



University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
**Center *for* Slavic, Eurasian  
and East European Studies**

# Beyond the Headlines: Russian Foreign Policy and the Crisis in Ukraine

North Carolina Council  
for the Social Studies Conference  
Feb. 13, 2015

# From Maidan to Minsk: A Geopolitical Overview of the Ukrainian Crisis

North Carolina Council  
for Social Studies

Feb. 13, 2015

Dr. Robert Jenkins  
Center for Slavic, Eurasian, &  
East European Studies  
[cseees.unc.edu](http://cseees.unc.edu)



# Three Interwoven Crises

- Economic Crisis
  - Structure: failed reforms, oligarchy, corruption
  - Performance: growth, trade, debt
- Domestic Political Crisis
  - Regional divisions
  - Personal & party division
  - Unstable coalitions
- Geopolitical Crisis
  - Between Russia & the West
  - Russian Intervention



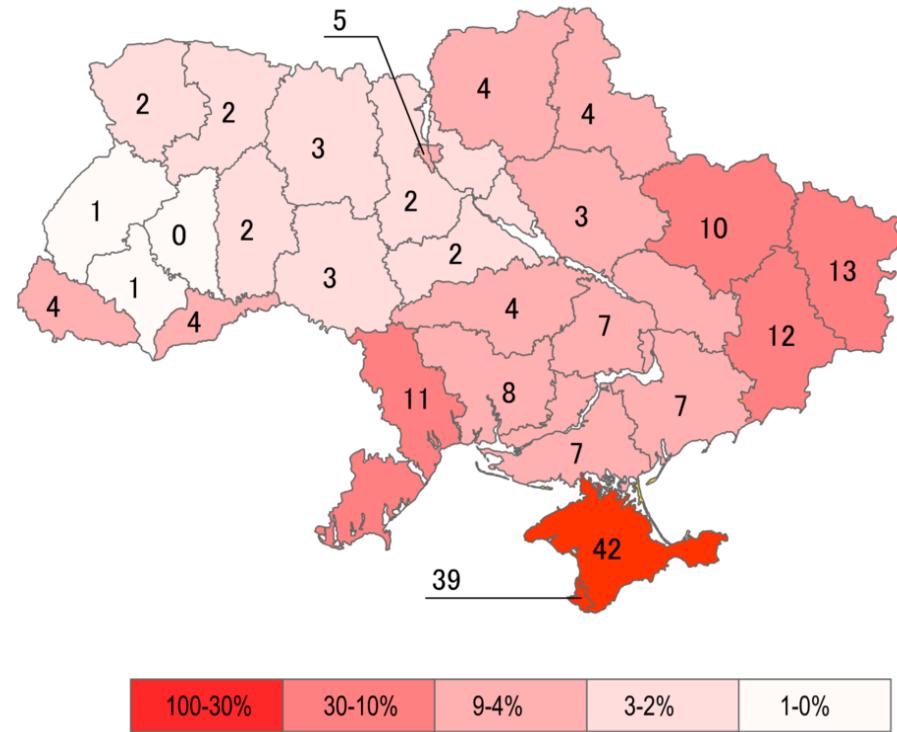
Maidan Protest, Feb 2014

# Geopolitical Crisis

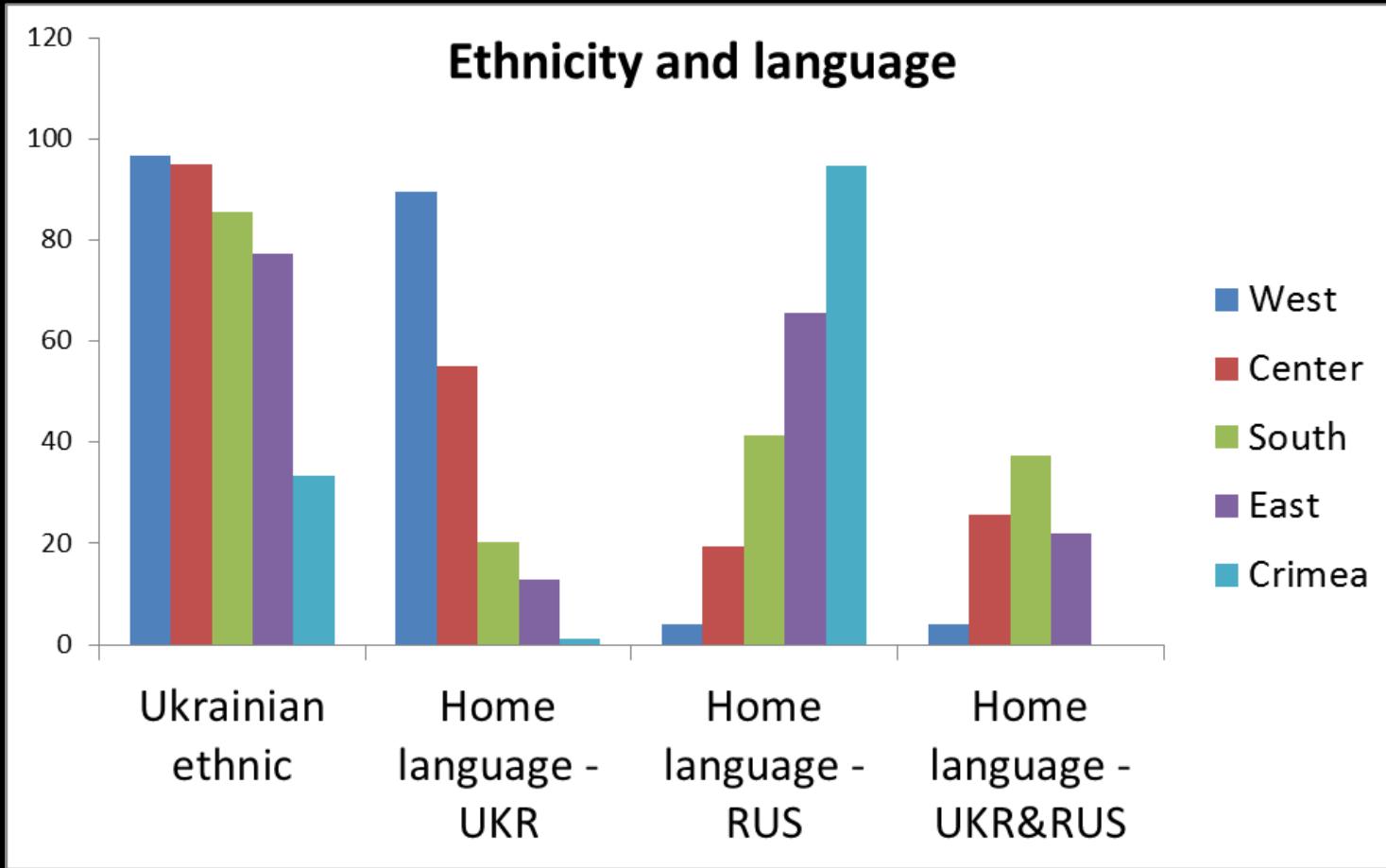
- Ukraine between Russia & the West
  - Identity differences
  - Economic ties
- Evolving global alliances
- Territorial seizure & support for military operations
- Future – frozen conflict?

