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Psychological Methods in Political Perception Studies

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1. Introduction

In contemporary political systems when politics becomes more and more mediated, citizens often base their electoral choice on incomplete and even biased information, that they are unable to check personally. Individual in this situation has to orient himself in a political world with the help of images from Media that become political markers that fill the missing elements of individual’s political picture of the world. These virtual images replace real political objects.

The studies of political perception are focused on the analysis of images of different political objects in public mentality: i.e. images of authorities and leaders, especially candidates in electoral campaigns, images of the state, images of political parties and countries.

One of the main difficulties of such studies is caused by virtualization of politics that leads to the breakaway of political images from real interests of people and makes them rather unstable and irrational. Hence there is a necessity to find out and explain unconscious components of political perceptions along with settled opinions of people about politicians, power, state, etc.

Standard quantitative methods, polls in particular, that are widely used in electoral studies do not permit to catch this level of perception. We believe that to receive a reliable and relevant picture of citizens’ perception one should use more sophisticated psychological methods, like open-ended questions in surveys, projective tests and in-depth interviews, method of fixed associations. In this paper we will discuss some qualitative psychological methods that we have used in the studies of political perception by Russian citizens in recent years.

2. Some Theoretical Presumptions

To choose methods relevant to the object and aims of the study one should first of all try to define political perception as an object of the study. If perception is a process of reflection of parties, state, leaders etc. in public mentality, than images are it’s main elements that constitute this process. In psychological literature one can find the definition of image as a generalized
picture of the world that is formed as a result of processing of information, that goes through the senses.

**Political image** as any other image, is on one hand – reflection of some real characteristics of the object of perceptions, i.e. political power, leader’s personality, peculiarities of political party, state, etc. One can call them *objective components*. They to a big extent define the contents of the image.

On the other hand the image is a projection of expectations of the perceiving individual. Political image reflects people’s needs, motives, emotions, cognitions, concepts, stereotypes, values and demands of public to authorities. These components of the image can be called *subjective*. Political images change with the changes of mass consciousness. Besides these images will change according such characteristics of the subject of perception as gender, age, education etc. Changes of images in time will be determined by *temporal factors* as well as differences in regional perceptions can be called *space (territorial) factors*. The influence of Media on perceptions of leaders, state etc. are very substantial in contemporary politics so we find it important to take *communicative factors* into account too.

So the aim of the political perception student is double: it is necessary to describe political images (dependant variables) and to interpret them, revealing the weight of each factor from the system (independent variables).

3. **From Theory to Methodology.**

Though each object of perception has its’ own specificity, one can find some general features in the structure of all political images.

**The first issue**, common to all the images, is their composition that includes both *rational* and *unconscious* levels. *Rational components* of image reflect those characteristics of the object of perception in the mind of a perceiving person which he/she is aware of and is able to describe. For instance, if we ask someone about politics this person is able to describe what he or she likes or dislikes about it and is able to say why. If we talk about authorities, citizens are able quite rationally explain their claims to them or name their grounds for trust. The same is
true for the other images (images of parties, state, organizations, branches of power etc).

On the rational level of perception one can find the **cognitive mechanisms** mainly.

**Emotions** predominate in an **unconscious** level. They are hardly realized by individual who rarely can explain his attitudes to the party, leader, country or power even to himself not to mention explanations that he gives to other people. While respondent tries to rationalize this explanation is not always trustworthy.

As our studies in 1990-2010s have shown, in the circumstances of political instability it is hard for citizens to produce stable, rational attitudes towards politics. That is why, they follow their emotions. Hence one of the main aims of political perception studies is to find such methodological instruments that permit us to reveal unconscious elements of images and give them an adequate interpretation. This does not mean underestimation of rational elements, but unconscious elements of image work faster and are closer to political decision to be made by individual.

**Second**, one can single out in the image such elements as **attractiveness**, **strength and activity**, or more precisely, scales of attractiveness-nonattractiveness, strength-weakness and activity-passivity.

We based on an Ch.Osgood’s model which uses these three scales for analysis of personality structure. We assumed that not only in politicians’ images but also in images of nonpersonalized political objects such as a, party or a state these parameters of image can be used for analysis.

