

Anna Sokolova, Maria Golovina, Elizaveta Semirkhanova

The 'Bandar-Log'¹ in Sakharov Prospect: A Sociological Portrait

This article utilises the results of a sociological survey carried out during a protest on Sakharov Prospect on 24 December 2011. The aim of the survey was to create, based on quantitative data, a sociological portrait of the protest participants that might serve as a background for subsequent research using qualitative research techniques.

The survey was carried out between 2.30 pm and 5pm at various locations within the protest. Bearing in mind the technical difficulties of carrying out quantitative research at events such as this, a decision was made to focus on the gender and age of participants. The basis for sampling was a preliminary calculation of the gender and age breakdown of protesters passing through the metal detectors. Members of the research group stood opposite six detectors and recorded the gender and age (under 30, 30–50, older than 50) of those walking through over the course of 10 minutes. After the relevant calculations were completed, the following gender and age composition of participants was obtained, which was then used to guide the process of surveying.

Anna Sokolova

Institute of Ethnology
and Anthropology,
Russian Academy of Sciences,
Moscow
annadsokolova@gmail.com

Maria Golovina

Russian State University
for the Humanities,
Moscow
maria3275@gmail.com

Elizaveta Semirkhanova

Russian State University
for the Humanities,
Moscow
semirkhanova@gmail.com

Selection sample

For 100 people	Aged under 30	Aged 30–50	Aged over 50
Men	20	30	20
Women	10	10	10

¹ On the use of the term 'Bandar-log' and variants as a challenge to Putin, see the discussion in Maria Akhmetova's contribution. [Editor].

While they were working, the interviewers tried whenever possible to move around the square in order to incorporate all possible groups of protesters. The low temperature (around minus 25 Celsius) and the incessant rotation of protest participants led to a degree of adjustment, in practice, of this sampling method. However, the empirical distribution of gender and age among those interviewed was close to what had been calculated, as well as being comparable to the equivalent data gathered by the Levada Centre. The total number of people sampled as part of our research was 216.

Fig. 1

Distribution of respondents in gender and age and comparison to the Levada Centre's survey

Age	Men	Women	Total number		Levada Centre
18–24	34	19	53	24.5 %	25 %
25–39	68	23	91	42.2 %	31 %
40–54	23	11	34	15.7 %	23 %
55+	17	21	38	17.6 %	22 %
Total	142	74	216	100 %	100 %

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first (questions 1–4) concerned the socio-demographic characteristics of protest participants and included questions about gender, age, occupation, education and well-being. At the same time, multiple-choice answers to the question regarding professional field were formulated in order to discover whether respondents worked in the state or private sectors (and by extension, whether their prosperity depends on fluctuations in the market or political budgets). Of particular interest are those who work on a freelance basis: their response is important because workers in this category depend more than any other on the middle-term predictability of the economy. The question about income was directed less at adducing precise indications of amount earned than at obtaining the respondent's own assessment of his financial situation and his feelings about financial stability, which is more relevant in the context of indicating satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

88 % of those surveyed had obtained a higher education qualification or had started but not yet completed higher education. Therefore, the protest participants primarily come from the educated part of Russian society. The level of education in the sample significantly exceeds the average level of education in Moscow and Moscow Oblast. According to the preliminary results of the nationwide population census of 2010, 50 % of Muscovites included in the census

Fig. 2

Level of education / Professional field

Level of education		Professional field	
Incomplete secondary	1 %	Pupil at school / secondary school	2 %
Secondary	5 %	Higher education student	14 %
Secondary specialist	6 %	Employee in state sector	14 %
Incomplete higher education	17 %	Employee in private sector	45 %
Higher education	64 %	Freelancer	10 %
Academic degree (Kandidat/Doktor Nauk)	7 %	Unemployed	4 %
		Pensioner	11 %

have higher, incomplete higher or post-graduate education, while in Moscow Oblast this figure is 36.2 % [Informational material 2010].