# Independent Ukraine

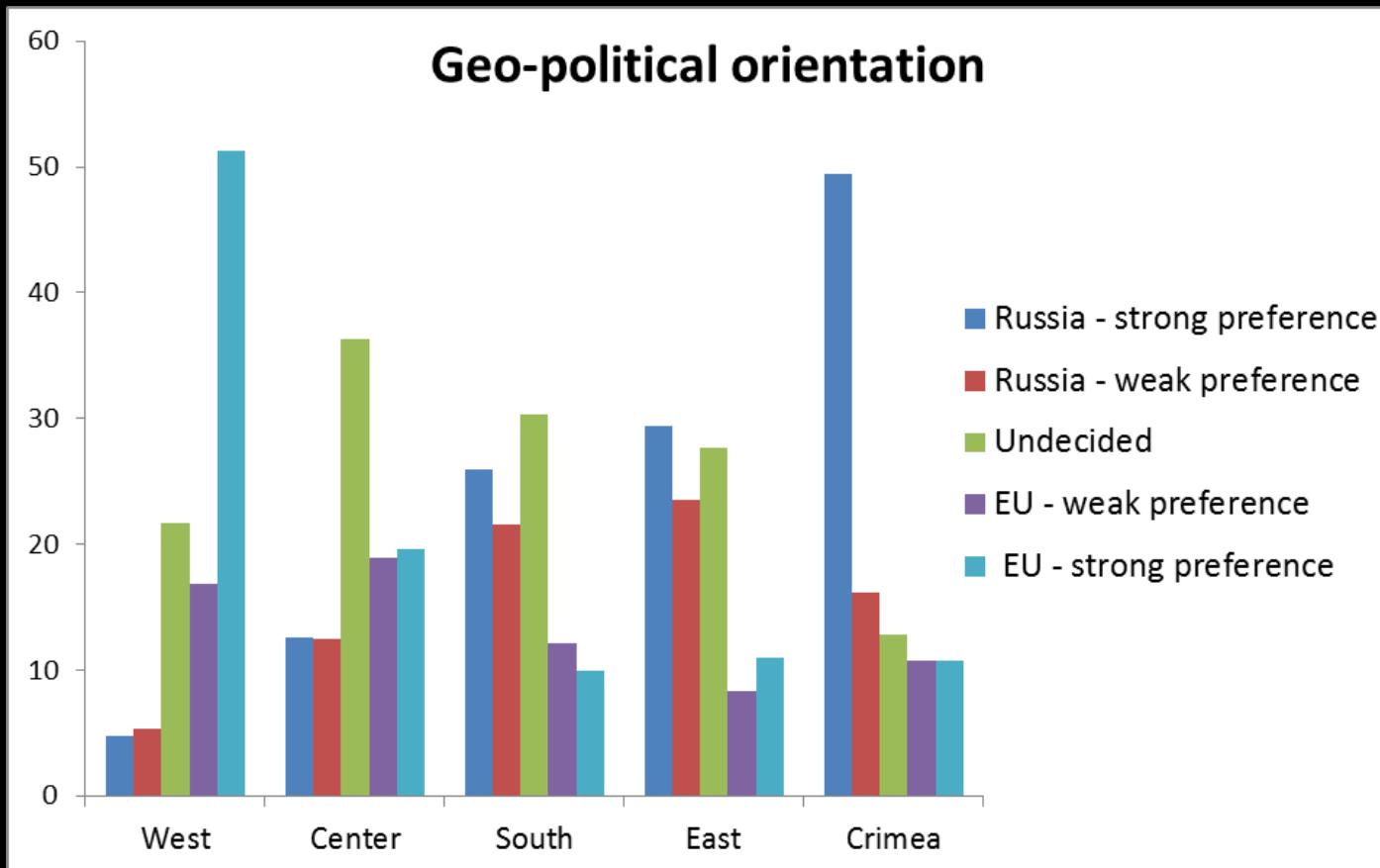
- 1991, Soviet Union in process of collapse
- August 1991, failed coup against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev
- December 1, 1991: Referendum on Act of Independence passes: 92.3% favor (84% turnout)