**Third, political images** include visual and verbal structural elements that should be analyzed separately. Visual components by their nature are unconscious. That is why their analysis demand special methods among which we prefer projective tests, methods of unfinished sentences and revealing of need that stay behind images.

**Fourth**, psychologists often in their attitudes’ analysis single out **cognitive, emotional and behavioral** elements. The same can be done with an
image. The most complicated task is to analyze emotional components of political image. In our studies of politicians’ images we used method of associations in a study of a country’s image we used a projective test and cartography.

Though formation of political image in citizens’ mentality is not based on a complete and clear information of a rational character, they nevertheless obtain some psychologically accurate instruments that permit them to make if not totally rational but at least emotionally acceptable political choice.

The structure of political image can be presented in a following way( see Figure 2)

Methodology of political perception study demands division of the study on operations or stages:
- collection of data,
- their processing and
- interpretation of results.

The data, obtained on the first stage of data collection then undergo coding and scaling. Then they are processed quantitatively with a help of a standard package of statistic information SPSS. But along with quantitative procedures our methodology demands qualitative analysis of respondents’ answers which describe some political objects. Interpretation is the most complicated part of the study as for each object of political perception one has to build up a particular explanatory model.

Above we discussed those characteristics of perception that are similar to all political objects. But in our studies we have come to the conclusion that each of the objects, i.e. authorities, state, parliament, leaders and the country have so important differences in their nature and functioning that their analysis demands specific instruments and approaches.

Among all the objects of perception we will take here only two: images of authority and the state (section 4) and leaders’ images (section 5). We’ll discuss the use of psychological methods for analysis of these types of images and their
perception. Images of political authority are the most abstract in nature. For this reason, they serve a psychological foundation of political mentality. In this capacity, they form part of many other political images (e.g., those of parties, a government, and a country).

The study methodology includes survey distinguished by a large number of open-ended questions; in-depth interviews; the technique of completing unfinished sentences; and projective tests playing a special role in the study of the authority images (we have been using such tests since 2005). All the methods are intended to shed light on both rational and unconscious aspects of the images. Qualitative methods prevail, but we also involve some elements of quantitative techniques: scaling answers to open questions and statistic analysis in survey data processing.

Section 5 highlights the methods used to analyze images of political leaders. Politicians excite the greatest interest in the public, because they personalize obscure political notions, thus making these notions bright and clear. Psychologically, leaders are the easiest to perceive. In this case, the psychological mechanisms are identical to those of perceiving ordinary people. In other words, respondents view politicians through the lens of their everyday interpersonal perception. To study images of political leaders, we used in-depth interviews where respondents were shown black-and-white photos of politicians as stimuli. The unconscious aspect of images was analyzed using the method of fixed associations, i.e.
4. Methodology and Methods for the Study of Authorities’ and the State Images

The methods comprise a survey including a large number of open-ended questions, in-depth interviews, and projective test ‘A Drawing of Authorities’. They are all designed to study both rational and unconscious aspects of the images. In respondents’ mind, authorities and the state are very close in meaning. That is why the same methods were used to study both of them. Below we are going to describe the aforementioned methods through analysis of the images of authorities. They will be subdivided into the methods of collecting, processing, analyzing, and interpreting the data obtained.

Data Collection Methods. Qualitative methods prevail in our methodology, but we also involve some elements of quantitative ones: in particular, those of coding and scaling answers to open-ended questions, and statistic analysis in processing of quantitative survey data.

First and foremost, we sought to reveal the emotional components of the images: namely, whether the attitude to the authorities is negative or positive. Secondly, the cognitive profile of authorities’ images was operationalized according to the following indicators:

- interest in the topic of political authority;
- independent or stereotyped judgments about authority;
- the level of cognitive complexity/simplicity;
- the degree of clarity/obscurity of images;
• Presence or absence of particular political subjects in authorities’ image.

We proceeded from the data mentioned in literature that give evidence to psychological correlation between political activity and an interest in politics. Electoral absenteeism and cynicism are, on the contrary, accompanied by an absolute or almost absolute indifference to politics (i.e., politics is totally out of people’s sight). Political maturity, in turn, presumes a person’s ability to judge about power independently and take a rational, non-stereotyped electoral decisions.

