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The Dima Yakovlev Law: Understanding the Russian Perspective

The collapse of the Soviet Union created the possibility of the adoption of Russian orphans by the international community. Since 1992, the United States has consistently been the leading nation in adopting Russia’s orphaned and institutionalized children. It has been estimated that Americans have adopted over 60,000 children from Russia between 1992 and 2013.¹ This trend began to decline in 2005, when an American mother who adopted a child from Russia a year before had a mental breakdown and beat the child, which resulted in the child’s death a few days later.² This incident forced Russian officials to look at previous abuses of Russian children by American families, leading them to implement a more rigorous process of evaluating potential adopters. Since then, the number of Russian children adopted by the citizens of United States has declined significantly.³ This decline came to a complete halt in 2013, when Russian president Vladimir Putin passed the Dima Yakovlev law, which accused the United States of participating in gross human rights violations against Russian citizens and banned all citizens of the U.S. from adopting children from Russia.⁴ This ban not only sparked great outrage in the international community but it also led to accusations that the Russian Federation was using orphan children as political tools in its disputes with the United States government. The intention of this paper is to examine Russian opinion regarding the Dima Yakovlev law, as well as to explore the law’s political intentions by comparing the letter of the law to its interpretation by Russian officials.

The Dima Yakovlev law was signed on December 28, 2012 by President Vladimir Putin, and came into effect three days later on January 1, 2013. The law, officially titled the “Federal

¹ Johnston.
² Vargas.
³ Barnes.
⁴ Russia Today, “Dima Yakovlev Law.”
Law on Sanctions for Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation,” was directly aimed at the United States. Its main intention was to ban U.S. citizens from adopting Russian children. The law not only banned U.S.-Russian adoptions, but it also aimed to punish American citizens that were involved in violations of human rights of Russian nationals. Those who were found guilty of violations by Russian authorities were forbidden from entering Russia, could have their assets in the Russian Federation frozen, and were banned from conducting business transactions and owning property on Russian territory.

The Dima Yakovlev law was named after a boy who was adopted from Russia and died in July 2008 after being left in a hot car for nine hours by his adoptive father. The boy, renamed Chase Harrison, was only 21 months old at the time of his death and had been in the United States for only three months. The real scandal, in the eyes of Russian authorities, occurred in December of 2008, when the father was found not guilty of involuntary manslaughter. This infuriated Russian authorities, who had opened up their own investigation into the child’s death but were denied any legal standing in the case. Upon hearing the verdict, they sought to restrict adoptions of Russian children by Americans. The Russian Foreign Ministry put out a statement saying that “[s]erious doubts arise as to the legitimacy of the practice of transferring our children for adoption to a country where their rights, primarily the right to life, turn out to be unprotected.” The “unjust outcome” of the verdict and the lack of any legal authority to participate and influence this case outraged many Russian officials, which led to further distrust

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5 Russian Presidential Executive Office, “A Law on Sanctions.”
7 Barry.
of the American legal system. Tatyana Yakovleva, the first deputy chief of the popular United Russia Party, questioned the circumstances of the case, telling reporters that, “When we give our children to the West and they die, for some reason the West always tells us it was just an accident . . . [I]t’s hard to believe.”

Despite Russia’s frustrations with the result of the Harrison trial, it did not take steps to ban adoptions of Russian children by U.S. citizens. There seemed to be an almost unanimous understanding by both U.S. and Russian officials (whether they admitted so directly or indirectly) that the Dima Yakovlev law did not come about from any specific human rights abuses, but instead was a direct response by the Russian Federation to the passing of the Magnitsky Act by the United States. The Magnitsky Act, officially titled the “Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Accountability Act of 2012,” was implemented by the Obama administration in December 2012 after an investigation conducted by Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer who uncovered a $230 million tax rebate scam which involved several high-ranking officials and businessmen.

The complex scam involved Hermitage Capital Management (HCM), which was the largest foreign investor in the Russian stock market. In 2007, HCM was raided by Russia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). Many of its sensitive documents and data files were seized. The corporation then appealed to the United States District Court, which discovered the raid involved many high ranking Russian officials, among whom were “senior officers within the MVD, including a Lieutenant Colonel and a Major; senior officers in the Federal Security Service (the successor to the KGB); senior officers in various Tax Bureaus; and several judges,

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9 Ibid.
10 Evans, 211–12.
including those of the St. Petersburg Arbitration Court.”

