

CHAPTER 8

Voice after Exit?

Exploring Patterns of Civic Activism among Russian Migrant Communities in Eurasia after 24 February 2022

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Abstract

Can citizens continue to participate in the politics of their home country after migrating to another country? Many examples exist of migrants engaging in their country of origin's political affairs, such as expatriate voting, forming political communities and hometown associations, donating money to political movements and politicians, advocating for migrants' rights, and other

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forms of political participation. However, it remains unclear why migrants are willing to continue exercising their ‘voice’ after ‘exit’, and what the main challenges and obstacles are for them to do so while abroad. In this chapter, we analyse the patterns of civic and political engagement among Russian migrants who fled their home country following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Drawing on scholarship in migration studies, we view exit and voice not as mutually exclusive but as mutually reinforcing alternatives. We argue that the way migrants connect with their homeland, and particularly the connections they have with their employers, plays a crucial role in mobilizing and demobilizing them. The incentives provided by employers may force migrants to damp their propensity to engage in political activities. To support our argument, we rely on an original survey conducted in March–April and September 2022, as well as semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Türkiye.

Keywords: migrants, Russia, civic activism, political remittances, employer, exit, transnational voice

Introduction

In the wake of the Russian government’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, an estimated 700,000 Russians fled the country (Kamalov, Sergeeva, and Zavadskaya 2022). This mass exodus represents the largest outflow of people from Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Among these emigrés were leading experts in top-notch industries, including the IT sector, as well as representatives from the non-commercial sector, science, and education. The loss of highly qualified labour resulted in a depletion of human capital and a significant shift in the Russian political landscape. The influx of unexpected migrants also had an impact on the states and societies of the destination countries, primarily Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Türkiye, which accepted the majority of new migrants.

Russia has experienced several waves of emigration since the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 (Obolensky-Ossinsky 1931). During the Soviet period, emigration was severely constrained, although certain groups, such as Jewish migrants, could leave the country (Remennick 2015). In the 1990s, former citizens of the USSR sought opportunities in Europe, North America, and Israel, fleeing an economic disaster and extreme poverty (Dieckhoff 2017; Cheskin and Kachuyevski 2019). The number of emigrants decreased only during a period of economic prosperity in the early 2000s, but Russians abroad remained disjoined (Kosmarskaya 2013): unlike many diasporas, they never tended to demonstrate unity, especially in the political field, though some of them worked hard to establish opposition media, networks, and NGOs abroad (Sellars 2019; Fomina 2021; Henry and Plantan 2022).

However, with the consolidation of authoritarianism, particularly after the annexation of Crimea, a new wave of political emigration began (Greene and Robertson 2019). Finally, after the dramatic increase in repression and military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, thousands of Russians fled the country. Compared with previous migration waves, these emigrés were not primarily economic migrants seeking a better life but rather representatives of the political opposition and those who shared an anti-war stance. Some of these emigrés had not planned to leave the country until they realized that their lives and prospects were under tangible threat (Erdal and Oeppen 2020).

The decision to emigrate represents a political action that can be interpreted as both an active exit and an outright protest, or voice. Throughout history, emigrants have remained involved in the political affairs of their homeland in various ways, including expatriate voting (Escobar, Arana, and McCann 2015), organizing political communities and hometown associations (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002), donating money to political movements and politicians (Mazzucato and Kabki 2009), advocating for migrants' rights (Adamson 2002), and other forms of political participation. However, it is unclear why migrants seek to continue to exercise their political voice even after having severed ties with their

country of origin, despite possible transnational repression and years of unsuccessful resistance at home. Previous studies have identified macro-level and individual-level factors that may facilitate voice after exit, such as the type of political regime in the host country, legal migration constraints, economic development, individual legal status, and time spent in emigration (Ahmadov and Sasse 2016a, 2016b; Hoffmann 2010; Pfaff and Kim 2003). Recent studies by Fomina (2021) and Henry and Plantan (2022) have highlighted various political activities of Russian migrants aimed at influencing Russian domestic politics, such as protests, advocacy groups, and investigative journalism.

We claim that the mode of connection with the homeland plays a critical role in mobilizing and demobilizing migrants, especially connections with employers, which define the incentive structure and may force migrants to damp their propensity to engage in political activities. To support our claim, we rely on evidence from an online survey of Russian migrants conducted from 23 March to 4 April 2022 and from 23 August to 25 September 2022, and 35 in-depth interviews collected in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, and Armenia among recent migrants. Host countries vary dramatically in terms of political freedom and opportunities for migrant activists to voice their claims. Kazakhstan is a closed authoritarian regime with an oppressed opposition. The Kyrgyzstani regime has deteriorated under Sadyr Japarov's rule and has strengthened its ties with Russia. Georgia and Armenia are examples of competitive political systems but also have a noticeable presence of Russia and its interests (Freedom House 2023). Finally, Türkiye is the only one of these states that is beyond the geopolitical orbit of Moscow, but it still maintains an authoritarian regime with severe constraints on civil society (Freedom House 2023).

In contrast to previous waves of migration, the current wave is highly politicized and has the potential to self-organize and form political and civic networks, which are currently impossible in Russia. This raises the question of whether and to what extent citizens participate in home-country politics after migrating to

another country. Will the new migrants be willing and able to form bottom-up civic associations, or will they prefer to sever ties with their homeland and start a new life from scratch?

In this chapter,¹ we use the revised ‘voice, exit, and loyalty’ framework proposed by Albert Hirschman (1978, 91) to analyse political participation and abstention among the recent wave of Russian emigrants. We view ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ as mutually reinforcing alternatives, rather than mutually exclusive. Emigration significantly reduces the costs of political dissent by reducing state capacity to repress those who leave, thereby making political activity more possible. However, we argue that the nature of connections with Russian society, and specifically with the Russian labour market, affects the transmission of political remittances and civic and political activism. Employers, particularly state-dependent companies, are known to be the main brokers in ensuring citizens’ political compliance in the Russian electoral context (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019). Workplace mobilization has played a critical role in upholding successful electoral outcomes for the incumbent. Insecure and illiberal labour markets make employees more pliant and vulnerable to any requests made by employers. Although the degree of employee dependency varies widely across different sectors of the economy, skill mobility and transferability also render employees less dependent. Those who remain employed with Russian companies that are registered in Russia are more compliant and are therefore likely to be more cautious and less likely to exercise transnational voice. Likewise, those who are employed with companies registered in host countries are likely to be more cautious and compliant with the pressure and expectations from their employers and the receiving society given their migrant status. The type of pressure stems from the nature of political regimes and labour markets in receiving societies.

We begin by presenting our theoretical expectations and examining the recent wave of Russian emigration in a comparative context. Subsequently, we provide a detailed account of the data and methodology, followed by an empirical analysis. The empirical analysis focuses first on the role of repression and political

illiberalism as the primary drivers of this migration wave. We then explore the impact of connections with the homeland, including both affective and labour relations. Lastly, we examine self-reported patterns of activism and political behaviour in receiving countries. The study concludes with a discussion section, including avenues for further research.