The cognitive or integrative complexity/simplicity is a quality of political mentality which plays an important role in evaluating authorities’ images. There are two basic factors affecting this parameter: individual psychological features of observers, and the context of perception.

Thus, individuals who possess pronounced cognitive complexity give more mature evaluations of authorities, have a feeling for subtleties, and are independent from stereotypes. This depends on the level of their authoritariansm. Cognitive simplicity is, on the contrary, typical of people with black-and-white, closed-mind and rigid mentality. This is, naturally, manifested in their political views.

At the same time, we should consider the nature of political processes. Obviously, in time of peace a considerable part of citizens hold rather complex, multi-faceted political images. Meanwhile, during crises, wars, escalations of political and international conflicts, and information wars, political images markedly decrease in complexity. In this case, a black-and-white, simplistic view of political reality prevails.
It is of equal importance to determine whether or not authorities are associated with particular political subjects. Our study indicates that not infrequently political power seems anonymous and impersonal to citizens. It acts as an inanimate object giving rise to anxiety, fear, and other negative emotions. However, when associated with political parties, institutions, the state or politicians, political power creates a clearer image. In our view, it is necessary to find out who or what an individual implies when talking about power.

In this connection, there is another task. We need to determine the limits of authority in people’s minds: where authority finishes and opposition starts, what are the lines of authorities, etc. Our observations show that Russian citizens narrow down the concept of authority to the executive or legislative power branches. Besides, they absolutely ignore the judicial one. Moreover, they hardly distinguish between power and opposition, vaguely associating political power with ‘higher authorities’ or ‘the people above’.

The behavioral facet of the authorities’ image is exposed in evaluating the political regime or system, but not only. It also shows in the readiness to support authorities by action: to participate in governing the country and engage in various forms of political activity. The questions about such readiness were included in the survey questionnaire and the interview guide.

Open-ended questions were used in our study to reveal which politicians enjoy people’s trust and support, exert a real influence on political events, and are likely to win the citizens’ votes. In terms of votes, respondents were asked to name concrete politicians, but were not offered lists of their names as a hint. The
answers to open-ended questions help to disclose the citizens’ actual personalized image of power and authorities. Here we primarily aim to find out whether power is associated with concrete public politicians, or is it regarded as a set of shadow and obscure elements? In the latter case, citizens consider authorities as puppets who conceal unknown and therefore particularly dangerous manipulators.

**Data Processing Methods.** Respondents’ answers to the open-ended questions were processed to reveal such authorities images’ parameters as:

- emotional sign;
- association with political subjects;
- clarity/obscurity;
- cognitive complexity/simplicity;
- needs underlying the images of power.

Upon obtaining quantitative data, we processed them using the help of SPSS package.

The qualitative part of research comprises an in-depth interview, a projective test (a drawing), the technique of unfinished sentences, and analysis of answers to open-ended questions.

Another qualitative method is a *Psychological Drawing of Authorities*. This projective method is widely employed in other domains of psychology, primarily to analyze the personality of the drawing individual. Meanwhile, we focused on the object of the drawing – the authorities. The given method has not used in political psychology until now. However, it can offer precious visual data on images of
power and authorities, which is of special importance in the study of political images. We paid attention to the:

- *the meanings* assigned to authorities, because they expose citizen-authorities relations;
- *symbolic objects* manifested in drawings;
- *cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of perception.*

**Data Collection Method.** Respondents were instructed to express their perception of Russia’s authorities in a drawing. They could freely place their drawing on an A4 sheet. Colored pencils were used where possible; graphite pencils, where not. The sample was balanced according to gender, age, and education.

In 2013-14 we collected 247 drawings from different regions of the country and used them for analyzing the image of power.

**Interpretation of Projective Test ‘A Psychological Drawing of Authorities’**.

First and foremost, we evaluated attractiveness, strength, and activity of authorities. *Attractiveness* and *activity* were assessed based on the general message of drawings. *Strength* was evaluated on the basis of acuteness of angles in the pictures; besides, expert assessment was employed. It is noteworthy that strength often combines with passiveness of authorities: that is, they are potentially strong, but do not use their resources. There are also drawings where power turns against ordinary people (Insert figure 3). The rest of the pictures show how authorities actively steal from the budget, plot corruption schemes, or eagerly exploit people.
Authorities are also frequently presented as strong, active, but uncontrollable (Insert figure 4).