# Cultural Identity

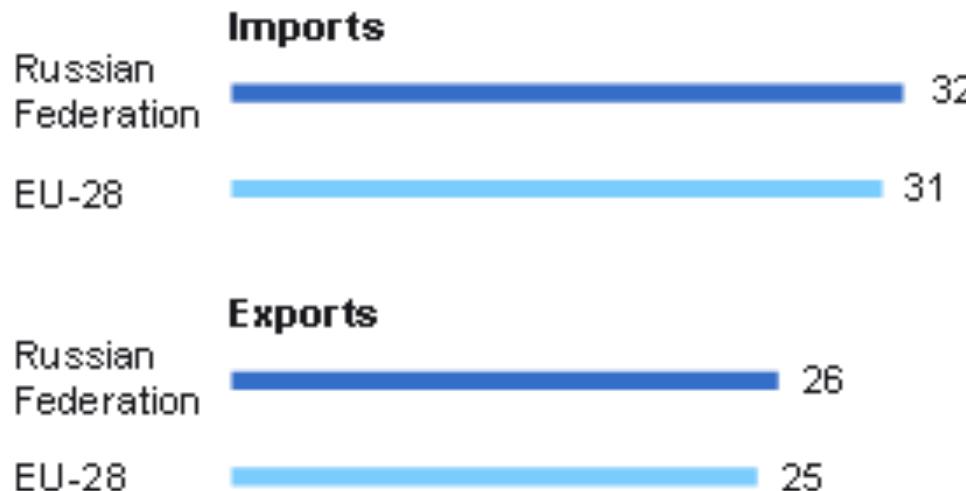


# Regional Affinities for EU & Russia



# Ukraine's Trade Orientation

**Foreign trade: Ukraine 2012**  
Share of im- and exports by trading partner in %

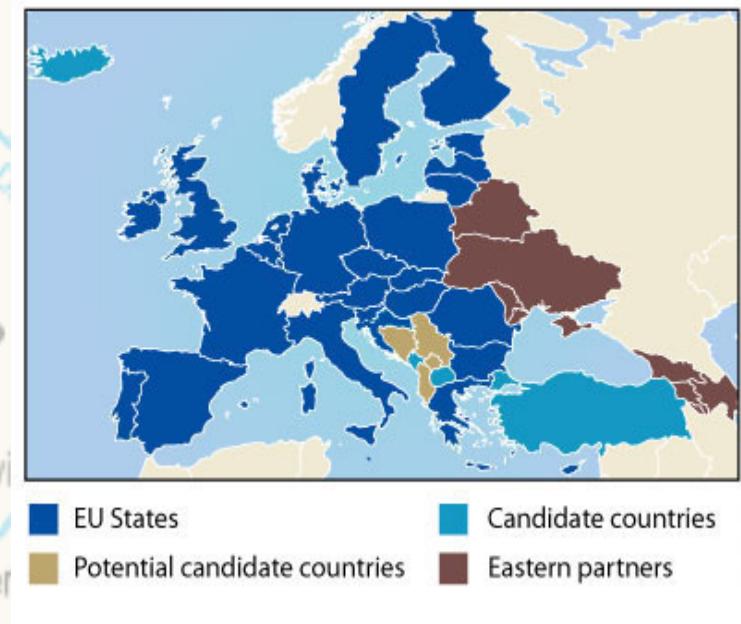


Source: UN Comtrade

© Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden 2014

# EU Eastern Partnership

- EU initiative inaugurated May 2009
  - improve political & trade relations, offer financial support & easier travel to EU
- June 2013, EU-Ukraine Association Agenda to prepare for Association Agreement
- Nov. 21, 2013, Ukraine suspended preparations for Agreement – Maidan protests result
- June 27, 2014, Ukraine, Georgia & Moldova signed Associate Agreements



# Alternative – Eurasian Union?

- 2010, Eurasian Customs Union – Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia
- Dec. 2013, Russia offered Ukraine \$15 bn bailout
- May 2014, transformed into Eurasian Economic Union
- Possible future members: Armenia & Kyrgyzstan



# Crimea Developments

- Feb. 27-28, Pro-Russian gunmen seize buildings in Crimean capital
- Mar. 6, Crimea parliament votes to join Russia
- Mar. 16, official results say Crimea votes 97% to join Russia
- Mar. 18, Putin signs bill to absorb Crimea into Russian Federation; says will defend rights of Russian abroad



# Escalation in Eastern Ukraine

- Apr. 7, 2014, protesters occupy government buildings in eastern cities
- May 11, pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk & Luhansk declare independence after referendums
- May 26-27, government launches ‘anti-terrorist’ operation leading to open warfare between Ukrainian forces & separatists
- Aug. 27-28, separatists open new front, capturing Novoazovsk on Sea of Azov – reversing weakening position



# Is Peace Possible?

- Sep. 5, Minsk ceasefire agreement signed – but fighting continued – over 5400 casualties (2400 since ceasefire)
- Feb. 12, 2015, new Minsk agreement
- Uncertain future – is it pause in fighting or move toward frozen conflict?



# Thinking Large

## Tug of War?

- Russian acting as regional power, seeks to assert power over “sphere of influence”— has military advantage and some economic advantages – trade & resources
- West, primarily EU, seeks to expand its influence through liberal internationalist framework – soft power, resting on values & institutions – NATO in background

# Russian Involvement in Ukraine: Theoretical Perspectives

James Brennan  
MA RUES '15

# The Question

- How can we consider Russian foreign policy in Ukraine?
- Three different models:
  - Rational Actor Model
  - Honor-Respect Model
  - Governmental Process Model
- Implications

# Rational Actor Model

Realist Perspective

# Theoretical Foundation: Realism

- Facets of Realism
  - Long tradition in IR Theory:
    - Morgenthau, Mearsheimer, Waltz
  - Key Principles:
    - Rational, cost-benefit analysis
      - Mistakes = information problem, not irrationality
    - Unified Actor
    - State survival is top goal
  - Materialist view:
    - States are interested in ‘tangible’ Power
      - Power can be military, economic, etc.