Russia's Political Emigration, Political Remittances, and Transnational Voice

The type of political regime in Russia is often characterized as politically and economically illiberal (Laruelle 2019; Åslund 2019). Russian illiberalism is characterized by a rejection of Western models of democracy and human rights, as well as an emphasis on Russian exceptionalism and the need for a strong, centralized state. This form of politics has been particularly prominent under Vladimir Putin's leadership, as he has sought to cultivate a sense of national pride and to position Russia as a counterweight to the West (Laruelle 2019). The recent anti-war emigration from Russia can be seen as a response to the Putin regime's war atrocities in Ukraine. Many Russians who oppose these actions view them as a betrayal of Russia's historical role and their own expectations. Pressure from the state, as well as growing ideological schisms, have made the lives of large groups of urban, educated Russians incompatible with the existing regime.

Unbearable Costs of Repression

The costs of political resistance are anticipated to stifle people's voice and render collective action unfeasible. Repression serves to suppress dissent by imposing high costs on those who would potentially want to engage in collective action to attain a shared goal (Lyall 2009; Opp and Roehl 1990). Furthermore, repression undermines trust between dissenters, thereby further increasing the costs of collective action (Opp and Roehl 1990). Repression mutes not only the dissenters but also the conformists

(Kuran 1995). The adverse effect of repression on voice is even more pronounced when repression targets opposition coordinating centres. Such repression directly affects the number of overt protests and the visibility of political activism. Initially, repression changes the cost structure for the opposition. If repression is directed personally at opposition leaders, they become less willing to self-organize. Second, such repression depletes opposition resources, which become increasingly difficult to replenish. Third, it leads to a decrease in the trustworthiness of opposition leaders, as they become more suspicious of betrayal and surveillance, leading to more problems with collective action (Sullivan 2016). Illiberal authoritarian regimes invest a great deal of effort in discouraging citizens from expressing their grievances and supporting the opposition. Therefore, socializing under authoritarianism involves a significant amount of depoliticization (Howard 2003; Magun and Erpyleva 2015), risk aversion, and compliance (Greene and Robertson 2019).

The Russian political regime has evolved into a full-blown oppressive dictatorship. The failure of the For Fair Elections movement in 2011–2012 was a turning point, leading to the absence of competitive elections, restrictions on peaceful demonstrations and pickets, and even limitations on posting and sharing politically charged information on social media. According to a recent report, more than 15,000 Russians were detained in 147 cities across Russia for taking part in anti-war protests as of March 2022 (Hoffman 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the country's downward spiral into a consolidated and isolated autocracy (Freedom House 2023).

In July 2020, a constitutional vote further cemented the country's autocratic turn, extending the presidential term, dismantling the remaining vestiges of local autonomy, and proclaiming the protection of 'traditional values' (Smyth and Sokhey 2020). The number and scale of protests have declined since the state's crackdown on the Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF), the main coordinating infrastructure supporting Aleksei Navalny, in 2021. Navalny, who was suspectedly murdered in a Russian prison in

February 2024, had been imprisoned ever since. As a result, many Russian oppositionists have been forced into smaller-scale and less visible forms of political resistance, and for many, emigration has become the only viable option.

Hirschman's concept of 'exit' as a form of political dissent suggests that emigration can serve as a signal of citizens' discontent under extremely repressive conditions, when active protest is associated with unbearable costs (Hirschman 1978). The weakness of Hirschman's idea is that voice, exit, and loyalty are not always mutually exclusive (Pfaff and Kim 2003). Emigration or exit can also undermine the capacity for protest and dissent by destroying domestic networks of political activists that are crucial for the opposition in repressive regimes (Pfaff and Kim 2003). However, under certain circumstances, exit can enhance active protest when grievances arise. Therefore, an increase in associated grievances can raise the potential benefits of voice (Miller and Peters 2014; Pfaff and Kim 2003).

Exit from a country can send a powerful signal to the rest of the society that something is fundamentally wrong to the point that people feel compelled to flee. The large-scale outflow of citizens discredits the regime and undermines the perceived competence of the leader by informing citizens of the incumbent's weak economic and political performance (Miller and Peters 2014; Mueller 1999). The negative signals emanating from such exit may trigger an information cascade, revealing widespread discontent with the regime that was previously unknown. This cascade effect may lead to an increase in protests due to the so-called 'bandwagon effect' (Henry and Plantan 2022). However, in informational autocracies such as Russia, the bandwagon effect may be mitigated by state-controlled media that transmit a positive image of competent leadership (Guriev and Treisman 2020) and engage in the blame game, attributing economic downturns to external actors such as 'the mythical West' or 'the fifth column' (Frye 2019; Sirotkina and Zavadskaya 2020). Under these conditions, the signalling effect of exit is limited, as the state effectively controls the flow of information and coordinates the activity of the opposition

(Pfaff and Kim 2003). Nonetheless, an unusually large number of emigrants heading to democratic states potentially increases the likelihood of peaceful protest and democratization at home, as those who leave for political reasons may continue to express their views even after exit (Kapur 2014; Miller and Peters 2014). Thus, exit may have heterogeneous effects on the prospects for political change in autocratic states.

Transnational Voice and Political Remittances

The impact of outward migration on democratic prospects in the home country can be both positive and negative, depending on a range of factors such as the characteristics of the emigrants, the destination country, and whether the emigrants maintain strong ties and a sense of belonging to their country of origin (Lodigiani 2016). Collective remittance projects, where migrants pool their resources to invest in community development in their country of origin, have the potential to enhance collaboration and partnership between migrants and their home country's government, thereby potentially contributing to economic and social development (Burgess 2012). However, democratization from abroad is possible only if the host country enables immigrants to integrate and participate in social and economic activities, allowing them to acquire new values and norms that can be transmitted to the home country (Lodigiani 2016; Ahmadov and Sasse 2016a). Empirical studies demonstrate that greater levels of emigration can reduce domestic political violence by providing exit opportunities for aggrieved citizens and generating economic benefits for those who remain, resulting in more peaceful societies. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that larger flows of emigrants to democracies can spur non-violent protests within autocracies, as exposure to freer countries can spread democratic norms and the tools of peaceful opposition (Peters and Miller 2022).

Maintaining connections between migrants and those who stay in a country plays a crucial role in information exchange and undermining authoritarian regimes. Economic remittances are

a well-known practice of migrants, serving as means to stay in touch with their close social circle, cultivate a sense of belonging to their home country, and even intentionally attempting to influence home-country politics (O'Mahony 2013). The money that migrants send home is thought to be linked not only to improvements in the quality of life in their home country but also to political changes there, although the empirical results are mixed and the exact effect on democratization remains unknown (Ahmed 2012; Escribà-Folch, Meseguer, and Wright 2015). Not only do migrants passively send money that their relatives and friends then use to fund political opposition, but they may strategically send money home hoping to engage in the major domestic political matters (O'Mahony 2013). Apart from economic remittances, the most conventional form of migrants' attempts to cultivate ties with their home country, there are non-economic remittances, i.e. the transfer of social, political, and cultural norms. Migrants export ideas and behaviours back to their sending communities (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Barsbai et al. 2017). Such remittances 'can influence political behaviour, mobilization, organization and narratives of belonging in places of destination and origin' (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2020).

We argue that political migrants have the potential to facilitate democratization in their communities of origin, especially in cases where they maintain connections with opposition movements in their home country (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). This is particularly true when the country to which the migrants have moved is politically liberal. Various mechanisms underpin this proposed effect. First, migrants acquire knowledge and practices of democracy in their host countries and then transfer these to their home communities (Careja and Emmenegger 2012). Second, financial remittances weaken citizens' dependence on clientelist ties, making voters less reliant on state transfers and their votes harder for the autocratic incumbent to buy (Stokes 2005).