Symbols in Respondents’ Drawings

The symbols in drawings were very different. In the 2000s, people most often included a dollar in their pictures (16%) (Insert figure 5). The dollar was associated with money in general, because it played an important role in Russia’s economy during the first post-Soviet years. Interestingly, during the last three years the dollar has occurred in drawings much more rarely (only 6%). It signifies that Russia’s dependence on this currency has decreased, at least as seen by rank-and-file people.

A crown is the second most frequent symbol (Insert figure 6). This means that part of the respondents considers power and authorities sacred. The drawings with this symbol reveal monarchical archetypes. These, however, gradually disappear in the subsequent pictures: in 2013 a crown was drawn in 11% of the projective tests; meanwhile in 2014, only in 6%.

Rather often respondents draw national symbols – the double-headed eagle or the Russian flag (Insert figure 7).

In 2013-14, the following symbols occurred in the drawings slightly less often: a weapon such as a sword or an assault rifle (5%), a tree (4%), and the sun (3%).

3. Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral Profiles of the Image of Power

The cognitive profile is determined by the following parameters as: the amount of space used on the sheet; elaborateness of the drawing, which shows an
interest to authorities; repeated structures; cognitive complexity of a drawing; and the stereotyped or unique scenario.

When analyzing a drawing’s cognitive complexity, we should consider uniqueness of the scenario depicted. We also pay attention to its complexity. Besides, we examine strength and activity within the cognitive profile. In 2014 the number of respondents who drew a strong power increased up to 68%, while authorities were shown as active in 40% of the drawings.

Emotional Profile

The analysis of the emotional facet of the images should consider attractiveness as an important parameter. The emotional character of most drawings testifies to the feeling of helplessness against authorities, resentment towards them, and alienation from them. Respondents quite often demonstrate an image of aggressive power (Insert figure 8).

Behavioral Profile

To build up a behavioral profile, it is necessary to find out who respondents identify with (i.e., people’s behavior). The majority of the drawings do not contain people at all. The pictures including them are subdivided into three scenarios, depending on the role assigned to the population:

1. people request something from authorities, but their request is either turned down or ignored;
2. people are squashed under the enormous weight of power. Or they are chained up and put into irons;
3. the nation is represented by numerous people who apathetically observe unfolding events.

Thus, the unconscious aspect of the images in its behavioral aspect shows that one part of the respondents alienates themselves from authorities, while another passively observes what is going on.

5. Study Methods for Images of Political Leaders
Similarly to the study of authorities’ images (or, perhaps, even to a greater degree), analyzing those of real politicians necessitates a search for appropriate methods helping avoid pitfalls. These are connected with unconscious perception of political leaders, and delicacy or sensitivity of the object perception. We chiefly imply respondents’ trend to dodge straightforward questions about acting politicians. Russian citizens are reluctant to comment on politicians, especially those in power. This particularly refers to the elder generation who vividly remember the Soviet political practices. According to them, the direct questions are politically incorrect.

Another reason for such behavior is that respondents do not realize their genuine attitude to politicians. For example, one of the respondents expressed an indifferent attitude to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and rejected the possibility of voting for him. After the interview, however, she requested that we leave her Zhirinovskiy’s photo as a keepsake, and even clasped it to her chest. It exposes the discrepancy between the rational and unconscious components in her image of this politician. Exit polls after elections revealed that the number of people who really voted for him exceeded the number of those who told that to sociologists. Thus,
there is a contradiction between the verbal attitude and the actual political behavior. It stems from people’s effort to conform to socially approved norms of political behavior.\textsuperscript{vi}

\textit{Research instruments}. On the one hand, we required tools for disclosing people’s \textit{opinions} about Russia’s political leaders and registering their preferences at the rational level. On the other, - we sought a method for measuring their \textit{unconscious attitudes towards} politicians. The analysis tools included a topic guide for the in-depth interview. Part of the questions related to the rational issues: a politician’s recognizability, votes for or against particular politician, attractiveness of his image, potential motives for assuming power, etc. Another part of questions was intended to identify respondents’ associations with politicians. We tested various types of them, and found out that associations with animals, color, and smell fitted the study objectives best of all. We showed respondents black-and-white photos of politicians which served as stimuli material. The photos were up-to-date.