# The Model for Russia (RAM)

- RAM = Russian government protecting the Russian State
- The state is a unified actor
  - The Russian Federation (RF) functions as a whole
- The state has a coherent interest in survival
  - NATO represents a possible threat to RF
- RF acts in relation to threats and opportunity
  - RF thinks NATO will expand to post-Maidan Ukraine
- RF's actions are objective-maximizing
  - Supporting rebelling areas/seizing Crimea
    - Prevents Ukraine from joining NATO
    - Sevastopol Fleet

# Assessing the RAM

## Advantages

- Matches RF anti-NATO rhetoric
- Matches ‘escalation of conflict’
  - economic, then military
  - Frozen conflict
- “Makes sense” - useful shorthand for state actions

## Disadvantages

- Assumes complete rationality of leaders
- Ignores personal interests of leaders
- Ignores conflict of values
  - RF vs. EU/US
- Ignores domestic politics
  - public and private

# Honor-Respect Model

Constructivist Perspective

# Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism

- Facets of Constructivism
  - Key principles:
    - Interests depend on context of the State
    - Values are key determinant of behavior
    - Value-rational action
      - Values > material well-being
  - Idealism, rather than materialism
    - Power is not necessarily top interest
    - Ideas/Values can be more important

# The Model for Russia (HRM)

- HRM = The Russian Government protecting Russian peoples
- Great Power status important for Russia
  - Influence in Near Abroad is particularly important
- EU's relationship with Ukraine was perceived as slight to Russian honor
  - Lack of consultation with Russia
- 'Fascism' in post-Maidan Ukraine
  - Russian peoples in eastern Ukraine needed help
- Rebellion in Eastern Ukraine means Russia is key negotiating partner

# Assessing the HRM

## Advantages

---

- Considers difference between values:
  - RF vs. West, instead of conflict with China
- Explains ‘irrationality’
- Support of ‘the people’
  - Fighters follow this idea
- Matches rhetoric

## Disadvantages

---

- Survival interests of State
- Material interests of leaders
- Assumes rhetoric is genuine
- Does not explain aggressive Russian action in Baltics (such as military jet encounters)

# Governmental Process Model

Liberal Perspective

# Theoretical Foundation: Liberalism

- Facets of liberal IR theory:
  - Key principles:
    - Individuals and private groups are fundamental actors
    - States serve the interests of some subset of society
    - These interests determine State behavior

# The Model for Russia (GPM)

- The Russian government protecting Putin's regime
- Putin's regime operates through informal clan networks
- Government strongly influenced by Siloviki faction
  - Current/Former military/intelligence officials
- In this network system, personal/faction interests guide government action
  - What are these interests?
- Successful Maidan revolution would have been dangerous for regime in Russia
  - Possible spread of revolution
  - Increased scrutiny on dealings with Ukraine

# Assessing the GPM

## Advantages

---

- Accounts for personal interests of leaders
- Explains degree of ‘irrationality’
- Accounts for decision making process /domestic politics (not a black box view)

## Disadvantages

---

- requires significant amounts of information from for a very opaque system
- Difficult to distinguish if acting in personal or national interest

# Implications

What do these mean for the future?

# Rational Actor Model

- Future conflict possible:
  - Ending ambitions of NATO expansion would reduce Russian threat perception
- Common interests → ending conflict
  - Constant security competition
    - Zero-sum situation: any increase in western power/influence in the region hurts Russia
- Long-run: Russia with liberal values would ease hostility, but not end competition

# Honor-Respect Model

- Future conflicts very possible:
  - Russians in northern Kazakhstan, Caucasus, Baltics
  - Foreseeable, however → months/years of rhetoric before involvement in the case of Ukraine
- Russian cooperation in global problems can be improved through consultation
- Does not necessitate a zero-sum competition
- Different values may impede future partnership
  - Russia turning towards China
  - Is this just Putin's regime, or greater Russian system?

# Governmental Process Model

- Future conflict likely if regime interest threatened:
  - Shifting interests can determine state policy
- Cooperation with Russia possible when regime interests are not directly threatened
- Does not necessitate zero-sum security competition
- Regime change would increase possibility of future cooperation
  - As opposed to RAM and HRM