The sensitive documents were then used to create false accusations against the corporation. In the same year, those who had orchestrated the seizure falsified a variety of documents in order to gain a $230 million refund for the company’s overpaid taxes. The Russian government subsequently routed money to various persons involved in the scam. According to HCM’s CEO William Browder, “After committing the tax rebate fraud, the criminal group then attempted to destroy the evidence by liquidating our stolen companies.”

Sergei Magnitsky was hired by William Browder to investigate the corruption that had occurred in the Hermitage Capital Management scam. In 2008, Magnitsky chose to testify on his own accord against officials of the Russian Interior Ministry; he was subsequently charged with tax evasion and jailed without a pretrial. He was held in custody for eleven months, and while in detention Magnitsky “developed gallstones and acute pancreatitis[,] . . . was repeatedly denied medical treatment[,] . . . [and was subjected to] poor sanitation, social isolation and lack of proper opportunities for [legal] defense.” On November 16, 2009, eight guards came into Magnitsky’s cell and beat him, denying him medical care for one hour and eighteen minutes until he died. He was said to have died of heart failure, although an independent autopsy to determine the actual cause of death was not permitted. The death of Sergei Magnitsky resulted in immediate public outrage, and in early 2010 President Medvedev filed a criminal investigation

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12 Ibid., 214.
13 Campbell.
14 Browder.
into the matter. Although President Medvedev’s investigation declared that the arrest and detention of Magnitsky were illegal, no one has been held responsible for the crime, and no criminal charges were issued against those who were involved.\textsuperscript{16}

The international response to this human rights violation by Russia against one of its citizens prompted many countries in the European Union to ban those who were involved in the Magnitsky affair from the EU and freeze any investments they might have there.\textsuperscript{17} The U.S. Magnitsky Act was drafted in light of EU sanctions, with the primary intention of banning those involved from entering the United States, revoking individual visas, and freezing the assets of Russian officials accused of human rights violations.\textsuperscript{18} The Magnitsky Act also cited other cases where the Russian government was found to be involved in human rights violations of its citizens, among them the former Yukos executives, Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, who were denied a fair trial.\textsuperscript{19}

Before the enactment of the Magnitsky Act by U.S. legislators, the Russian Federation warned the United States of the consequences that would result if it followed through with this decision. In May 2012, President Putin’s top foreign adviser expressed his concerns regarding U.S. Magnitsky legislation, stating that “We would very much like to avoid it, but if this new anti-Russian law is adopted, then of course that demands measures in response.”\textsuperscript{20} Russia’s response came in December of 2012, the same month the U.S. passed the Magnitsky Act of 2012. Its swift reaction aimed to embarrass the United States the same way that Russia felt it had

\textsuperscript{16} Evans, 217.
\textsuperscript{18} Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal.”
\textsuperscript{20} Englund and Lally.
been embarrassed by U.S. legislation that accused Russia of human rights violations. The response was the Dima Yakovlev law, which banned American citizens from adopting Russian children. This legislation attempted to show that the United States had its own internal problems and was also guilty of human rights violations.\textsuperscript{21}

On December 20, 2012, at his annual press conference, President Vladimir Putin outlined various reasons for passing the Dima Yakovlev law. When asked whether or not it bothered him that orphan children suffer as tools in political conflicts, President Putin responded by stating that,

“It’s not about specific people, US citizens who have adopted our children. We know that tragedies happen but the vast majority of people who adopt Russian children take good care of them and are good, decent people. The State Duma’s response was not to that but to the U.S. authorities’ position.”\textsuperscript{22}

President Putin went on to criticize the American justice system, expressing his displeasure with the verdict of the Harrison trial and his irritation that Russian authorities were not allowed to participate in the trial proceedings. He also went on to cite many alleged human rights abuses committed by the U.S. government, including Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite President Putin’s dissatisfaction with the results of the Harrison trial, it was not the main motivation for the passing of the Dima Yakovlev law. In the same interview, President Putin implied that the adoption ban was an overt response to the U.S. Magnitsky Act. He rebuffed U.S. criticism of Russia’s human rights abuses, saying, “it is outrageous to use this as a pretext to adopt anti-Russian laws, when our side has done nothing to warrant such a