In addition to this it is essential to note that the majority of those who came to the protest were people who are dependent on the market system, and therefore they are forced to be restrained when it comes to making political and economic demands. This is demonstrated by the high percentage of those working in the private sector (45 %), and also the relatively large number of freelancers (10 %) — these are people without any social guarantee (see fig. 2). The latter group is interesting in that (with a few exceptions) it is made up of people engaged in creative professions and/or active Internet users. No less important is the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents are well provided for. Only 25 % of them considered their income to be unsatisfactory. Comparing the level of education and the professional field allows us to suppose that no less than 14 % of students (2.4 % of the total sample) earn money on the side, while the intersection of the ‘academic degree’ and ‘working in state sector’ indicators suggests that those representing the academic environment (university employees and scientists) comprised no more than 3% of protesters.

The second section (questions 5–10) was designed to elucidate why the person had come to the protest, how ordinary (normal) it was for him to display this kind of civil activity, how full of initiative he is in general and how radical his protest mood was. The question asking whether the respondent identified with any political organisation was included to establish whether there was any correlation between declared political views and real political activity. A question regarding the frequency with which the respondent had attended political actions provided an opportunity to determine the level of political commitment of those who came and the dynamic of political activity during the period following the protest at Bolotnaya Square

(from 10–24 December). The question about participation in community service allowed a potential correlation between political commitment and social action to be identified.

Fig. 3

Political views

Political views	
Communist (Left)	14 %
Nationalist (Far Right)	6 %
Liberal	49 %
Supporter of a current community organisation	6 %
Other	3 %
Has no defined political preferences	22 %

The overwhelming majority of respondents characterised their political views as liberal (49 %) or generally struggled to define their political preferences (22 %) (see fig. 3). Strikingly, there is an unexpectedly low percentage of people who have far-right views (6 %) (at any rate, in comparison to a visual assessment — for example, judging by the number of so-called ‘imperial’ (black, yellow, and white) flags).¹ This possibly points to flaws in the sampling. Furthermore, it is interesting that 88 % of respondents assert that they do not belong to any political organisation (see table 4). Of those who defined their views as leftist, 48 % identify with a specific political organisation. Among liberal respondents, 6 % were party members, which might suggest an ideological ‘blurriness’ and de-politicisation of the concept of ‘liberal’ among respondents. Only 36 % of those surveyed had participated in political action before the elections on 5 December (see fig. 4)

Fig. 4

Political activity

How often do you participate in political activity?	Do you relate to any political organisation? ²		
	Yes, I belong to one (or more)	No, I do not belong to any	Total
I have never participated before today	1 %	29 %	30 %
The first time was at Bolotnaya Square on 10 December	1 %	33 %	34 %
I have participated in activity before the elections	10 %	26 %	36 %
Total	12 %	88 %	100 %

¹ These flags are favoured not only by monarchists, but also by nationalists of different groupings. [Editor].

² Percentage of the total number of respondents.

It is therefore possible to assert that for the most part the protest participants were not ‘professional protesters’ and did not associate themselves specifically with any political organisation. Furthermore, far from all of them directly supported the protest organisers or speakers (only 39.8 % of those surveyed agreed with the relevant statement). Among the most important motivations for participating in the action, the majority listed their confidence that it might influence the country’s situation (68.5 %).

37 % of citizens claimed to participate in political activism (i.e. associated themselves with a particular political organisation, etc.) or social activism (taking part in movements such as the ‘Blue Buckets Society’¹ or the campaign to save the Khimki Forest, working as volunteer firefighters, as electoral observers and so on). Yet only 4 % said that they participated in direct political action. Many (8 %) combined political and social activism. Generally this kind of combination was more common among men (12 %) than women (5 %). One in four of those who came to the protest, while not a political activist, nevertheless participated in civil initiatives (see fig. 5).

The correlation between income and gender and participation in social or civil activity was an interesting result. The average age of men participating in civil activity for the first time was the same as for those who had participated before (35). ‘Initiative-led’ women (~39 years old) were younger by on average 3–4 years than those with less initiative. In sum, among all those demonstrating social or civil initiative, 45 % were women and 55 % men, whereas those not showing this initiative were comprised of 29 % women and 71% men.

