

**Boosting Political Participation in a Non-Democratic Context?**  
**Political Effects of International Educational Exchange Programs**

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## **Abstract**

Educational exchange programs of American institutions have long been seen as contributors of democracy promotion strategies. However, little has been done to practically measure the effects these programs have on university students coming from non-free regimes. This project for the first time aims at addressing the posed research puzzle. Whether Bard College (New York, USA) partnership with St. Petersburg State University (St. Petersburg, Russia) results in enhanced political participation of Russian students upon their return from a semester exchange – is the question that is explored both from theoretical and empirical perspective in this thesis project. The study combines statistical methods of analysis of survey data, collected specifically for this research, with the interpretative strategy of in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted with the participants of this international exchange. The results of the project are generally skeptical about the direct presence of such a relationship. Nevertheless, the qualitative section of this study suggests that after the exchange students increase and diversify the range of their latent political civil participation practices. Follow-up studies of political effects of international educational exchange programs may bring more clarity and support for these findings.

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## Introduction

The advocates of the soft power concept have long argued that educational exchange programs hosted by the US institutions are a powerful tool spreading liberal values and practices “across the border of the authoritarian states”, impacting political institutions and political behavior of the citizens of the non-free regimes (Atkinson 2010; Nye Jr. and Owens 1996). While some attempts have been made in order to evaluate these claims in the reality, most of the articles focus specifically on institutional changes as the result of the key political actors’ involvement in exchange opportunities. For instance, Carol Atkinson performs generalized multilevel longitudinal analysis that allows to prove causal linkage between military and civilian exchange participation and advanced human rights practices employed by the non-democratic countries (2010). Thomas Gift and Daniel Krcmaric, in their turn, show that Western-educated leaders systematically support democratization in their countries (2017). This research, in contrast to the previous articles, aims at identifying the relationship (or an absence of it) between involvement in exchange programs and ordinary citizens’ political participation.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, it utilizes the case of Russian students studying at St. Petersburg State University (Smolny College, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences) as the unit of analysis, and primarily employs positivist approach. Furthermore, the study critically discusses potential mechanisms through which the international educational exchange programs (IEEPs) might affect civil and political involvement of students.

The Institute for International Liberal Education (IILE) of Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, New York) has been sponsoring Program in International Education (PIE) since 1991. It aims at bringing students from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from the countries of the former Soviet Union, Africa and the Middle East to upstate New York for a year, semester or a month long intensive programs. As the liberal arts undergraduate institution acting “at the intersection of

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<sup>1</sup> It might indeed be controversial to call members of student groups “ordinary citizens”. However, while acknowledging the important role youth, and students specifically, undertake in various social movements and change, I make this word choice here consciously. It helps to underline my focus on those members of society, who, unlike the elites, oftentimes do not have instruments and influence to bring change to the political system as lone individuals.

education and civil society”, Bard College aims at fostering civic and public engagement, inclusive environment, and critical thinking in communities where this type of education is “underdeveloped, inaccessible or absent” (“The Bard College Mission”, <http://www.bard.edu/about/mission/>). Thus, PIE, to a certain extent, can be viewed as a multifaceted tool, promoting liberal values, human rights and political rights in nondemocratic contexts by educating and supporting young academics and communities’ leaders from across Bard’s network.

One of the most long-lasting dual-degree partnerships of Bard with Smolny College of St. Petersburg State University provides me with a unique opportunity to employ a quasi-experimental research design to find out, whether enrolment in PIE semester exchange actually contributes to students’ further political involvement, activism and adherence to the principles of open society and globalization in their home country. This partnership, even at times of the turbulent relations between Russian Federation and the United States, with various political scandals making the headlines, continues to accept students and bring them to their desired destinations.

In this project I turn to mixed methods for data collection and analysis, and aim at addressing the following question: does the enrolment in PIE semester exchange result in enhanced political participation of Russian students of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences?

From a broader perspective, the goal of this case study is to create a better understanding of the complex mechanisms of bias and self-selection into international educational exchange programs, political socialization in the college campus environment, and subsequent political effects of the exchange experience on students coming to the US from non-democratic regimes.