However, the extent of political engagement of migrants with their home country's political affairs is contingent on the amount of time they have spent in their host country and the composition

of their migrant networks (Waldinger 2016). The longer a migrant stays in their host country, the less attached they become to the political process in their home country. Networks dominated by compatriots tend to preserve migrants' initial political attitudes, while more diverse and international networks expand their types of political engagement with homeland affairs.

Migrants residing in foreign countries have the potential to influence the policies of their host country (Heindl 2013). Similarly, they may play a role in bringing about democratization in their home country through remittances (Ahmadov and Sasse 2016a). Russian migrants are not an exception to this trend and are politically active in their home country, according to Fomina (2021) and Henry and Plantan (2022). These migrants engage in activities such as fighting corruption, promoting fair elections, and advocating for human rights, environmental protection, and anti-war causes. Additionally, Henry and Plantan (2022) find that Russian migrants establish connections with host-country politicians, which increases their ability to influence home-country politics. Although the current wave of Russian migrants is much larger and more diverse than previous waves, the behaviour of the migrants seems to follow the same trend.

Russian migrants have settled in host countries the political regimes of which vary drastically, ranging from closed autocracies such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to more liberal regimes such as Georgia and Armenia, where activism and protest constitute legitimate parts of domestic politics. Therefore, we expect more vibrant and efficient communities in more politically liberal regimes such as Georgia and Armenia.

Staying Connected through Labour Markets and Families

The legacy of the Soviet-era planned economy has been one of the key drivers of economic illiberalism in post-USSR states. The planned economy left behind a strong state apparatus and a culture of state intervention in economic affairs, which has hindered the transition to a more market-based economy in many former

Soviet states. Instead, a hybrid model combining elements of state control with market-oriented reforms has emerged (Åslund 2019). Economic illiberalism in post-Soviet states refers to a range of economic policies and practices that deviate from the norms of liberal market economies. These policies may include state intervention in the economy, restrictions on foreign investment and trade, and a lack of transparency and accountability in economic decision-making.

In the context of authoritarian regimes, economic illiberalism has created a peculiar situation for employers, particularly those affiliated with the public sector, who serve as brokers in upholding political loyalty. Workplace coercion and mobilization are widespread practices among large companies in Russia, which mobilize voters and deliver votes in exchange for material benefits or simply to avoid punishment (Frye, Reuter, and Szakoni 2019). This has resulted in a blurring of the lines between the private and public sectors, with employers becoming enmeshed in the state's efforts to maintain its hold on power.

The level of dependence of migrants on their employers varies significantly across different economic sectors, skill levels, and geographic locations. Individuals with more transferable skills, entrepreneurs, and the self-employed may enjoy greater flexibility, while those with non-transferable skills or public sector employees (such as schoolteachers, as noted by Forrat 2018) may have fewer prospects abroad and stronger ties to their employers. Large numbers of migrants maintain their employment with Russia-based companies through remote work arrangements or fee payments. While remote work allows migrants to stay financially afloat and ensures their income in the short term, the Russian government seeks to incentivize remote workers to return by increasing tax rates (as reported in Reuters 2022) or to leave the Russian labour market altogether. The nature of this connection with the country of origin may have ambiguous effects on migrants' propensity to engage in political action abroad and exercise transnational voting rights. These mechanisms may involve direct pressure, as well as self-restraint on the part of migrants who devise plans for their

eventual return to Russia. We hypothesize that the presence of an employment relationship, in addition to family ties, shapes the incentives structure for Russian migrants.

Data and Method

This analysis is based on an original survey of individuals who left Russia after 24 February 2022. The survey was conducted in two waves, the first from 23 March to 4 April 2022 and the second from 23 August to 25 September 2022. This was a panel survey, meaning that we resurveyed the same respondents in the second wave. Thus, our sample includes only those who left Russia between the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the announcement of ‘the partial military mobilization’ in Russia. The questionnaire included series of questions on socio-demographic status, professional positions, the political views of the respondents, their plans after departure, threats in case of return to Russia, and needs and fears in the destination countries. As we do not have access to population data for Russian migrants, a convenience sample of 1,680 respondents was recruited via online relocation groups, Telegram channels, and networks close to the OK Russians project, a non-profit organization that provided assistance to anti-war migrants in spring and summer 2022. The questionnaire was distributed through relocation groups (at least ten groups on relocation in 60 countries), through internet influencers, and by respondents themselves. It should be noted that the data obtained does not represent the entire population of Russians who have left, but it provides an understanding of the portion that is most active on social media and messaging platforms. Therefore, the sample may be biased towards the youngest, most active (including politically) internet users, city dwellers, and professionals. It is also important to highlight that our survey does not cover draft evaders, who constitute another wave of predominantly male migrants from Russia who fled due to ‘the partial military mobilization.’

We conducted a series of in-depth interviews with recent migrants, consisting of 14 interviews in Tbilisi, Georgia, during the summer of 2022 and five interviews in late March and April 2023; four interviews in Kazakhstan; six interviews in Armenia; five interviews in Türkiye; and one in Kyrgyzstan—making a total of 35 interviews, with Georgia being over-represented in the sample. Informants were recruited through the initial online survey as well as snowball sampling. Georgia emerged as one of the most popular destinations for Russian migrants due to its visa-free entry policy, allowing them to stay for a year without registration. Tbilisi became a hub for hundreds of Russians who immediately launched a series of anti-war initiatives, humanitarian aid, charity activities, and political protests.

Away from Illiberalism and Repression

The relative costs of voice and exit are crucial for making sense of the recent emigration (Dowding et al. 2000). Exit is not a cost-free option, as leaving a permanent place of residence requires financial resources and social capital. Back in Russia, many of the migrants had been professionals with well-established careers in high-paying fields and had lived comfortable upper-middle-class lives. According to several accounts, the current migration wave consists mostly of middle class, highly educated people with large networks and more liberal political views (Kamalov et al. 2022). In other words, they are not representative of the Russian population and reflect the worldview of groups of highly educated, urbanized, and highly politicized citizens. What prompted people who were relatively safe to flee Russia in a rush, leaving their comfortable lives behind?

Our survey suggests that the average respondent was 32 years old, while the average age of the Russian population as a whole is 46 years. Most migrants came from Moscow, St Petersburg, and other cities with more than a million residents. Most respondents had higher education or a postgraduate degree (81 per cent), against 27 per cent in the general population.² Prior to the war, 15 per

cent could afford luxury goods (against 1 per cent in Russia), 27 per cent could purchase a car (against 4.4 per cent in Russia), and 46 per cent could purchase expensive home appliances (against 26 per cent in Russia). For many respondents, leaving Russia meant abandoning projects and possessions dear to their hearts and wallets: informants mentioned that they had left recently purchased apartments and newly acquired professional positions. One of the informants in Tbilisi explained that:

I lived in Moscow all my life, I really liked Moscow. Not so long ago I moved into my own apartment, settled in, just a year ago ... the last job I had in Russia, I had to quit in June because I couldn't continue working remotely. I basically liked the job, I got promoted there at the beginning of February. I mean, everything was kind of good. (Kirill, 25, project manager, Georgia)

Many of the migrants considered themselves patriotic and rooted for Russia's economic success. Leaving Russia threw them into a dilemma about their sense of belonging to their country. Exit from the country meant abandoning their goals of making a contribution to the lives of their communities and the state. They were presented with the question of whether they should continue to look for meaningful ways of cultivating their Russian identity or reconsider their identity choices altogether.