Fig. 5

Initiative of protest participants

Have you participated in social initiatives?²	
No, I have never participated	67 %
Yes, I have participated (without clarification)	6 %
Volunteering	10 %
‘Blue Buckets Society’	2 %
Movement to save the Khimki Forest	7 %
Firefighting	5 %
Electoral observer	8 %

¹ The ‘Blue Buckets’ is a movement of drivers who object to the use of blue warning lights on official cars (as opposed to emergency vehicles). Beginning in 2010, participants have joined ‘flash mobs’ and gone on drives round the streets of Moscow with items such as children’s miniature blue buckets fixed to their roofs in parody of the blue warning lights. The participants in the movement emphasise its non-aligned status in a political sense. [Editor].

² This question gave multiple choice answers.

Question 8 — regarding the demands put forward by protesters — sought to expose the extent of the radicalism of their mood. To this end, three options were suggested that contained comparatively moderate demands, as well as three more radical ones. Included in the moderate demands were: 'Fair elections from now on, but acknowledge the result of past elections as valid'; 'Electoral reform to increase the number of parties'; 'New elections'. In the more radical demands were: 'Putin and Medvedev to resign'; 'Thorough investigation into the violations, punishment of those responsible', and 'Putin behind bars!'. Respondents could choose up to three answers. In the end result, the moderate demands received fewer votes than the radical ones (248 against 344), which suggests that the protesters were quite serious about their confrontation with the authorities (see fig. 6).

Fig. 6

Support of proposed demands by protesters

Which protest demands do you support? (choose up to 3 answers)	
Fair elections from now on, but acknowledge the result of past elections as valid	7 %
New elections	77 %
Electoral reform to increase the number of parties	55 %
Putin and Medvedev to resign	59 %
Thorough investigation into violations, punishment for those responsible	50 %
'Putin behind bars!'	23 %

The results of our survey supplement the results obtained by other researchers working at the protest. In particular, according to the data from a survey carried out by the Levada Centre, despite the fact that 89 % of those surveyed found out about the protest from the Internet (the question gave several options)¹, only 37 % had regularly discussed the current State Duma elections and related events on social networks or blogs in the past three months [Levada Centre 2011].

The survey data also indicates a rather high level of radicalism and protest mood. 68 % of respondents confidently support the slogan 'Not a single vote for Vladimir Putin' (at the forthcoming elections), 44 % were definitely willing to go as observers to the elections on 4 March, while 82 % were definitely willing to attend new protest action in the event of further electoral fraud.

¹ According to RPORC data 66 % of respondents found out about the protest via the Internet.

The data obtained by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (RPORC) suggests that the slogans that were the most popular among protest participants were 'For free, fair, honest elections' (37 %), 'Down with Putin' (25 %) and 'Cancel and revise the election results' (19 %) [RPORC 2011]. The more radical slogans such as 'Putin is a thief, put him behind bars' were less widely used — only 6 % of respondents selected this answer.

As can be seen from an analysis of the data obtained, the typical protest participant is a man aged around 35 with higher education and working in the private sector, that is to say economically he lives comparatively independently of the State. He identifies himself as a person with liberal views, but is not a member of any political organisation and does not even relate to one. He began his political activity with a series of protests after the State Duma elections in 2011. This typical protest participant's civil and political position is very moderately radical, which is reflected in his support of specific protest slogans: leading by a large margin were the moderate options 'Re-elections' and 'Putin and Medvedev to resign', whereas the radical repressive version 'Putin to prison!' was only selected by 49 respondents. However, alongside these people was a rather large group who held much more radical views.

References

- [Informatsionnye materialy 2010] 'Informatsionnye materialy ob okonchatelnykh itogakh Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda' [Informational material about the final results of the 2010 Russian Population Census] // Federal State Statistic Service website <http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm>.
- [Opros 2011] 'Opros na prospekte Sakharova 24 dekabrya' [Survey at Sakharov Prospect on 24 December] // Levada Centre website. 2011. 26 December. <<http://www.levada.ru/26-12-2011/opros-na-prospekte-sakharova-24-dekabrya>>.
- [RPORC] 'Mitinguyushchie v Moskve. Kto, pochemu i kak vyshel na prospekt Sakharova na subbotu?' [Protesters in Moscow: Who, Why and How Did They Go to Sakharov Prospect on Saturday] // Website of RPORC [VTsIOM]. 27 December 2011. <<http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=112274>>.