\textit{The Sample}. In order to analyze the images of political leaders, we, again, employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, the latter were a priority. We should note, that the empirical data obtained were not supposed to be representative of the entire country. When building a sample, we relied on the standards for qualitative studies. For example, in order to receive reliable information, up to 20 in-depth interviews related to each politician were enough. Nevertheless, we, as a rule, significantly exceeded this number for the sake of better reliability. At the same time, the sample was balanced according to gender,
age, education, and, in a number of studies, according to respondents’ political preferences. At different stages, we held a various number of interviews with regard to each politician – from 80 to 500.

*The study procedure* is based on focused interviews. During these, respondents are showed, one by one, the black-and-white photos of three politicians. Unlike verbal stimuli (including only a politician’s name), the visual ones are more relevant for our task. Even if respondents do not recognize politicians, they will be able to answer what they like or dislike about them and voice their associations therewith.

Choosing photos turned out to be a hard job. We examined the portraits made by professional photojournalists. They combined a reporter’s accurateness of an image with the emphasis on a politician’s distinctive features. We excluded the photos giving a slight caricature of politicians and highlighting their outward peculiarities, such as corpulence or an unusual haircut: such photos contain ‘a hint’ and make it easier to recognize the politicians. The major criteria for choosing photos were a politician’s recognizability and distinctive features (‘differential characteristics’). The latter distinguish one politician from another in citizens’ perception.

The photos were black-and-white, because we needed to elicit associations with color. We required the stimulus material that would not have an unintended effect on perception.

*Analysis and Interpretation.* In accordance with the methodology used, the survey comprises two types of questions. The first one is designed to register the
rational assessment of politicians. It includes the questions on politicians’ recognizability and citizens’ intention to cast their votes for a particular candidate; as well as questions about people’s likes and dislikes towards politicians and their opinion about why these politicians need power.

The second type of questions was supposed to register associations with animals, color, and smell, and thus shed light on respondents’ unconscious attitudes. These three sorts of associations spotlight different unconscious layers: associations with animals refer to the shallowest ones and are most of all subject to stereotypes; while those with smells are related to the deepest ones and are least of all exposed to rationalization.

The data were processed according to the following procedure: we (1) scaled respondents’ evaluations of politicians’ qualities, and (2) made a qualitative politico-psychological analysis of some of these evaluations, with them being further divided into rational and unconscious levels. The basic scales used in assessing the perception of politicians’ features were the same for both rational and unconscious levels of perception: attractiveness/unattractiveness, strength/weakness, and activity/passivity. Such dual parameters were introduced deliberately, because rather often respondents’ answers were ambivalent. The dual scales proved very convenient in revealing integral evaluations of politicians’ images among a variety of respondents and in comparing the perception of one politician with that of all others.

At the rational level, we utilized the scale of politicians’ attractiveness/unattractiveness to find out the frequency, the emotional sign, and
the correlation between positive and negative qualities; as well as the share of negative and positive evaluations in the general number of the qualities mentioned by the respondents. We rated evaluations according to the object of evaluation:

- appearance (clothes, behavior);
- physical characteristics (health/illness, physique, corpulence/thinness, bad habits, masculinity/femininity, age, temperament, and physical attractiveness);
- moral and psychological peculiarities (character, certain personal qualities, turns of phrase, and ethical values of a politician);
- purely political and professional qualities (political views, organizational skills, and leadership potential).

On the strength/weakness scale, respondents most often ascribe strength or/and weakness to politicians’ appearance, physical characteristics, psychological and moral features, and political and professional qualities.

The activity/passivity scale is designed to evaluate public activities, the exercise of authorities, and images associated with a politician. It is subject to the same algorithm as two previous scales are: we code answers and then calculate their ratio with regard to the overall number of answers related to a politician.

After coding respondents’ answers and making a database, we processed the results using SPSS.