\textsuperscript{21} Bridge.
\textsuperscript{22} Russian Presidential Executive Office, “News Conference of Vladimir Putin.”
\textsuperscript{23} “News Conference of Vladimir Putin” (Kremlin.ru, December 20, 2012).
response.” Here, the “pretext to adopt anti-Russian laws” clearly refers to the U.S. Magnitsky Act and the United States’ involvement in Russia’s domestic affairs. President Putin also went on to state that the Russian decision to ban all U.S.-Russian adoptions was an “emotional” but “adequate” response.

Some of the most compelling evidence that the Russian adoption ban was a direct response to the U.S. Magnitsky Act can be found in the sanction lists of specific individuals that the countries included in their respective pieces of legislation. In April 2013, the Obama administration released a list of 18 individuals who it accused of participating in human rights violations, banning them from entering the United States and freezing their assets as punishment. In response, Russia retaliated with its own list of 18 individuals who were banned from entering the country, among whom were former President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. In May of 2014, the United States added 12 more people to the list, among whom were the prison officials that denied medical care to Sergei Magnitsky while he was in detention. Russia reacted by adding 12 more individuals to its list, banning them from entering the country. Ten of the individuals on that list were implicated in the Abu Ghraib torture misconduct and two were tied to Guantanamo.

This political game between the U.S. and Russia regarding human rights violations has left Russian orphans at the center of the crossfire. President Putin’s decision to retaliate against the passing of the Magnitsky Act by banning U.S. citizens from adopting Russian children was a strategic one. On December 20, 2012, during a news conference, President Putin brought up poll

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Solash.
27 Heintz.
29 Russia Today, “Russia Bars Entry.”
statistics, noting that every poll indicated that the majority of Russian citizens support the banning of adoptions between the U.S. and Russia. This move resulted, at least in part, from the growing discontent of the Russian people and their perception that the United States was mistreating children adopted from Russia. President Putin’s strategy of banning U.S.-Russian adoptions seems to suggest that the enactment of this law was designed to accomplish two goals: embarrass the United States and procure domestic support from the Russian people.

The decline of U.S. adoptions of Russian children began in 2006, shortly after a 2005 incident involving a two-year-old girl adopted from Russia who was severely beaten by her adoptive mother and died shortly after from her injuries. The mother pled guilty and was sentenced to 25 years in prison for the abuse and death of her adopted daughter Nina. This incident caused many Russian officials to look at the previous 14 deaths that occurred in the United States since Russia opened its doors to intercountry adoptions in the early 1990s. This incident prompted some officials to threaten to impose a temporary ban on all U.S. adoptions, but this threat was never realized. Instead, Russian and U.S. officials called for stricter screenings of both children and parents in order to ensure the parental capacity of the adopters and the mental stability of the child.

Three years later, the death of Dima Yakovlev further antagonized Russian officials when Dima’s adoptive father, Miles Harrison, was acquitted of charges against him because he was found not to have shown “‘callous disregard for human life,’ the legal standard for involuntary manslaughter.” The denial of Russian prosecutors to participate in the case was used by President Putin in his 2012 press conference as one of the reasons for implementing the Dima

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30 Russian Presidential Executive Office, “News Conference of Vladimir Putin.”
31 Rosen.
32 Vargas.
33 Barry.
Yakovlev law:

It is a fact that when a crime is committed against an adopted Russian child, the American justice system often does not react at all and releases the people who have clearly committed a criminal offense against a child, of any criminal responsibility. But that's not all. Russian representatives are denied any access, even as observers, in these legal processes.\textsuperscript{34}

Here, President Putin refers to the Dima Yakovlev incident, which by that point had happened four years prior, and expresses dismay that Russia had been blocked from participating in the case. The frustration with the 2005 incidents, combined with the death of Dima Yakovlev and the innocent verdict that followed, furthered Russian weariness towards U.S. adoptions and resulted in extra restrictions and legal hurdles being added to the adoption process by the Russian government.\textsuperscript{35}