The first chapter of the current project discusses at large theoretical frameworks and findings from the previous research, both in regards to the key indicators and empirical evidence collected by the authors of the similar case studies of the educational exchange programs. The second chapter is devoted to the research design, data collection and coding procedures. The third chapter presents



the results, while the conclusion gives space for discussion, outlines limitations of the study, and suggests questions and directions for further research.

## Chapter 1. Theoretical Grounds

### 1.1. Key Concepts

The roots of the posed research question go into such notions as political culture and political involvement. For the benefit of the further research an introduction to these matters and conceptualization of the terms follow.

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba were among the first scholars to present a new approach to political attitudes in modern democratic states, and formulate the term “civic culture” (1963). According to the authors and their highly influential yet criticized work *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, political culture refers to the specific orientations – “attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system” (12). The distribution of these orientations assessed by Almond and Verba suggests that the United States and the United Kingdom are examples of a flexible equilibria between “subject” and “participant” relationship of the state and the governed. In other words, both of these nations “closely approximate the model of the [ideal] civic culture”, with a balance of political participation and commitment of their citizens (360).

While in the recent years the levels of Americans’ direct engagement in public affairs have been doubted widely by the academic community, with decrease of people’s trust in political parties and politicians, low voting turnout, and decay of traditional associational structures (Norris 2005; Putnam 2000), political involvement remains to be primarily a characteristic of a democratic political system. Some authors argue that in fact a new typology should be introduced in the discussion about citizens’ participation and engagement in society and politics, so that skepticism about Americans’ actual political involvement rates can be disputed (Ekman and Amnå 2012). Part of the reason for this need is that Robert Putnam’s application of the term “civic engagement” has stretched the concept. By now its definition encompasses both individual and collective action in private and public spheres, ranging from volunteering and joining organizational structures to electoral participation. This makes the term confusing and useless for the political science

research, unless it is narrowed down and re-defined. Moreover, as Joakim Ekman and Erik Amnå write in their article “Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology” a focus in theoretical advancement should not only be made on direct manifest activities, but also on latent forms of political participation. This way, new dimensions and prospects of political behavior can be understood in the United States, as well as in the other countries (2012). This is necessary for those types of analysis that specifically deal with explanations of political affairs and involvement of such social groups as youth, immigrants and women (288). “Pre-political” orientations and “stand-by” activities, in view of the authors, entail involvement in current affairs, and serve as basis for the future conventional forms of political participation, despite not being “directly aimed at influencing the people in power” (288). In context of the current study I will employ the typology suggested by Ekman and Amnå, which would not only be useful for capturing the range of Russian students’ activities, but would also accommodate to the political participation options available in a non-democratic regime. The empirical section of this research consequently will benefit from the flexible choice between various indicators of political participation.

The discussed typology can also be viewed as valuable by contributing to the integrated agenda for political participation studies (Teorell 2006). By bringing in “pre-political” orientations and “stand-by” activities as latent forms of engagement to the conceptualization of political involvement, on a par with more conventional acts such as voting and protesting, Ekman and Amnå bring together perceptions of political participation, derived both from responsive, participatory and deliberative models of democracy, and unite the expectations of the particular consequences for each of the conception of participation (Teorell 2006).

Practically it means that for the discussed research question it would be equally important to observe enhanced individual and collective forms of political participation of the students, who have been enrolled in the educational exchange program (PIE), no matter whether these participation forms are manifested through voting in elections, donating money to political parties and organizations, or perceiving politics as important, discussing societal issues with friends and

volunteering with community based organizations.<sup>2</sup> What makes a difference here is quantitatively higher rates of the varieties of political participation practices and limited amount of disengagement of the students, who have undergone the exchange (or treatment), in comparison to those who have not.

## 1.2. Political Participation in Russian Context

Studies carried out by Russian agencies such as the Levada Center, the Public Opinion Foundation and the Institute for Comparative Social Research confirm that reported civic and political activity of Russian citizens in the period from 2002 till 2006 was even lower than in the Soviet times (Rimskii 2008). The article by Vladimir Rimskii, a sociologist and the head of the INDEM (Information Science for Democracy) Foundation, suggests that the distinction between political and civic activity remains vague for the Russian public. Political involvement, encompassing protesting actions or any type of collective activity in pursuit of the solution for the common problems, is seen as a job for a professional politician or a state figure. The most spread forms of participation are volunteer days (for instance, cleaning and gardening of the common areas), and only then election campaigns, attendance of meetings and conferences for civic causes, signing petitions, donations for social projects, and political rallies (47). Although, the distinction between average citizens, professional and nonprofessional activists of civic initiatives and organizations is expectable, the author concludes that all three social groups fail to properly communicate and understand each other's motivations, which results in further alienation of Russian public (54).

