

Russians Consider Marrying, Giving Birth and Education Most Important Things

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A screenshot from an episode of "Friends," an American sitcom.

When asked what the most important things to do before turning 30 are, most Russians chose getting married, giving birth and receiving an education, while things like starting a business or traveling the world were at the bottom of the list, a poll released Wednesday by an independent Russian pollster Levada Center revealed.

Three top priorities for men were receiving an education (65 percent of respondents of both genders said so), getting married (according to 56 percent of respondents) and serving in the military (55 percent).

Women are supposed to, first and foremost, get married (77 percent of responders said so), have a baby (75 percent) and get educated (according to 60 percent of respondents). The poll was conducted from Aug. 7-10, among 800-1,600 respondents in 46 Russian regions. The statistical error does not exceed 3.7-4.1 percent, according to the Levada Center.

Most Important Things to Do Before Turning 30

Here are the things Russians consider men and women should do before turning 30, according to the poll conducted by Levada Center.

For Men:

- To get an education – 65%
- To get married – 56%
- To serve in the military – 55%
- To have a career – 52%
- To buy a place to live – 46%
- To have children – 40%
- To buy a car – 30%
- To fall in love – 26%
- To start a business – 20%
- To travel – 17%
- To learn to cook – 9%
- To take part in charity – 9%

For Women:

- To get married – 77%
- To have children – 75%
- To get education – 60%
- To learn how to cook – 52%
- To fall in love – 32%
- To have a career – 19%
- To travel – 18%
- To buy a place to live – 14%
- To take part in charity – 8%
- To buy a car – 6%
- To start a business – 4%
- To serve in the military – 3%

The results of the survey fitted well into the rapidly developing trend of Russians embracing so-called traditional values that usually entail patriotism and devotion to family, as opposed to what is considered to be Western capitalistic ideals.

“Russian society remains strongly conservative, especially when it come to gender roles — they are seen to be very traditional,” said Karina Pipiya, a sociologist for Levada Center who took part in conducting the poll. “A woman should give birth, a man should earn a living,” she told The Moscow Times in a phone interview on Thursday.

Social Approval Factor

Russian society is very androcentric and doesn't respond well to changes, Papiya said, and that's why such things as feminism, women who do not want to have children and LGBT relationships fall out of the circle of socially approved processes.

At the same time, there is a difference between what people declare a priority and what they really consider to be important, she pointed out.

While most of respondents (75 percent) placed giving birth for women above having a career (19 percent), when asked whether a woman should quit her job in order to raise a child, 61 percent of respondents said she shouldn't and it would be better to somehow combine work with family.

“If we look at the dynamics, we see that number of those who share this point of view grows during periods of economic crisis,” the sociologist said. The economic factor enters their decision making process as well as the social approval factor, she added.

The same social approval factor is responsible for both men and women excluding starting their own business from their top priorities in life. Only 20 percent of respondents thought men should do it before turning 30, and only 4 percent considered it a thing a woman should do.

“Traditionally we [Russian society] perceive businessmen negatively,” said Papiya. “Most people are skeptical toward the rich and those who managed to accomplish something. Russian society is set to think that the state will give it things, including material benefits. It is not used to earning them and getting them on its own,” she said.

Propaganda Works?

Serving in the military closing the top-three of men's priorities seems to be a recent development that reflects the political situation in the country. Several other polls conducted lately showed that the army is gaining more and more respect in Russia.

Just Wednesday the state-run pollster VTsIOM published a survey revealing that 39 percent of Russians think of the army as an example to the society. Another 40 percent thinks the army's influence in the country should increase.

“During the last two years the number of people thinking they should serve in the military has been consistently growing,” Papiya said. “This phenomenon is resulting from, among other things, the current geopolitical situation and overall mobilization,” she said.

Propaganda does work, agreed Olga Isupova, senior lecturer at the Higher School of Economics' Institute of Demography. “[Russian] people are open to these influences. Even though we haven't eliminated the conservatism that has always been our thing, it has never been as [strong] as it is presented to us now,” she told The Moscow Times in a phone interview Thursday.

The number of people resorting to traditional values has increased, said Isupova, because those who always held conservative views but doubted them, no longer do, and those who

disagree are not so inclined to talk about it openly.

Iranian Scenario

At the same time, propaganda doesn't have absolute power — it may influence the polls and public opinion, and people may declare certain views, but they will not change their lifestyle because of it, Isupova explained.

That's why the declining birthrate in Russia doesn't correspond with most men and women naming having children as a top priority, she said. Women may claim that their calling is to become mothers because they are unable to resist the pressure from the society, but this pressure will not make them do what they don't want to do.

“If people are used to a particular lifestyle, they will not change it in a matter of seconds because of propaganda,” the expert said. “It's impossible to motivate people to do something because someone else wants it for them,” she added.

A similar situation, according to Isupova, occurred in Iran, when it was run by an ultraconservative government. “People there were used to living according to their own values, which weren't conservative or liberal — just different [from what the state declared],” and they found ways to lead their lives the way they wanted, she said.

“It's very likely that things in Russia will be pretty much the same,” Isupova said. “People [in Iran] lived like they used to live, but pretended [to live in accordance with the demands state imposed on them]. Worst case scenario they [Russian government] will accomplish just the same with their conservative propaganda,” she added.

World Overview

There are four categories of values societies all over the world share, according to the World Values Survey, a research project that explores people's values and beliefs, carried out by a worldwide network of social scientists since 1981: traditional values, secular-rational values, survival values and self-expression values.

Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, parent-child ties, deference to authority and family values. These societies have high levels of national pride and a nationalistic outlook, the website of the project says.

Secular-rational values entail less emphasis on religion, traditional family values and authority. Divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide are seen as relatively acceptable.

Survival values place emphasis on economic and physical security. It is linked with a relatively ethnocentric outlook and low levels of trust and tolerance.

Self-expression values give high priority to environmental protection, growing tolerance of foreigners, gays and lesbians and gender equality, and rising demands for participation in decision-making in economic and political life.

The latest cultural map created by the scientists involved in the project places Russia and other Christian Orthodox countries somewhere in the middle between traditional and

secular-rational values and closer to the survival values than to the self-expression ones.

At the same time groups of countries marked as “Protestant Europe” and “English Speaking” are placed much closer to the self-expression values. Protestant Europe countries are more into the secular-rational values, while English speaking countries are also in middle between traditional and secular-rational values.

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