A stronger government reaction came in 2010, when a Tennessee woman put her Russian adopted son on a plane back to Russia two years after he was adopted. The boy, Artyom Savelyev, who was seven at the time, landed at a Moscow airport and was taken to the Russian Education and Science Ministry by a man who had been paid $200 by the family to deliver him there as soon as he landed. The mother claimed that the boy was violent and had severe psychological problems that the Russian doctors withheld from her.\textsuperscript{36} This sparked outrage from both sides of the aisle, and both U.S. and Russian TV media aired extensive reports of the case, showing to the public not only the case involving Artyom, but also looking back on the abuses of other children adopted from Russia. At the time of this incident, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that this was “the last straw,” while U.S. State Department Spokesman P. J. Crowley admitted that, “If Russia does suspend cooperation on the adoption, that is its right.

\textsuperscript{34} Russian Presidential Executive Office, “News Conference of Vladimir Putin.”
\textsuperscript{35} Barry.
\textsuperscript{36} Associated Press.
These are Russian citizens.”

The consequences of this event not only prompted a temporary suspension of adoptions, but it also pointed to specific mistreatments of adopted children in the United States. This led the Russian public to find further fault with U.S. adoptions, rather than with intercountry adoptions in general. As Mansur Mirovalev points out in his article in The World Post, the 2010 incident had many consequences:

“[Artyom’s] treatment ignited outrage in Russia toward the United States, temporarily halted American adoptions of Russian children, sparked investigations in both countries and touched off an emotional debate about whether U.S. couples could trust Russian information on children they were seeking to adopt.”

Looking at U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs adoption data, it becomes apparent that the 2005 incidents, as well as the ones that followed, had a direct impact on the number of Russian children adopted by United States citizens.

Between the years of 1998 and 2005, the number of Russian children adopted by the United States leveled out to constitute an average of about 4,500 children per year. Starting in 2006, the number of adoptions declined to 3,702. In 2010, only 1,079 adoptions took place, and the number dwindled down to 250 adoptions in 2013. Due to the passing of the Dima Yakovlev law, there were only 2 adoptions that took place in 2014.

The declining number of adoptions was a direct result of Russia’s increased scrutiny of the adoption process, which led to a decreased number of adoption approvals to the United

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38 Mirovalev.
39 Johnston.
40 Ibid.
States. Increased focus on this topic prompted it to become a national issue. The complaints of Russian officials over U.S. scandals, along with increased media coverage on Russian national television, swayed Russian public opinion. U.S. adoptions of Russian children were viewed in light of the abuses that occurred between 2005 and 2010. According to a 2005 opinion poll conducted by VCIOM that asked Russian citizens whether or not they supported the prohibition of foreign adoptions, 32% said that foreign adoptions should be prohibited. In 2010, the percent of the population against foreign adoptions had risen to 38%.

When a similar poll was conducted by an independent Levada Center pollster after the passing of the Dima Yakovlev law in January 2013, about fifty percent of Russian citizens showed support for the law. When the Levada Center conducted another poll a year after the passing of the law, support for the law increased by 11 percentage points from the previous year. The increased support for the Dima Yakovlev law seems to be at least partially the result of anti-American propaganda on popular Russian national television networks. Anna Kachkayeva, the head of the media department at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, notes general media distortions in the coverage of various cases of abuse in America. She writes that “no one is covering this story in all its complexity—the international, business, ethical, psychological aspects of it. . . . So it sounds very simple: [i]n American hands, children die.” President Vladimir Putin’s campaign of demonizing the United States has proven to be very effective in swaying public opinion and leading the populace to believe that the U.S. behaves irresponsibly with respect to children adopted from Russia, as well as in convincing

41 Smith, 157–59.
42 Johnson’s Russia List, “Two-Thirds of Russians Support Banning Foreign Adoptions - Poll.”
43 The Moscow Times, “50% of Russians Support Adoption Ban, Poll Says.”
44 Russian Legal Information Agency.
citizens that the Dima Yakovlev law was an appropriate response to America’s negligence.