I was always raised with the attitude that Russia is our home country, no matter what happens here, we will fight for it. This attitude is very strong. Now I have a kind of feeling of losing my identity, because ... I tied my activities to 'making Russia better', 'doing business to create jobs', 'making design to raise visual culture', 'participating in contests to represent Russia'. Now it's kind of not quite clear what to do with that. Apparently, I will have to somehow reformat my views for some other country. (Alevtina, 26, designer, Georgia)

While the majority of migrants interviewed possess skills that are easily transferable in the global market, the occupation of a large portion of Russian migrants—especially those employed

in the realms of journalism, culture, and the non-governmental sector—remains anchored in the Russian cultural context. The latter makes their employment prospects in their new countries less cheerful. Among those respondents who had been employed, 45 per cent were from the IT industry, 16 per cent from art and culture, 16 per cent from management, 14 per cent from science and education, and just 8 per cent from journalism. Remarkably, only 10 per cent received assistance from their employers when relocating.

For many families, the proliferation of pro-war propaganda in schools and kindergartens became the last straw. The war was largely perceived as an emergency and most people who had left Russia in February and March 2022 either did not plan it beforehand or considered emigration as a remote and unlikely prospect. Elena, a mother of two children, talked about her teenage son and his rough experience at his school in Russia after the beginning of the full-scale invasion due to his anti-war stance:

Well, he kind of supported us, I mean he's kind of like he's more on our [side]. I mean about the war and all that. Well, the war is kind of bad, everything is terrible. But it turned out that his friends were on the other side ... After a while it turned out they had a conflict, they said that he was a traitor, f****t—well, he has long hair ... So, he stopped [going to school]. So, I said, okay, don't go ... It was essentially bullying. (Elena, age unknown, housewife, Türkiye)

Push factors include the lack of freedoms, especially freedom of speech and assembly, and the de facto ban on certain professions (e.g., journalism) and on activism. The risks of political repression due to an anti-war stance became extremely high. This is how one of the ACF activists, Aleksandr, tells the story of his evacuation:

Well, we have connections through ... the Anti-Corruption Foundation, that is, Aleksei Navalny's structure, and they recommended that we leave immediately. Because at that time the persecution of all former employees of Aleksei Navalny's own

structure began, and we were recommended to seek help from a foundation called [he names an international organization that supports civil society in Russia] ... We turned to them, and they helped us with the logistics of the whole thing, because at the time tickets were very expensive. And they helped us with tickets and shelter for the first couple of days. (Aleksandr, 35, male, journalist/activist, Georgia)

Aleksandr had had to leave his mother, who was not well, in Russia. He had attempted to visit her a while ago: he crossed the border with Georgia in Verkhni Lars, but his flight was cancelled due to weather conditions and he had to stay in Vladikavkaz. Before he was able to get to his mother, police came to his place to search it. Aleksandr had to immediately return to Tbilisi. Another civic activist Natalia recalls:

From the first days of the war, we revamped our Telegram channel ... into a news aggregator ... all the news about what was happening at the battlefronts, and [we] actively opposed the war. Right away we took an anti-war stance. So, we made the decision that we should leave when the law on 'fake news' was passed, when we realized that we were facing 15 years [in prison] for our work. It was probably somewhere around March 1st when we realized that we should leave, we were told that yes, here we are. (Natalia, around 30, journalist/activist, Georgia)

Survey data suggests that many respondents experienced political pressure before their departure. The predominant form was psychological pressure—preventative talks, warnings, or contact by the authorities. Less frequently, oppositionists had faced straightforward threats from pro-government activists, police detainment, and home searches (see [Figure 8.1](#)).

Seventy per cent of respondents believed that upon their return to Russia, they would suffer a drastic decline in quality of life, and 30 per cent that they would risk losing their work or right to study. In addition, half of the respondents expected prosecutions for posting and sharing information about the war in

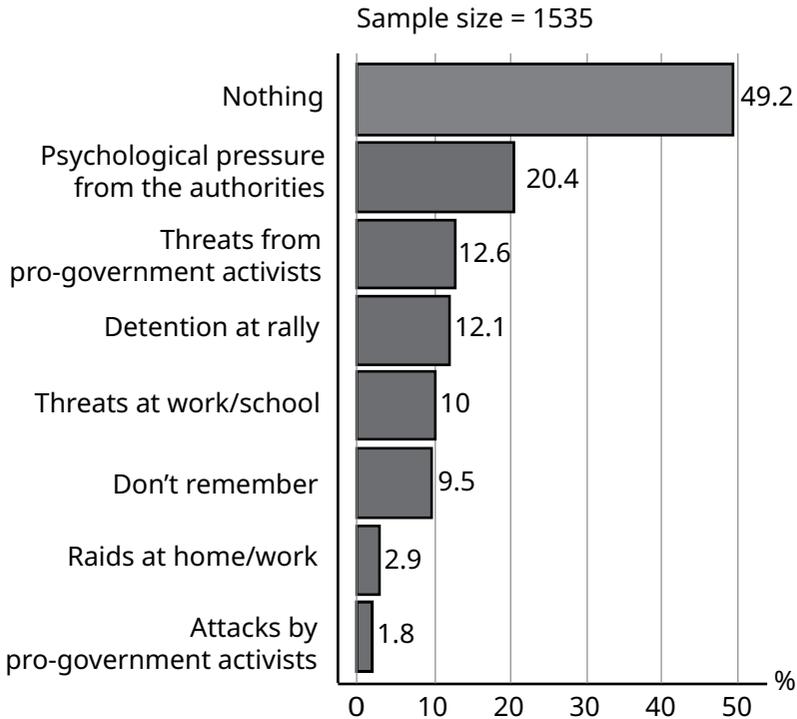


Figure 8.1: Political pressure in Russia

Ukraine on social networks, 20 per cent feared conscription, 19 per cent that they would lose access to necessary medication, and 9 per cent expected criminal charges. Finally, 20 per cent did not know what could happen if they returned. These numbers suggest that repression prevented these citizens from voicing their claims safely, set the risks extremely high, and crowded these people out. This is how Valentina and Petr explained their decision to leave in February:

That's why the choice was, in general, pretty obvious, that if I want to say what I want to say and do what I want to do, I have to leave—in terms of both physical and psychological safety. (Valentina, 30, NGO coordinator, Georgia)

I wouldn't have come out [to protest] in Russia if I had been in Russia, because that would have been suicide, and here we went because here, first of all, it was possible, and secondly, because we had to express our position somehow, that's all. (Petr, 35, IT product manager, Georgia)

Staying Connected with Russia: Family and Employers

Employment is one of the strongest ties that migrants have with their sending country; their income and life plans revolve around it, as well as incentives to engage in activism and remit money and 'values' back to Russia. On one hand, employment in Russia may impede exiles from participating in protest initiatives due to fears of potential contract disruptions. On the other hand, it establishes a powerful connection with the homeland and can potentially facilitate political remittances, as migrants still have stakes back home and tend to be more concerned about Russia's domestic developments than with those who have severed all ties, including employment.