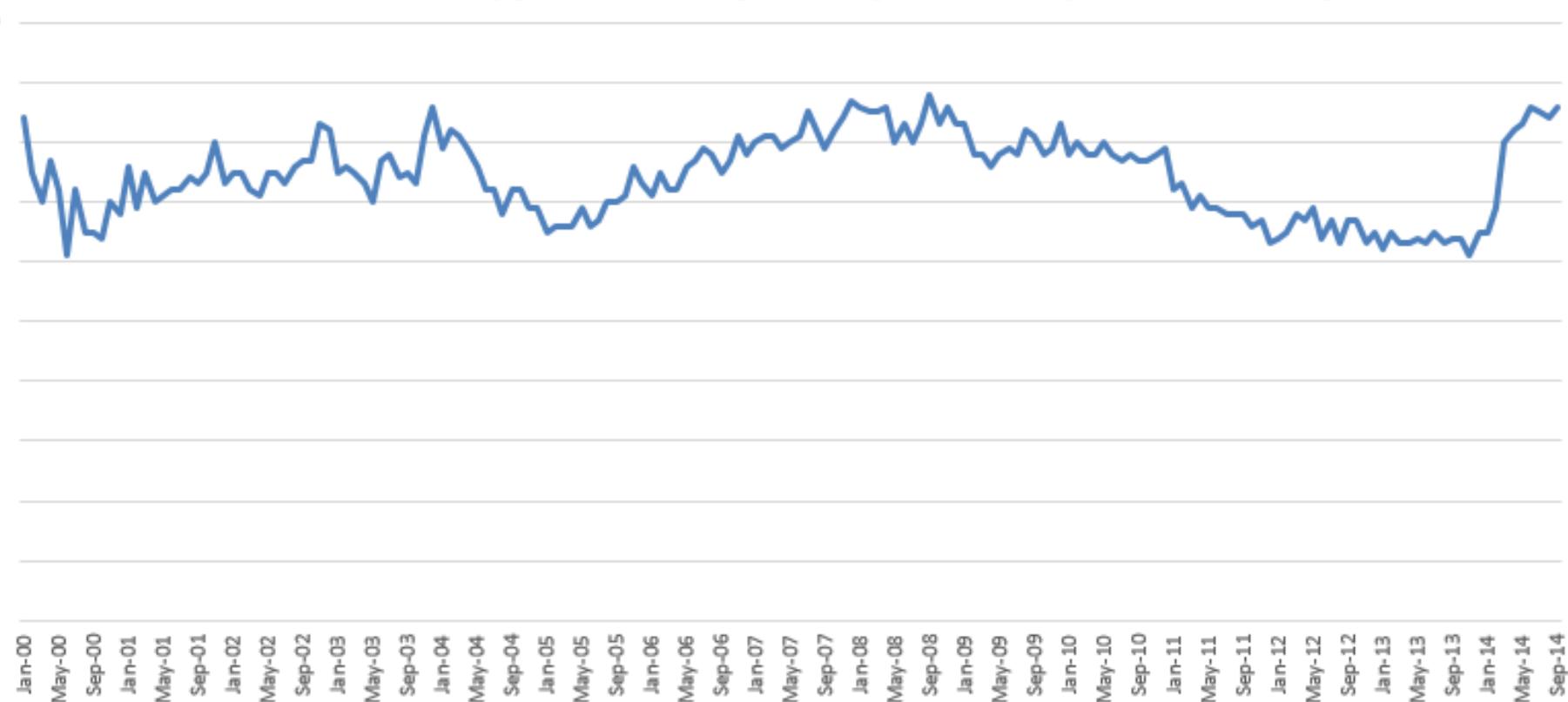
# Conclusion



# Russian Public Support for Putin's Policy toward Ukraine

Anna Yudina  
MA RUES '15

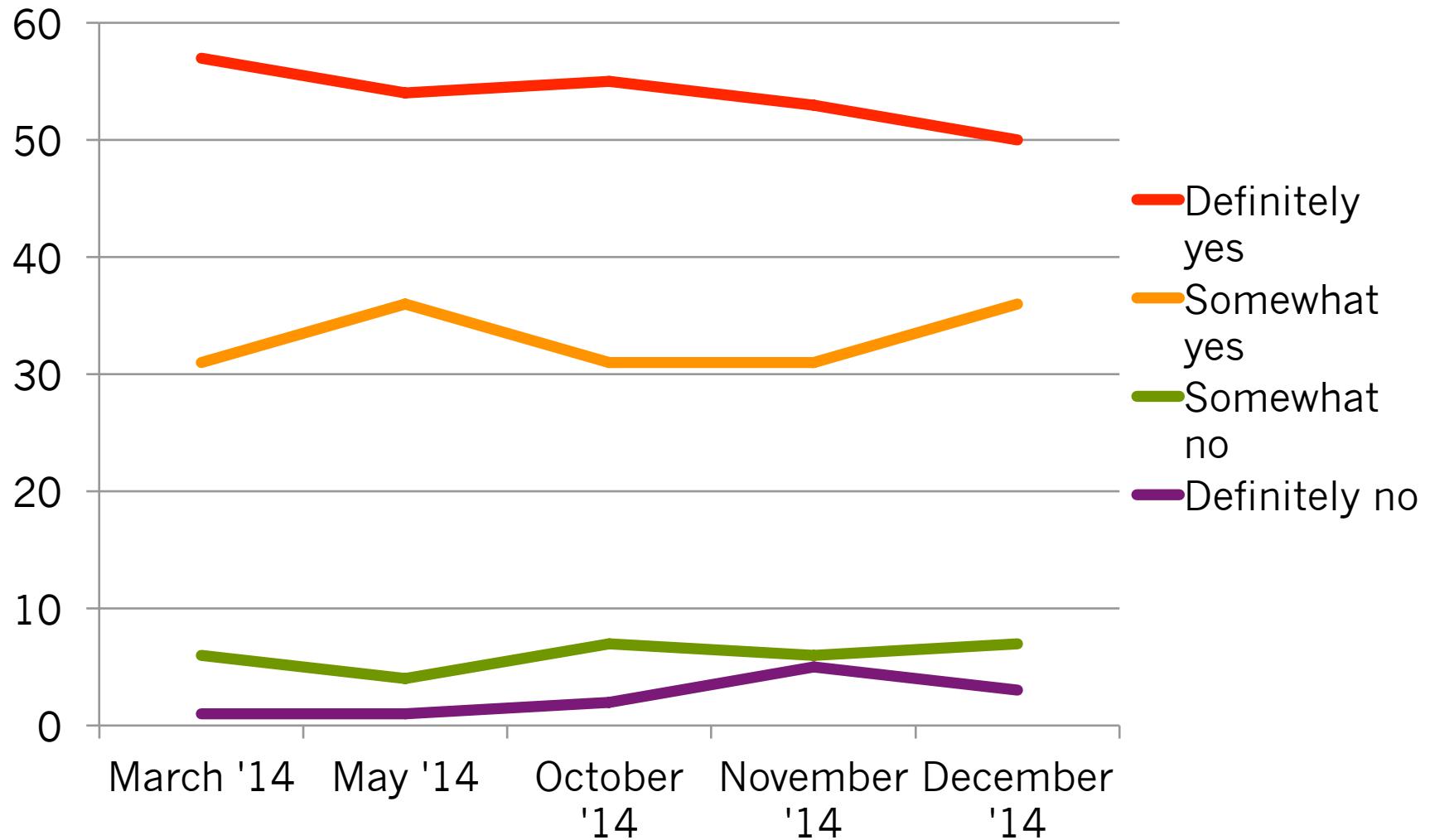
## Vladimir Putin Approval Rate (January 2000 - September 2014)