Despite polls consistently showing that the majority of Russians support the adoption ban, there is still a variety of factors that need to be considered regarding the reliability of polling data. According to Lev Gudkov, the head of Moscow Levada Center pollster, people are generally not aware of the situation at hand, and the questions that pollsters ask are often distorted. He writes that, “most people don’t understand the context in which this ban was introduced: They don’t know much if anything about the Magnitsky Act . . . they are just asked, in essence, ‘Are you against the abuse of our children by foreigners?’”46 Both, Gudkov and Kachkayeva point out that the demonization of the United States by the Russian state media, combined with the simplification of the situation to “in America our children die,” has had a great effect on people’s opinion.47 When polling questions are framed in a similar context and strategically asked in a way where a negative answer would mean supporting the abuses committed by foreigners, it would be surprising for many individual to express support for such actions.

There is also a variety of discrepancies that exist between state orchestrated polls and private polls. When opinion polls were conducted in January 2013, right after the passing of the Dima Yakovlev law, a state-run VCIOM poll indicated that 76% of Russians showed support for the law, while a private pollster (the Levada Center) showed that about fifty percent of Russians were favorable towards the newly implemented ban.48 The situation becomes a bit more confusing when the same pollsters conducted similar polls the following year. VCIOM’s poll showed that support for the law increased to 64%, citing the Levada Center’s previous year’s

47 Ibid.
polling data of 54% while ignoring their own, which had registered 76%. The Levada Center found that the support for the law increased by 11%, indicating a 32% approval. The “Russian Legal Information Agency” reflects those statistics in their 2014 articles, stating that, “The number of ‘Dima Yakovlev law’ supporters has grown 11% (from 21% to 32%).” While most articles reflected those 2014 statistics, numerous articles from 2013 stated that the Levada Center found that about fifty percent of people support the banning of adoption of Russian children by American citizens. Those discrepancies at the very least indicate that polling data concerning the Dima Yakovlev law should be taken with a grain of salt. It is useful to address the reasons why those who are polled answer in the affirmative, and the distorted questions and resulting statistics cast doubt on the accuracy of the data.

Despite the polls showing that a sizable number of Russian citizens seem to support the Dima Yakovlev law, there is still a large minority group that opposes the legislation. In December of 2013, right before President Putin signed the law, the newspaper Novaya Gazeta collected 100,000 signatures in opposition to the implementation of the adoption ban. The deputy of the State Duma stated that the petition signatures would be considered by the parliament, but they did not end up having any significant effect on the passing of the legislation, which received overwhelming support from both the upper and the lower houses of parliament.

Along with the petition signatures a large protest took place in Moscow on January 13, 2013. The protest included about 20,000 participants, some of who shouted “shame on the scum” while holding large signs with pictures of Russian officials who voted in favor of the law. The

49 Sputnik News, “More Russians Support Adoption Ban.”
50 Sputnik News, “More Russians Support Adoption Ban.”
53 Berry.
magnitude of the protest seems to suggest that those involved were very much aware of the fact that the Dima Yakovlev law was a retaliation tactic to the U.S. Magnitsky Act legislation.\textsuperscript{54} Zhanna Polyakova, one of the participants, summed up the argument made by the opposition, stating that, “We feel pity for the children and came here out of a sense of human dignity. Putin did exactly the same thing as Herod.”\textsuperscript{55} While some compared President Putin to King Herod (referring to the Biblical narrative of the killing of innocent children by Herod), others cited Holy Innocents’ Day—which is typically celebrated around December 28\textsuperscript{th}—the day that Dima Yakovlev law was signed by President Putin.\textsuperscript{56} The second largest protest took place in St. Petersburg and included about one thousand individuals; there were also a handful of smaller protests that took place in other parts of the country, consisting of only a few dozen people.\textsuperscript{57}