The share of those employed with Russian companies tends to decline over time. In autumn 2022, the share of those employed in Russia remotely decreased by almost two-thirds (see [Figure 8.2](#)). Within six months, the labour situation of the emigrants had changed. Many kept their jobs in Russia during the first months of their stay abroad, shifting to remote forms of employment. In autumn, we observed transitions from Russian companies to international and local companies, freelancing, or attempts to start a business. Only 2 per cent had become unemployed, and 5 per cent of respondents had started to study. Overall, the economic connection to Russia was gradually weakening. Those employed in international companies and self-employed freelancers, with few exceptions, appeared to be the most economically stable group of migrants. Russian employers' reluctance to retain employees in 'remote work' contributed to the outflow of employees from

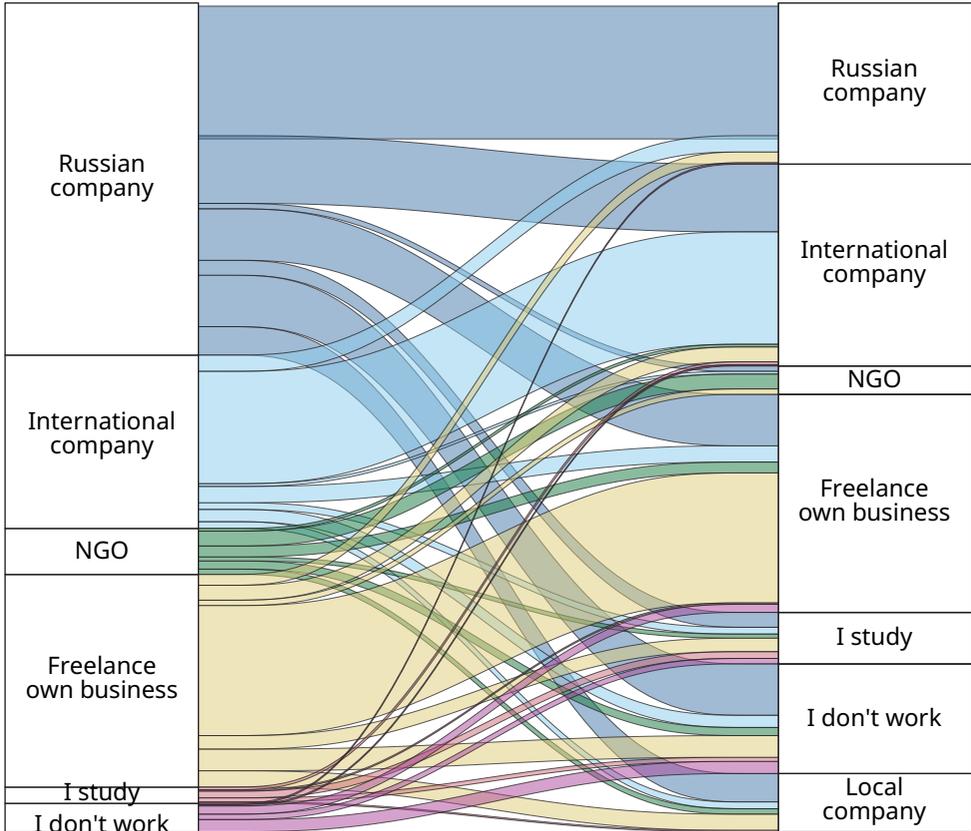


Figure 8.2: Outflow of employees from Russian companies from March to September 2022

Russian companies, reinforced by the tightening of tax legislation on non-residents. Difficulties with money transfers from Russia also played a role in detachment from the Russian labour market.

Among the reasons why respondents abandoned their current workplace were an expected economic downturn and subsequent devaluation of the ruble, unwillingness to pay taxes in Russia and thereby to sponsor the war, and finally, expected redundancy or a planned change of workplace.

I don't want to pay taxes from my pay cheque into the military coffers of a government and president I didn't elect. (Feedback on the question 'Why have you decided to leave your job', first-wave panel, March 2022)

Under these conditions, we have lost foreign partners, and I no longer want to pay the taxes that are given to the wars. (Feedback on the question 'Why have you decided to leave your job', first-wave panel, March 2022)

Some of these people left precisely because staying in Russia meant losing their jobs and any career prospects (30 per cent of respondents), while some could have benefited financially had they stayed in Russia. This became possible because the exodus of international companies meant a large import-substitution campaign that opened opportunities to some domestic businesses. Economic reasons also mattered, as many foreign companies left Russia immediately after the war started and their employees had to decide quickly whether to stay in Russia jobless or to move away. Paired with the escalating economic crisis in Russia, this formed a strong push factor for thousands, especially those employed in the IT sector.

I still get calls there offering me a job. And you understand that they offer me a job there ... [at several] times more money than I could ever get here. But as long as it's in this format, it's not acceptable at all. (Evgenia, 40, top manager, Georgia)

[One option was] to go to a European university [in St Petersburg] for a master's degree. But now it has become clear that things will only get worse and worse, these universities will also have more repression applied to them, etc. I mean, what's the point of this? There are no career prospects either. That's also the reason why it's accelerated [migration]. (Aleksandra, 30, urbanist, Georgia)

According to the survey data, half of the respondents maintained economic ties with Russia and even planned to continue working for their current organizations, while another half did not have

such an opportunity or did not wish to use it. While many had plans to quit working at a Russian company, for some respondents this was not desirable and they preferred to stay attached to a Russian workplace.

I contacted the supervisor immediately when I decided to leave. He said: ‘Yes, you can leave’. We agreed that I would go away for a month, and he would see how I could work remotely completely ... And in the end, a month went by, and he said that everything was fine, and I could continue to work like that. (Vladimir, 30, marketing specialist, Georgia)

I luckily didn’t quit [the job in Russia]. In fact, I continue to work with the brand and Instagram that I worked with before. I mean, I continue to cooperate with them in principle, we’ve changed in the sense that, at some point, I was really caught up in a quite powerful depression ... I just didn’t have the energy to work on the same scale as I did there, for example, before the war. Because of that, my income went down, and that’s quite a lot, but now I’m trying to get back to that level. (Anastasia, 28, beauty blogger, Armenia)

Before emigration, Maxim was happy with his work at the Russian TV Company, although he felt that he had got stuck there. It paid well, and he already planned to have children with his wife. When the full-scale war started, he took an official holiday and left Russia. He and his pregnant wife had to change countries four times before they landed in Türkiye. Since at the beginning it was unclear how long the war would last, many migrants took unpaid holidays. In his interview in a small Turkish town, Maxim recalls:

[A]t the end of the month of this vacation, I realized that I have no idea how I could go back to Russia, even though I was promised [an exemption from the draft]. Then they [his employer] just started talking about the draft exemption, all sorts of stuff and said, of course you’re kind of key employees, key industry, that without television, our country is kind of like it does not work. (Maxim, around 30, event manager, Türkiye)

Almost all informants who kept their Russian employment, with the one exception of Konstantin in Kyrgyzstan who was well versed in Russian and Kyrgyzstani politics, preferred to stay away from politics both in and outside of Russia. Denis, a logistics manager and IT specialist who had arrived in Armenia, said that he had tried to quit his job in Russia but had failed to find a suitable one and had had to return to another Russia-based company. Answering the question about activism, he mostly described Ukrainian diaspora organizations in Yerevan without elaborating on Russian rallies and charities (Denis, logistics manager, Armenia). Maxim, who ended up in Türkiye with his wife, a former TV worker, considered political discussions at work (before the war and when he was working remotely) as a form of activism and sounded proud of this, as he was clearly working in a more pro-government and therefore less friendly environment (Maxim, event manager, Türkiye). Anatoly, then based in Kazakhstan, kept his company operating in Russia and claimed that he had always strived to side with ‘a constructive position’ (*sozidatel'naya* in Russian) vis-à-vis political activism and had preferred ‘small deeds’ and urban projects to politics (Anatoly, architect, Kazakhstan). While most of the informants had quit their Russian jobs, those who had kept theirs one way or another seem to be more cautious. We clearly observed some ‘straw-in-the-wind’ evidence that confirmed this expectation.