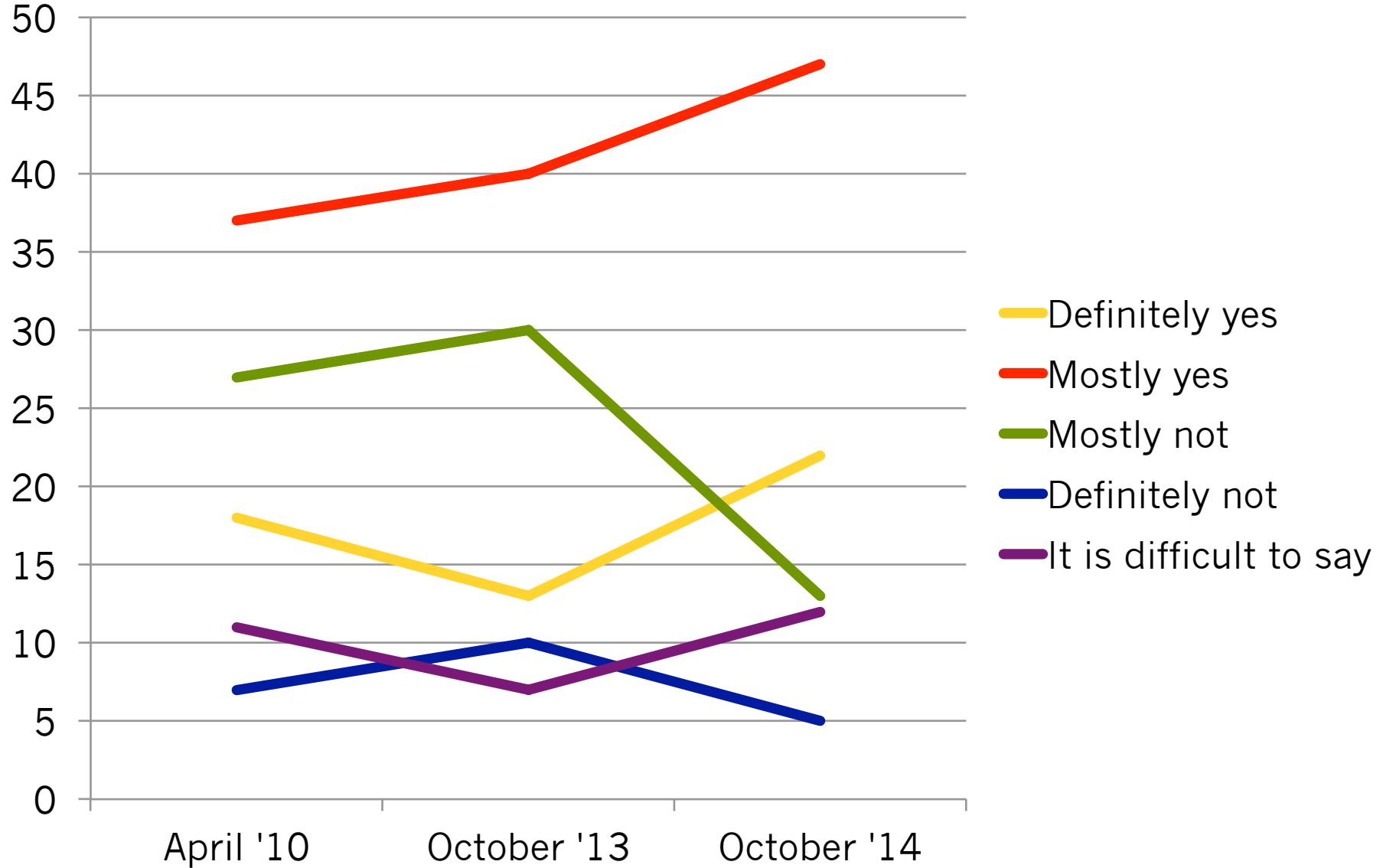
Source: Levada Center

Graph taken from: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2014/10/06/vladimir-putins-approval-rate-is-still-near-an-all-time-high/>

