subjective models of causal relationships between the justification of violating democratic procedures (i.e., occupying the office above and beyond the legal term) and a defined set of personal characteristics of a political leader).
 - to check the hypothetical effects of such factors as the leader's age, professional background (relation to law enforcement agencies), the mode of decision-making, views on international politics, the treatment of local communities, the role of religion in society, position on economic reforms, and tolerance to the attempts to limit the leader's power.

Expected results

- The socio-demographic profile(s) of citizens approving of the violation of democratic procedures popular political leader;
- Revealing of different types of leadership that receive the highest approval by respondents in case the office is held beyond the legal limit;
- Identification of factors that may affect such approval, and their relative importance.

Conclusion

The findings will enhance understanding of political processes in Russia, in theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects;

Explain the phenomena of political life associated with the trust of the Russian population to the political leaders and political institutions;

At the level of theory, research results will help to understand in more detail the role that can play the political attitudes of the population in the development of authoritarian tendencies in recent years, including the low level of turnover of the government and its weak democratic accountability.

Empirically, we expect to reveal to what extent do the citizens agree with the violation of democratic procedures for the sake of having an "effective" leader. Usually, the mass political behavior does not receive much attention from political science in Russia, and the political process is largely explained by the choice and strategies of the elites. This study is aimed to at least partially fill the gap.

Thank you for your attention!

Your suggestions are welcome

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