We surveyed the recent migrants from Russia as to whether they planned to maintain ties with their homeland and whether they felt that they had anything left back home. In the Russian-language segment of the social networks, one may observe heated debates over who are the true patriots or the true opposition, schisms between ‘remainers’ and ‘exiters’. Such disputes over whose moral choices are better under the horrible circumstances of the war tend to impede coordination and cooperation between those who stayed and those who left. From the pragmatic viewpoint, those who are outside Russia can openly disseminate information and aid, form civic associations, and build working relationships with the leadership of their host countries. Those who stayed, in

turn, do not lose touch with the reality inside the country and continue to resist. In this sense, maintaining ties between those who stay and those who leave is an important condition for the formation of an alternative political programme for Russia.

I certainly consider as heroes those people who stayed in Russia, who are doing something now. I know them by name, I follow them, I see what they are doing. And it's probably not hopeless, someone had to stay there and continue at least some kind of civic activity. (Valentina, 30, NGO coordinator, Georgia)

Well, you have to help [those in Russia], and I don't have the opinion that if you stayed there, you're an asshole. On the contrary, I have a lot of respect for these people who stayed ... [like my] wife's sister and her husband. Basically, they worked with Navalny there too, now they [help] Yulia Galyamina. And Galyamina stays in Russia, the children too, the sister's husband. (Aleksandr, 35, male, PR/journalist/political activist, Georgia)

The immediate social circle of back home of someone who has migrated is likely to be more pro-democratic than those with no one close to them who have gone to another country, so migrants' influence rather reinforces and strengthens their relatives' political views than changes it. However, the latter is also possible. Below are two excerpts from interviews in which informants told us that their relatives either were already on their side politically or had changed their minds later, perhaps influenced by their decision to migrate.

I had a huge fight with my mom [after the full-scale invasion]. I can only talk to her about flowers and neutral topics because she is supportive [of the war], she thinks that everything is normal. Imagine the situation ... I came to Russia, I haven't seen my mom for six months. On February 24, we had a dispute, so I tried several times to convince her, tried to convince my grandmother, my cousin, but it didn't work. They were talking according to the *metodichka* [instructions], as if I was talking to Kiselyov or Solovyov [Russian TV propagandists and news anchors] ...

I arrive in May [2022], our dog dies, we are in an even worse state of mind. Practically the first thing she says to me after formal things like ‘hello, goodbye’ ... is ‘Do you know that in Ukraine they do experiments on the sick?’ I understand that this is not going to end well, so I got up and left. A few days later I visit her again. (Petr, 35, IT product manager, Georgia)

But at that time, it was February 26, he [the respondent’s father] had an opinion that we don’t know the whole truth, it’s not clear what’s going on, who’s to blame, who isn’t ... And as a result, a few months later, [my parents] recently came to visit me. And in the end, yes, his opinion became more radical: war is awful, Putin is a horrible person, everything became clearer. Well, it became easier, but we still discuss it more superficially, without details. (Vladimir, 30, marketing specialist, Georgia)

According to the survey, more than half (57 per cent) of the respondents talked to their relatives in Russia every day, 37 per cent several times a month, and fewer than 7 per cent less than once a month. Talking to family does not mean discussing sensitive political issues (see [Figure 8.3](#)). Nevertheless, 18.4 per cent of respondents constantly discussed politics with their relatives in Russia, 36.5 per cent did it often, 38 per cent rarely, and only 7.3 per cent never. Thus, the communication is likely to be emotional and highly politicized. Very few of our informants had had to cut ties with those relatives who did not share their political position. Family connections keep migrants attached to their country of origin and remain the main channel of transmitting back politically relevant information. Based on the interviews we conducted, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of political discussions or debates about the war. Some claimed that they had ceased to talk about the war altogether, while others continued to discuss it and find ways to convey their viewpoint. From the perspective of political remittances, we can only assert that the contacts remained in place that left the possibility of remitting ‘values’ or at least providing support to those in Russia.

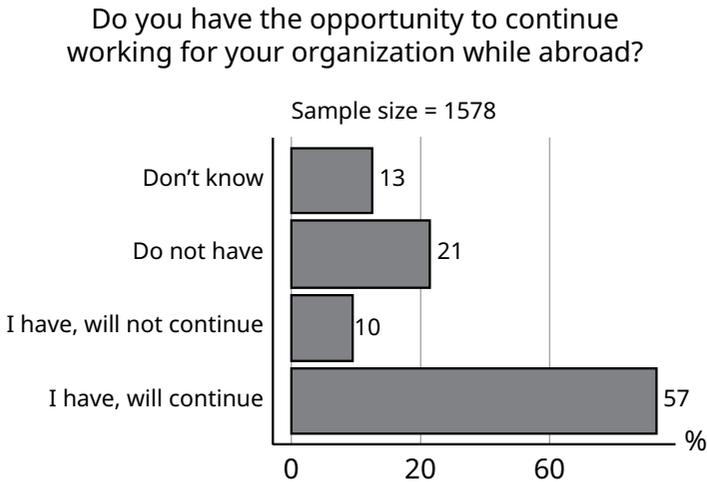


Figure 8.3: Employment in Russia-based companies: first wave of the online survey, March–April 2022.

Transnational Voice

The survey results indicate that the new wave of migrants from Russia is highly politicized and actively engaged in political initiatives, standing in solidarity with each other and maintaining contact with those who stayed in Russia. The vast majority of respondents expressed a deep interest in politics and reported their engagement in political activities (see [Figure 8.4](#)). This is in stark contrast to the usual migrants from Russia, who are not as politically active. Moreover, only 1.5 per cent of the new migrants reported having voted for United Russia, while 86.4 per cent followed the recommendations of ‘Smart Vote’, a strategic voting tool developed by the team of Aleksei Navalny to support opposition candidates who are not allowed to run. The national share of respondents in favour of Smart Vote, according to the Levada Centre, is merely 8 per cent, indicating that these migrants are more politically active and more likely to support the opposition

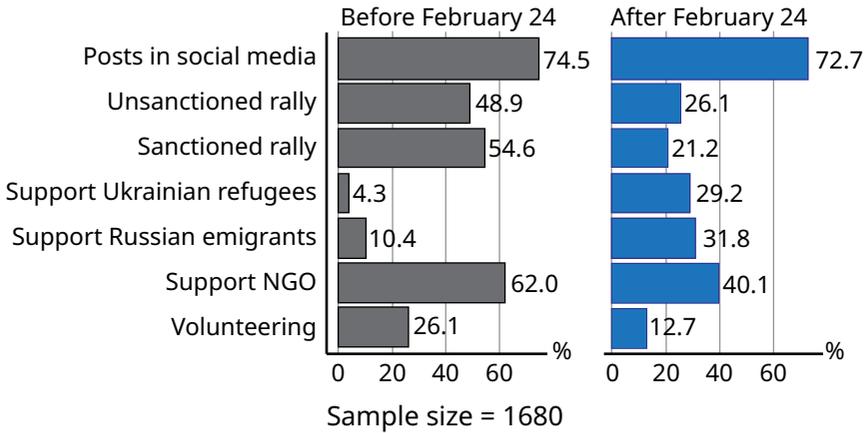


Figure 8.4: Political activism of Russian emigrants before and after emigration

than the general population (Turchenko, Zavadskaya, and Golosov 2022).