The opposition to this law largely consisted of progressive activists, pro-democracy groups, and independent media journalists, whom \textit{USA Today} dubbed as “urban professionals,” “Moscow’s creative class,” and the “Internet Generation.”\textsuperscript{58} Many individuals in this group are uncomfortable with President Putin’s political power and the Kremlin’s corruption. About 30\% of the population opposes policies recently implemented by the Russian government.\textsuperscript{59} In an article titled “Putin Versus Civil Society,” Miriam Lanskoy and Elspeth Suthers cite a variety of protests that have taken place from 2011–2012 to show that the opposition is dedicated to establishing accountability and democratic reform within the Russian parliament. They write that “[t]he demographic profile of this opposition minority—young, active, comparatively well off,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Lynn Berry, “Thousands March to Protest Russia’s Adoption Ban,” \textit{USA Today}, January 13, 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Kravtsova and Krainova.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Berry.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Berry, “Thousands March to Protest Russia’s Adoption Ban.”
\item \textsuperscript{59} Lanskoy and Suthers.
\end{itemize}
and highly educated—suggests that it will persist in seeking a voice in politics.\textsuperscript{60} This suggests that, despite undergoing government persecution for voicing their anti-Kremlin opinions, this minority group is still gaining ground and might have a great impact in influencing the future of Russian politics.

Although the progressive minority was able to voice their displeasure with the passing of the Dima Yakovlev law by orchestrating a mass protest in Moscow that got the attention of international media, independent pollsters still found that, over the course of a year, the support for the law increased by about 11%\textsuperscript{61}. This increased support is the result of a variety of events that took place in 2013. These issues had a direct impact in further solidifying the opinions of Russian citizens.

About a month after the passing of the Dima Yakovlev law and the Moscow protests against it, another unfortunate death, this time that of a 3-year-old boy adopted from Russia, occurred in Texas. After being in the United States for about three months, the boy, who had been renamed Max Shatto, had been found unconscious in the back yard by his mother and ended up dying at the hospital shortly after\textsuperscript{62}. The parents claimed that the boy had a tendency to hurt himself and that a medical doctor had prescribed medication in order to contain his self-destructive behavior. However, the parents only administered it for three days out of concern that it adversely affected Max’s health. The autopsy and the toxicology investigation deemed the death an accident, which further frustrated Russian authorities. They initially claimed that the

\textsuperscript{60} Miriam Lansky and Elspeth Suthers, “Putin versus Civil Society: Outlawing the Opposition,” \textit{Journal of Democracy} 24, no. 3 (July 2013): 75–87.

\textsuperscript{61} Sputnik News, “More Russians Support Adoption Ban.”

\textsuperscript{62} Botelho.
boy had been “murdered” and the parents had given him “psychopathic substances.” Russian Human Rights representative Konstantin Dolgov stated that this incident “is yet another inhumane abuse of a Russian child adopted by an American family.” The Russian state media initially responded with headlines like “3yo Russian Boy ‘Killed by American Adoptive Mother,’” incriminating the mother before the investigation had been completed.

The unfortunate timing of Max’s death and the official Russian response to the verdict exonerating Max’s adoptive mother sparked a reactionary protest in Moscow, where those involved marched in support of the Dima Yakovlev law. According to various estimates, about 12,000 to 20,000 people participated in the protest. The protesters chanted slogans such as, “Children are not goods” and “Bring Kirill back to his motherland,” referring to Kirill, the brother of Max who was adopted by the same family. When interviewed, one protester stated that, “I am in favor of a more serious investigation. It just shows they treat Russian children like cats and dogs.” Many of the protesters were also carrying Orthodox icons, which reflect the support that the Russian Orthodox Church has shown for the law. Father Vsevolod Chaplin, a high-ranking priest in the church, suggested that it is rather problematic to “sell” Russian children to other countries, pointing out that those adopted by foreigners "won't get a truly Christian upbringing and that means falling away from the church and from the path to eternal life, in God's kingdom.”

A significant factor that contributed to the escalation of support for the adoption ban is

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64 Russia Today, “3yo Russian Boy.”
65 Ibid.
66 Russia Today, “Thousands Rally in Moscow.”
68 Ibid.
69 Elder.
increased media coverage of the tragic deaths of Russian children at the hands of their adoptive parents and citations of various abuses and statistics that show that children are not “safer” in America than those in other countries. One TV news special (Pravda.ru) stated that if those children were never adopted and remained in Russia, perhaps they would still be alive, painting the U.S. as a country that is largely negligent towards children. The same news special claimed that the United States has the worst rate internationally of child abuse in families, adding that “this is not a piece of Russian propaganda, this is a fact from the American organization Childhelp, which helps save these children.”