Trying to find adequate indicators of people’s genuine attitude to leaders, we proceeded from a number of theoretical presumptions. First of all, we focused on the public aspect of political personalities: that is, the facets of their behavior
which can be evaluated by both experts and rank-and-file citizens. For this reason, the scope of study narrows down to the observed behavior, while the study object includes the public image of politicians rather than politicians themselves.

We explore the images by analyzing how they are perceived by citizens; that is, we deal with mediated perception. According to our previous studies, although the perception is indirect, it rather adequately reflects political reality. In other words, the evaluation of political objects offered by rank-and-file citizens is quite comparable to expert assessments. Admittedly, people do not fully realize the vague and partial information they use to reconstruct a political image. Nevertheless, they possess a precise psychological tool for assessing political images. This tool enables them to make choices. Though these might not be fully rational, they are acceptable for the people, at least emotionally.

Our immediate task was to:

a) analyze respondents’ rational answers to disclose what politicians’ qualities respondents take notice of and classify as important or unimportant, positive or negative;

b) analyze respondents’ associations and identify their hidden messages about what politicians’ qualities respondents noted and evaluated unconsciously;

c) compare the results (a) and (b).

We proceed from the hypothesis that respondents’ answers hold many layers of information about the attitude to politicians. The upper layer consists of rational, characteristics. To interpret them, we utilize simple scales of
attractiveness, strength, and activity. Attractiveness is subdivided into the evaluation of:

- appearance understood as behavioral patterns and a style of interpersonal relations;
- physical characteristics;
- psychological and moral qualities;
- political and professional qualities.

We singled out unconscious elements in the images of politicians by analyzing the answers to open-ended questions containing their rational evaluations which also contain a deeper, unconscious layer. To illuminate it, we need to make a textual analysis of respondents’ statements. As a result, we revealed hidden unsatisfied needs, presuppositions, and ideal prototypes with which respondents compare real politicians. Apart from that, we employed the method of fixed associations with animals, color, and smell. Unlike Sigmund Freud’s popular free association technique, we sought to elicit fixed associations which were artificially limited to the three groups mentioned. The major difficulty with the given method is to interpret the results.

5.1. Associations with Animals

Respondents were shown a black-and-white photo of a politician (used as stimulus) and offered to associate him or her with an animal. The interviewer made it clear that respondents needed to voice the very first association coming to their mind – that is, an association emerging before the respondent actually recognized the politician. Naturally, we did not give respondents any list of possible
associations. They were required to name an animal and explain why they associate a politician therewith.

In our view, it was reasonable to analyze only those associations that correspond to metaphorical images of Russian culture. Meanwhile, exotic animals – such as rhinoceroses, panthers, giraffes, duckbills, etc. – were classified as testifying to the politician’s alienation from the dominating political culture (‘not from this forest’).

The associations were analyzed based on the general interpretation procedure devised specifically for this study. Primarily, we sought to reveal metaphorical meanings of an animal in the national folklore context. The procedure looks as follows:

1) The mythological round of animals embraces the main heroes of proverbs, fairy-tales, and omens. These animals form part of defined plots, play habitual *roles*, have repeated *attributes*, and are associated with the same *setting*(locuses).

When scrutinizing the rational side of politicians’ images, we rated the answers on the scales of attractiveness, strength, and activity. The unconscious side was examined using the same scales: on the strength scale, however, we also paid attention to the size of an animal interpreted as a politician’s rank or a scale of his personality; meanwhile, activity was expressed through the parameter ‘the degree of aggressiveness’. In addition, we examined the dominance-obedience relations and politicians’ involvement in power – they indicate leadership potential.
Apart from mythological images, respondents’ answers often comprise images of the animals that bear no relation to Russian folklore and mythology. These animals hardly ever occur in productive plots, but nevertheless exhibit a certain number of attributes arising from Russian turns of speech:

- having thick skin like an elephant (a rhinoceros, a hippopotamus, etc.);
- ugly (funny, clever) like a monkey;
- quick like a deer (a cheetah, a scent hound, etc.);
- ancient like a brontosaurus (a pterodactyl, etc.);
- a haircut like the one of a hedgehog (a porcupine, etc.).