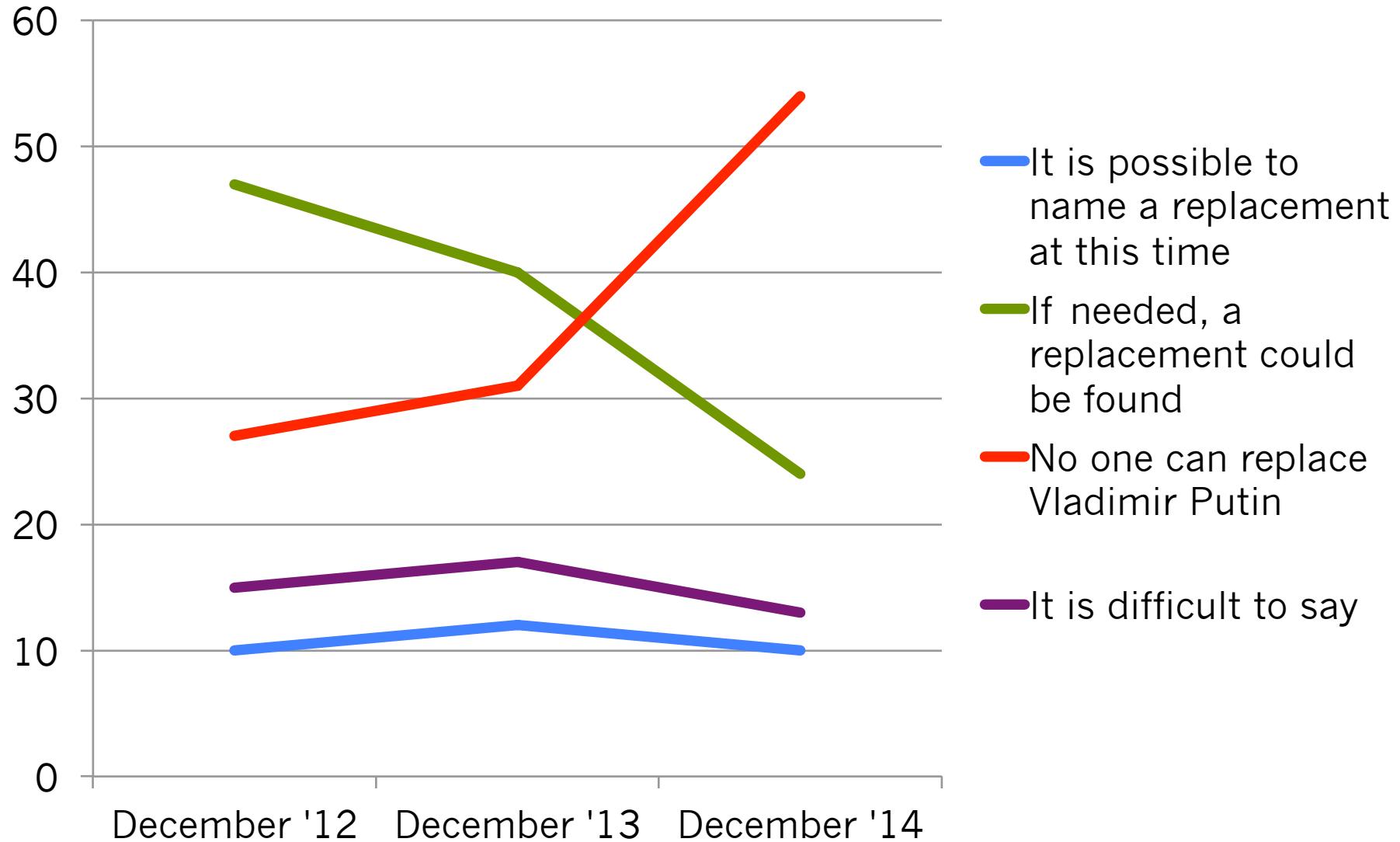
# Do you support Crimea joining Russia?



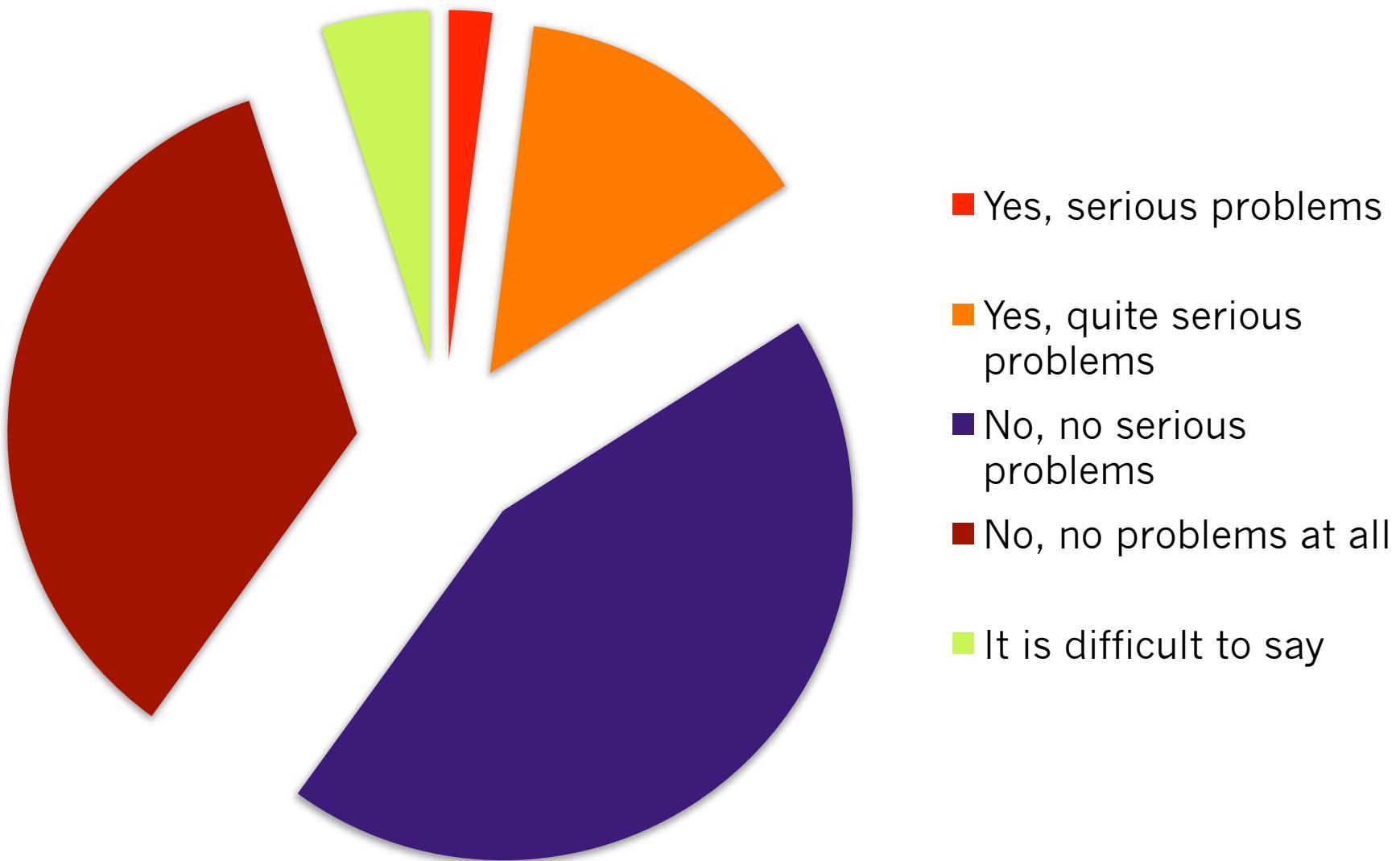
# Are you proud of Russia today?