Another news broadcast (Russia Today) claims that there are lists and lists that cite the abuses of Russian children in the United States. The anchorwoman goes on to state that those abuses are often swept under the rug, and that there are “so many of these bizarre cases, people are wondering how are they [Americans] are able to get away with it.” Other Russian TV news coverage often includes American professionals who agree with the adoption ban, as well as Russian legislators who bring up various horrors associated with intercountry adoptions and attack the U.S. government and its system directly.

Although the Russian protests and the demonization of the United States by the Russian media are helpful in gauging Russian opinion on the Dima Yakovlev law, they are not enough to conclude that the majority of Russian people believe that the law is just. A closer analysis of the protests reveals that both pro- and anti-Dima Yakovlev law protests were organized by the same person, Sergey Udaltsov, the leader of a far-left socialist group called Left Front. This suggests that the Dima Yakovlev protests were not staged to show support or contempt towards the law, but in order to give people a chance to voice their concerns relating to other issues within their

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70 Pravda Report.
71 Marine1063.
72 New Insight.
73 Russia Today, “Thousands Rally in Moscow.”
society.\textsuperscript{74}

While these various considerations are not enough to definitively state where most Russians stand on the U.S. adoption ban issue, the evidence nevertheless suggests that the Russian people are largely in favor of the Yakovlev law. This becomes clearer when all of the factors are considered in a linear order: the almost unanimous agreement in the parliament, the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, the government reaction to the death of another Russian child in 2013, the Russian state media’s constant demonization of the United States, and the public protests all seem to suggest that the Russian people are more likely to show support, rather than contempt, for the law.

As for attempts to gauge the future of the Dima Yakovlev law and whether or not it has any hope of being repealed, there must be a serious shift in the mindset and political opinions of the Russian officials who have the power to bring about change within the system in order for this to occur. As Miriam Lanskoy and Elspeth Suthers point out in their coverage of the 2011 election protests, there exists a tight concentration of power within Russian politics:

“[I]t is not clear that this can be achieved without undermining the regime’s popular appeal and its support within the elite. . . . ‘By so thoroughly refusing to engage the protestors as he did, Mr. Putin in effect announced: I will not permit evolutionary change of this regime. . . .‘It’s me or the abyss. There is no one else.’”\textsuperscript{75}

In order for any serious change to take place in Russia, there needs to be a shift in political power, without which it does not seem likely that the Dima Yakovlev law is going to be repealed. Even the confusion of data and the double-edged statements made by Russian politicians regarding the law can be interpreted as part of a Russian government strategy to dilute the issue. As Peter Pomerantsev points out in his \textit{New York Times} op-ed piece, President Putin is

\textsuperscript{74} RT, “Thousands Rally in Moscow to Support US Adoption Ban.”

\textsuperscript{75} Hill and Gaddy.
concerned with controlling "all narratives, so that politics becomes one great scripted reality show." Pomerantsev further argues that Putin is using his control over Russian media to disorganize the opposition through an information war. If Pomerantsev is correct in his assertion, then the information distortions shown in the polling data and the government’s persistence in portraying the United States as a place where children are not safe can be seen as part of President Putin’s political strategy to create and control all aspects of this narrative. By portraying the United States as a place that poses a threat to children adopted from Russia, President Putin has been able to justify his implementation of the Dima Yakovlev law, and present himself as a leader whose policies serve the interests of the Russian nation and its people.

The ethical implications of the Dima Yakovlev law and its ban on adoptions of Russian children by the United States has garnered much controversy. Each side claims moral superiority over the other. Despite Russia’s claim that this law came about as a result of various human rights abuses committed by U.S. citizens, the overwhelming majority of journalists and intellectuals agree that the adoption ban was a Russian response to the passing of the 2012 Magnitsky Act by the United States. While attempts to gauge the Russian opinion on the passing of the Dima Yakovlev legislation have found that the majority of Russian citizens do in fact support the law, much of the given data is not entirely reliable, which suggests that President Putin has intentionally used misinformation as a strategy to further his political goals. It does not seem that this law has any chances of being repealed any time soon, as such, in the foreseeable future, American families will not be able to adopt Russian children.

76 Pomerantsev.
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