Respondents frequently mention young animals instead of adult ones. We thought it acceptable to interpret this fact as follows: they identify all typical attributes of an animal’s image, but at the same time deny its usual dominant role. For example, a bear cub retains all features of an adult bear (i.e., cleverness, rudeness, clumsiness, hostility), but does not perform its normal role of a ruler.

In conclusion, we will examine a thesaurus of zoological metaphors rated according to their degree of favorableness for politicians.

The politico-psychological part of interpretation includes the following parameters:

*Attractiveness*, both physical and moral: it is determined by the qualities attributed to a mythological animal in our culture. For example, a pig is unattractive, while a piglet is rather nice. A horse is attractive, while a snake is unappealing. This dimension of unconscious evaluations makes it possible to
compare the degree of attractiveness at the rational level with unconscious attitudes to the same politician.

*Aggressiveness:* it was assessed depending on whether an animal is herbivorous or carnivorous. In our view, at the unconscious level aggressiveness shows the degree of activity comparable to the same indicator at the rational level.

*Strength* is an equally important indicator at both the rational and the unconscious levels. However, apart from strength, we also single out the size of an animal. We interpret it as a reflection of a politician’s rank.

5.2. Associations with color

When interpreting associations with color, we proceeded from the following hypotheses:

- *Sensations and perception are connected with each other (a color with a smell), not only with the object of perception;*
- *There is a correlation between sensations (perception) and a behavior style;*
- *It means that associations with the object can be used to interpret the recipient’s behavior pattern and also be attributed to the object of perception (i.e., a politician).*

Color has three physical properties:

- A hue is a color’s wavelength within a defined part of color spectrum. The pure hues include red, yellow, green, and blue. The rest of the colors are of mixed nature.
- Brightness or lightness is the intensity of a color by comparison with others.
• Saturation or purity – the number of achromatic colors (i.e., white, black, and gray) added to a basic color. All natural colors have such an admixture.

Within our study the psychological influence of the color spectrum – to be more exact, wording of color associations and their interpretation – is more important than perception of colors as such.

The psychological impact of color is dual. First of all, it allows to perceive an environment or an object and form an impression about it (e.g., about its weight, warmth, humidity). Secondly, it exerts an unconscious influence through associations. In this case the impact is more individual and grows stronger with experience and over time.

At the same time, there are a number of associations that make an identical impression on everybody. Being centuries old, they are stuck fast in our unconsciousness and passed on to new generations through genes. For example, orange is typically associated with the sun, warmth, and energy, while blue is usually linked with sea, the sky, and peace. This peculiarity left an imprint on human culture. We find it difficult to associate peace with red; dryness, with blue and green; and air, with brown.

Color associations hardly emerge in a disturbed state of mind: when feeling a fear, anxiety, alarm, pain, and being unwell. We paid special attention to the respondents who could not provide color associations.

Darkness is associated with black and dark blue, which became part of the collective unconscious. These colors give rise to fear, uncertainty, and depression. On the contrary, bright and light colors either raise our mood (especially those
similar to the color of the sun – orange and yellow) or create a peaceful state of mind (green and light blue).

Light tints evoke a feeling of safety, give new energy, prompt action, and convey joy.

Darkness normally signifies danger, anxiety, uncertainty, and mysteriousness. These associations provide an unambiguous meaning for interpretation of leaders’ images. Most of them, especially successful ones, are associated by respondents with dark colors. In other words, they either cause fear and alarm, or seem mysterious. It is noteworthy that politicians associated with the brightest and lightest tints did not succeed much in assuming the desired position.

Achromatic colors are emotionless. They are abstract colors of time and space.

Red and yellow tints evoke a feeling of warmth, while dark blue and light blue ones cause a cool feeling. Orange, not red, is the warmest color. This is a purely psychological regularity, because red has a longer wavelength than orange does.

Red is stimulating and considered the most active. Purple is closer to peace. And orange-yellow communicates a feeling of joy, alleviates aggressiveness, and lowers activity.

Green means balance. It combines the lightness and liveliness of yellow with the peace and heaviness of blue. Active colors are easier to remember and seem brighter.
Dark blue and light blue tints make an object appear maximally remote from the observer. They slow down the time.

On the contrary, orange and yellow hues make an object seem nearer to the observer. They speed up the time. Dark blue and light blue shades are heavy, while yellow ones are light.