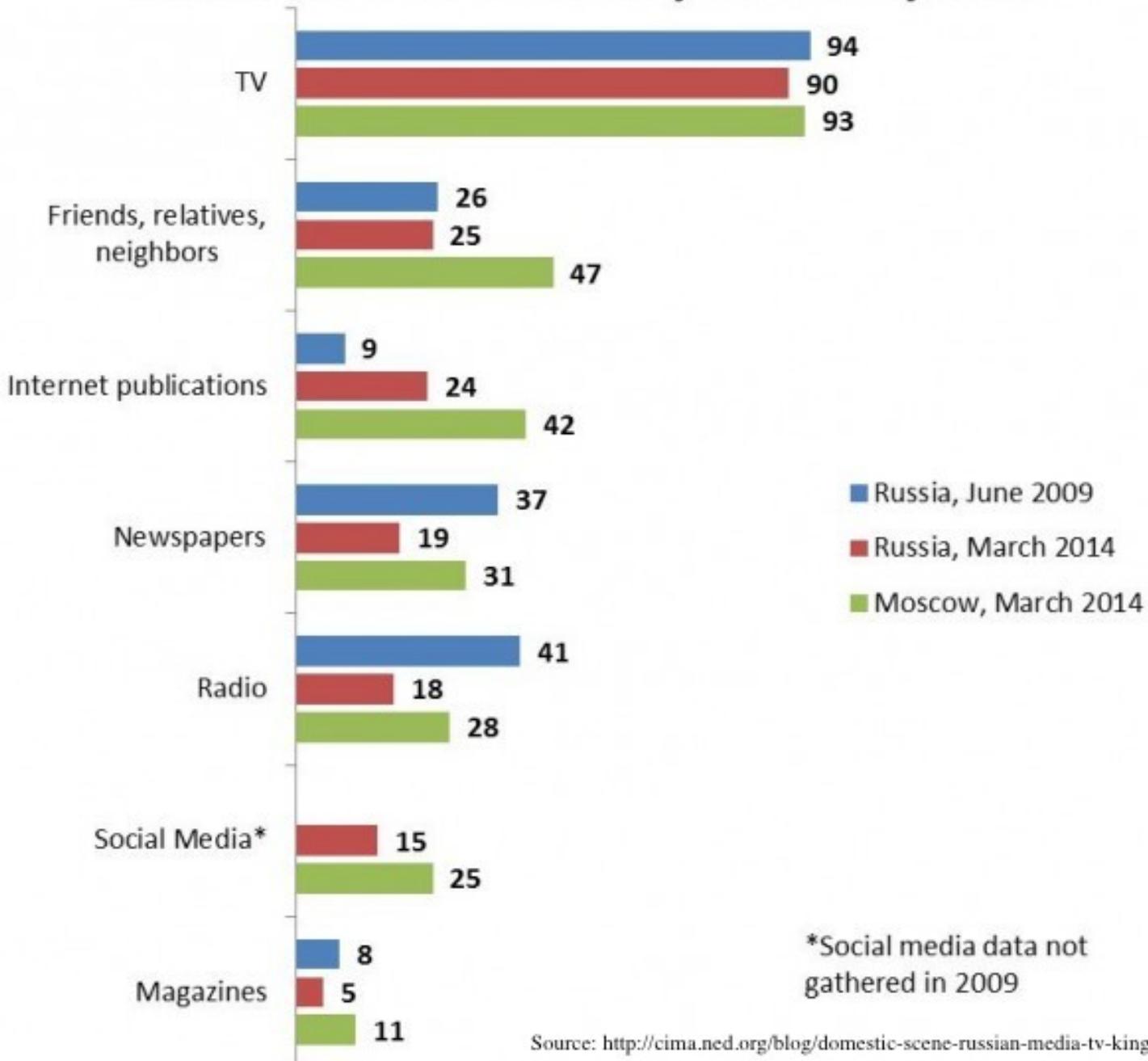
# Can you name a replacement for Vladimir Putin?



## Have the sanctions created problems for you and your family?



# Which news sources do you usually use?



## Assessment of situation in the country



Source: Levada Center



Picture taken from: <http://imrussia.org/en/politics/2011/03/15/much-does-love-for-pu...>