The political initiatives of the Russian opposition in exile have been led primarily by the ‘old guard’, referring to Russian oppositionists who left the country prior to the full-scale invasion. These initiatives are concentrated mainly in the European Union and have yet to fully engage with the communities of new migrants in Eurasia. Among the most controversial of these initiatives is the proposal put forward by the Free Russia Forum during the II Anti-War Conference in May to introduce a passport that would identify ‘good Russians’. The rationale behind this proposal is that Russians who oppose Putin’s regime and the war in Ukraine are entitled to exemption from international sanctions. This idea sparked intense debates within Russian-speaking intellectual and political circles, as well as within the European policymaking community.

Despite the domination of ‘old guard’ initiatives, there have been several successful efforts to create bottom-up organizations to represent anti-war Russian migrants and facilitate fundraising. According to the Map of Peace,³ there are 111 anti-war

communities, with the most visible ones providing aid to Ukrainian refugees. These include Help Ukrainians in Hungary, which provides food supplies; Russians for Ukraine in Poland, which aids individuals at the Polish–Ukrainian border; and Kovcheg, which provides aid to Russian migrants with branches in 29 countries. Similar projects exist in Estonia, the Czech Republic, Armenia, and Georgia. While these organizations focus primarily on providing urgent assistance to those in need and do not articulate any explicit political agenda, it would be incorrect to label them apolitical. Activists within these organizations take a clear stance on the war in Ukraine and do not shy away from engaging in political discourse.

Feminist Anti-War Resistance is among the most successful movements today, with its branched and flexible structure. The movement's representatives have been invited to the congresses of pro-democratic movements in exile and have gained recognition among the opposition. Meanwhile, Navalny's network, the ACF, remains one of the most coherent opposition structures, uniting and coordinating its activists both within and outside of the country.⁴ The network is well known for its viral anti-corruption investigations and continued production of online news, political analysis, and even political stand-up shows on YouTube.

One would anticipate that economically successful migrants of the new wave could provide a source of donations to political actors. Our survey indicated that migrants were indeed interested in funding independent political movements in Russia. In fact, 41 per cent of those interviewed had donated money to independent Russian organizations after leaving Russia. However, anti-Russian sanctions have resulted in difficulties with international transfers to Russian accounts, which may significantly limit migrants' ability to send money home. This problem may also hinder migrants' attempts to support opposition politicians and anti-war initiatives that continue to function in Russia, albeit in a limited form due to repression and the final withdrawal of international donors from the Russian NGO scene. Thus, while the vast majority of migrants were active participants in the life of

Russian grassroots initiatives, donating money and volunteering for human rights organizations, financial infrastructure limitations may be the main reason for the weakening of ties with Russian opposition movements.

The Russian state is known for using all of the above-mentioned repression formats. It is highly likely that Russian emigrants are aware about the possibility of repression from the Russian state. Several cases of successful recruitment of influential activists by Russian special agencies have been publicly disclosed recently (Meduza 2022). According to journalist investigations, these activists were recruited to collect and transfer information about activist networks in Tbilisi. Also, many appeals to pass legislation aimed at harming those who have left Russia since the invasion of Ukraine have been made by Russian politicians and public figures. These have been highly populist in their nature, from appeals to increase taxes for remote workers to proposals to confiscate the property of those who have left (RBC 2022). Transnational repression may affect migrants' voice in a detrimental way, making the political activity and protesting potential of even the most active regime opposers much less powerful. However, transnational repression may also increase migrants' mobilization and ability to protest.

Well, I see actions here, there are Russians all over the place. 'Sakartvelo' does different rallies, something else. But to be honest, I didn't go, I didn't take part in them. For some reason I ... in fact when I was leaving, I thought: 'Wow, it is cool, you can do something like that in Tbilisi,' but I had a fear that photos might not be super safe, I mean if they take your picture during the campaign. So I had such cautious attitude towards the rallies. (Ekaterina, 31, online education specialist, Georgia)

According to Tsourapas (2021), autocratic transnational repression practices involve not only states but also individuals and organizations. This is relevant to the case of Russian migrants who find themselves in countries that are potential partners in assisting the repressive Russian regime, such as Kazakhstan, Armenia, and

Kyrgyzstan (Tenisheva, 2022). In fact, many Russian emigrants have settled in precisely those countries that maintain cooperation with Russia. Georgia stands out as a prominent exception, as it limits the entry of well-known political activists, fearing retaliation from Russia. In this context, Türkiye is noteworthy as the state least connected to Russia, without any communist or USSR-related legacies. This makes it harder for Russian authorities to pressure the Turkish government to extradite or influence the lives of Russian migrants in tangible ways.

Respondents remained politically active after leaving Russia. More than 70 per cent were active in social networks and signed anti-war petitions, about a half (48.9 per cent) took part in unauthorized actions before the war, and 26 per cent came out to protest even after 24 February. After the war began, 29.2 per cent actively supported Ukrainian refugees and 31.8 per cent actively supported fellow Russian migrants. Before the war 62 per cent of respondents had supported various NGOs, while after 24 February this figure was 40 per cent. Quite predictably, the share of demonstrators went down because in host societies, volunteering and other forms of social activity were easier and looked more desirable. In contrast, rallies usually imply a target audience in the location where they take place, but in the migrants' new societies there was no such audience. Last but not least, several migrants found themselves in countries where rallying was not the most common form of political participation.