Dark blue and light blue are asexual. Sexuality increases from purple to red.

Bright and light (warm) hues have a stimulating effect, and encourage communication and action. Meanwhile, cold colors demotivate action, and foster logic and rationality.

Green, green-yellow, and olive green are conducive to a peaceful state of mind and cause introversion.

Pastel shades, such as rose, light green, and lilac, inspire modesty and tenderness.

Black and other dark hues convey gloom, sullenness, melancholy, and fear.

The combination of blue and yellow creates tension and movement.

Taken together, red and yellow communicate impulsiveness and life-asserting, optimistic feelings.

The combination of purple, yellow, and green is associated with hidden, balanced force.

The mixture of orange and blue symbolizes restrained energy in combination with reticence.

*Color associations* will be closely examined with regard to each politician. Meanwhile, the generalized data indicate the following trends. Associations with
color split into three formal groups: light/dark, warm/cold, and bright/dim. Practically all successful Russian politicians are identified with dark, cold, and dim hues. The overall range of colors associated with politicians is cheerless. It makes an impression that politicians are *unattractive* and alienated from respondents. Most probably, this is a collective image of authorities as such which causes extremely negative emotions at the unconscious level. There are also a few statesmen who make an exception: they evoke ‘warm’ and ‘light’ feelings, and therefore attract respondents at the emotional level. However, they obviously lose in political struggle and thus do not inspire willingness to vote for them.

5.3. Associations with Smells

*Associations with smells* give extra information on respondents’ unconscious attitudes to politicians. First and foremost, it is important whether or not respondents clearly associate a leader with a certain smell. The *lack* or *ambiguity* thereof indicates a vague image of a politician and shows that it is deprived of physical content. In this connection, Viktor Chernomyrdin offers a good example. In the mid-1990s, he projected a clear image which was unambiguously identified with the political elite. He was associated with prestigious and positive smells (expensive brandy, ciguars). Meanwhile, by the end of the 1990s more than half of the respondents could not associate Chernomyrdin with any smell at all.

We analyze respondents’ rational evaluations using *the scale of attractiveness*. However, it also applies to associations with smells that expose a deeper layer of perception.
Another basis for classifying smells was differentiation according to their sweetness/sharpness. The resulting shades of meaning testified to the perception of masculinity/femininity in politicians’ images. An image identified with a fragrance of sweets or jasmine is obviously different from the one associated with a scent of a conifer, hay, a sea, or a smell of sweat. The given type of associations will presumably enrich our notion about politicians’ strength and weakness. In order to compare politicians, we employed one more typology of smells – natural/artificial. Natural smells comprise body odors and scents found in nature, as well as edible and inedible smells. Artificial or man-made smells include quite frequent associations with perfumes, and smells connected with a politician’s professional activity (books, medicines, barracks, and ‘the smell of military operations’).

Among all politicians, natural smells prevailed over artificial ones. This can be interpreted using the attractiveness scale.

Along with these classifications, we singled out ‘social’ markers in associations with smells. For example, the smell of dust, ink, and moldiness makes an impression that a politician is connected with bureaucracy and red tape. Meanwhile, the smell of blood and jackboots indicates involvement in a military profession. There are smells that directly testify to the poverty or wealth. As an illustration, in one of our first studies a politician was associated with a smell of expensive cigars, cognac, and salami; while another, with a smell of cheap bologna sausage.

All these parameters enable us to single out the most essential aspects of an image. However, experience in interpreting associations shows that
masculinity/femininity is the most important parameter. It proved to be one of the central characteristics in the image of the Russian politician.

At the final stage of analyzing a politician’s image, we draw a comparison between its rational and unconscious elements. We pay special attention to the congruence between them. The lack thereof (i.e., a disagreement between two components) normally has an adverse effect on perception of political leaders.

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It is noteworthy that the given phenomenon more often shows among older respondents. In the group of young respondents (below 25), the described response to the stimulus offered by a politician’s photo is hardly ever observed.


Our analysis of associations with color was mainly based on interpretations offered in the following book: G.E. Breslav, \textit{Tsvetopsikhologiya i tsvetolechenie} [Color psychology and color therapy] (B&L: St. Petersburg, 2000).