As expected, those who had been politically active before leaving Russia continued to engage in various activities in their host societies. Among the countries our informants had settled in, Georgia seemed to be the most vibrant venue, hosting several political initiatives. Aleksandr, for example, described how he and his spouse participated in assisting Ukrainian refugees in Tbilisi:

When we talk about refugees, we talk about Ukrainian refugees, yes, who are ... in the frontline or occupied territories ... Yeah. My wife supervises the whole Kharkiv region, she deals with evacuating people from there to Europe ... [Answering the

question about possible repression:] Well, I mean, that's why we left, we could talk and write [freely]. (Aleksandr, 30, journalist and political activist, Georgia)

Another interviewee, Natalia, had previously worked for the ACF and considered it natural to carry on with the same activities, but she abstained from participating in domestic Georgian politics, seeing this as 'unethical':

Well, as for activism, well, yes, I worked first as a volunteer in Navalny's headquarters [back in Russia, before the full-scale invasion] ... I went to rallies organized by the Free Russia Foundation in Georgia, which were rallies for Russians and for Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, that is, for people who had left their countries. But they were rallies against the war in Ukraine. So, I did not go to other actions because it seemed to me like I was meddling in Georgian politics ... Well, yes, as if it is unethical to pry into the politics of the country which is objectively more democratic, because I do not have any [right?] Well, I'm not a citizen of Georgia here, and secondly, like we fucked up our own [democracy], we came here, that to restore order here, well as it seems to me, is not very cool. I mean I did not go to rallies that were against the law on foreign agents in Georgia, because again, well, Georgians are doing fine by themselves. (Natalia, around 30, journalist/activist, Georgia)

It seems that migrants who are more politically open tend to choose to settle in states that are also more politically open. As a result, migrants in countries such as Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and Kyrgyzstan may be less interested in political activism. This is likely due to the self-selection process that is limited by migration constraints. Olga, a former manager in an international oil company who ended up in Kazakhstan, explained her decision to stay away from activism before and after the full-scale invasion:

Rather not ... I've always had a kind of detached attitude towards [political activism], and it always seemed to me that ... it's ... maybe not quite right, of course. I could have probably done

it differently, but it is what it is. Um ... it always seemed to me that ... not that it's any of my business ... I'm out there working and sorting trash and doing what I think is okay, but I've never wanted to get involved in any mass stories at all ... I worked on one project ... I don't even know if that's cool or not cool. Well, in my mind, it was cool. We were doing a project about cycling in the city, and it seemed cool to me that I was contributing [to the infrastructure] in some way. (Olga, 27, marketing specialist, Kazakhstan)

Another migrant in Kazakhstan, Vadim, who before the full-scale war began had participated in pro-Navalny rallies, argued that political activism after emigration is 'forbidden':

Well, it's forbidden. As far as I know, by law, so no one participated. I mean, like ... Non-residents can't participate in protests. For example, I don't consider this kind of my home and my kind of end point. That's why I don't participate. (Vadim, 33, musician, Kazakhstan)

The incentives structure for migrants in the medium and long run is shaped by the host countries and their political regimes. Those who value activism and a sense of community tend to choose Georgia or move further, to Germany. On the other hand, those who are less politically engaged and do not have prior experience with political activism tend to choose more affordable and convenient locations with fewer language barriers and tend to consider political context to a lesser extent.

Discussion

The political attitudes, skills, level of trust, and economic well-being of new Russian migrants differ significantly from those of the Russian population. Compared with the general population and earlier migration waves, new migrants are more politically engaged. New migrants have demonstrated a capacity for self-organization and mutual aid, creating a variety of public spaces

where different perspectives on Russia and Russian communities meet. The creation of such networks is facilitated by more permissive political opportunities structures. Of the post-Soviet states, Georgia is the most vibrant venue, where Russian migrants have built up communities from scratch despite the largely anti-Russia sentiment. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan may appear more friendly towards Russian migrants at first glance, but newcomers quickly learn that their activism is not welcome, leading them to either integrate or move elsewhere. Armenia presents an in-between case and merits further exploration.

From this perspective, migrants in Georgia and possibly Armenia are the most likely to transmit political values and information back to Russia, while political remittances from other non-EU states are limited. The capacity of Russian migrants to influence politics in their country of origin is highly contingent on political dynamics within their countries of destination, international sanctions, and the internal features of anti-war communities. On an individual level, those who were politically active before leaving Russia tend to remain active and to continue to voice their political stance. Professional activists tend to concentrate in Tbilisi. Those who retain their employment in Russia remotely tend to be more cautious about activism and may have been more apolitical before leaving Russia. This group shares an anti-war ethos but tends to use milder language. The fact that these people still decided to leave while maintaining ties with the Russian labour market poses a genuine puzzle and merits further scrutiny.

Migrants' capacity to uphold horizontal networks and take advantage of their social and economic capital is limited by several factors. First, migrants remain dependent on their previous Russian employers, which may impose certain constraints on their activism. Second, while more liberal political environments can outweigh restrictive migration legislation, there is little evidence that communities to those in Georgia or Armenia have emerged in Kazakhstan, Türkiye, or Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, this analysis does not address the challenging identity questions raised by the fact that most migrants end up in former 'colonies' and countries

that send labour migrants to Russia. Lastly, we do not examine the gender aspect of migration and how it shapes patterns of activism in host countries. Rather, we offer a broad overview of Russian migration from the perspective of connections with the homeland, potential for political remittances, and correlates of activism in migrants' new homes.

Notes

- 1 We express our gratitude to the editors of the volume Dr Anna-Liisa Heusala and Dr Kaarina Aitamurto from the University of Helsinki and Dr Sherzod Eraliev from Lund University, as well as three anonymous reviewers.
- 2 Hereinafter we rely on socio-demographic data from Levada Centre (2021a, 2021b).
- 3 Map of Peace website: <https://mapofpeace.org>.
- 4 The data used in this chapter was collected before Aleksei Navalny was allegedly killed in prison in Russia on 16 February 2024.

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Informants

Informants were anonymized and assigned random names.

1. Ekaterina, 31 years old, online education specialist, 8.7.2022, Georgia
2. Kirill, 25, project manager, 6.7.2022, Georgia
3. Alevtina, 26, designer, 9.7.2022, Georgia
4. Valentina, 30, NGO coordinator, 12.7.2022, Georgia
5. Petr, 35, IT product manager, 8.7.2022, Georgia
6. Evgenia, 40, top manager, 6.7.2022, Georgia
7. Aleksandra, 30, urbanist, 14.7.2022, Georgia
8. Vladimir, 30, marketing specialist, 12.7.2022, Georgia
9. Nikolay, around 30, journalist, 4.4.2023, Georgia
10. Anna, 27, journalist, 27.3.2023, Georgia
11. Olga, 27, marketing specialist in international company, 29.3.2023, Kazakhstan
12. Vadim, 33, musician, 3.4.2023, Kazakhstan
13. Elena, age unknown, housewife, 4.4.2023, Türkiye
14. Anastasia, 28, makeup and beauty blogger, 31.3.2023, Armenia
15. Maxim, around 30, sports/event manager, 4.4.2023, Türkiye, also lived in Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Georgia
16. Oleg, 45, journalist, 5.4.2023, Georgia
17. Vladimir 24, IT specialist, 5.4.2023, Türkiye and Georgia

18. Timur, around 30, teacher/ freelance/entrepreneur, 9.4.2023, Kazakhstan, also lived in Montenegro
19. Denis, age unknown, logistics manager, IT, 10.4.2023, Armenia
20. Karina, around 36, filmmaker/producer, 12.4.2023, Georgia
21. Albina, around 38, entrepreneur, 31.3.2023, Türkiye
22. Marina, age unknown, marketing specialist, 2.4.2023, Armenia
23. Konstantin, 32, university lecturer, 2.4.2023, Armenia
24. Daniil, around 26, PhD student, linguist, 17.4.2023, Kyrgyzstan
25. Mikhail, 27, entrepreneur, 14.4.2023, Türkiye
26. Anatoly, 33, architect-entrepreneur, 12.4.2023, Kazakhstan
27. Olessia, 22, IT specialist and unemployed, 7.4.2023, Armenia
28. Aleksandr, around 35, journalist/political activist, 23.3.2023, Georgia
29. Natalia, around 30, journalist/activist, 28.3.2023, Georgia