Several waves of mass protests in Russia might make one think that the situation has changed dramatically. Following the legislative elections of 2011 and the news of the electoral results forgery, citizens of Moscow and St. Petersburg joined the demonstrations in fight against corruption and fraudulent elections. The inauguration of Vladimir Putin in 2012 resulted in

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<sup>2</sup> For the full description of the indicators employed by the discussed typology please refer to Table 11 in the Appendix A. This is the exact table originally developed and used by the authors, Ekman and Amnå, in the article "Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology" (2012).

infamous Bolotnaya Square Case with over than 400 people detained and 30 criminally charged for participation in an unauthorized protest. 2017 was marked with pro-Navalny rallies after the politician's Anti-Corruption Foundation had published the investigation against Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The documentary film showcasing Medvedev's unjustified financial gains while refusing the vulnerable strata of the population in social payments and governmental support has gained over 34 million views. The unpopular reform of pension system and tax increase in 2018, led people to the streets, as well as to the polling stations. Finally, the most recent case of local elections in Moscow and St. Petersburg in September 2019, stirred up a wave of popular indignation and participation in unauthorized actions and pickets, resulting in new criminal cases against opposition political leaders, students of political science, and even peaceful bystanders. Despite that, political sociologists addressing the rise of collective action still believe that popular mobilization in Russia tends to be diffuse and has grassroots nature, while Russian society remains being apolitical (Clément 2015).

In contrast to on the ground activities, the growing body of literature focuses on political engagement in Russia through Internet and social media. For instance, by analyzing LiveJournal blogging platform as a political factor, Olessia Koltsova and Andrey Shcherbak make a suggestion that online political activity result in offline support of political candidates and parties (2015). This, however, becomes quite irrelevant as registered candidates and election results are independent of the media and, to a certain extent, of public opinion. Moreover, Russian government has intensified its efforts in control of the internet – one of the latest initiatives, the bill, requiring Russia to create its own version of Domain Name System (DNS) disconnecting its internet from the global network in case of a major cyber threat, has been recently adopted in the first reading by the State Duma (Polonskaya 2019). These measures, partially inspired by the protest activities and networking of activists through social media channels, enabled the state to curb freedom online and to hamper “opportunities for a fully functioning society” (Klyueva 2016, 4662).

There is no consensus among researchers, journalists and policy experts on what Russian youth is like today, whether consumerism and careerism trump politics, Kremlin youth programs are successful, and how does national approval ratings of Vladimir Putin coexist with a large share of Russians between 18 and 24 willing to emigrate and search for a permanent residence abroad. Young people seem to be politically involved by tracking the news, engaging in volunteering activities and occasionally joining protest movements. For instance, some have participated in the last uprising inspired by Alexei Navalny on the eve of the presidential elections in 2018. Solidarity amongst the representatives of a “Putin generation” has inspired hope in Russia’s future (Gessen 2017), however, as Stanislav Andreichuk points out “involvement with the “Navalny headquarters” these days is a surefire way to get into problems with the police and security services” (2019). Dimitri Alexander Simes refers to the study of the Higher School of Economics to argue that while rising generation does not approve the status quo of the internal affairs as well as the foreign policy of the country “64 percent of Russian students would not be willing to take part in a demonstration and that 72 percent deem protests as ineffective means to achieve political change” (2018). Much safer and more favorable approach could be to get involved in extracurricular work, managed by the special departments in Russian universities, supervised by Rosmolodezh – the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs; or participate in conferences, forums and youth parliaments, supported by the state. This, essentially, might pave the way for a committed student to a participation in government-controlled political actions, such as rallies in favor of the ruling party, and later - to a position in the state bureaucracy (Andreichuk 2019).

Due to an apparent fluidity of the situation the supporters of the democratic change in Russia might argue that the efforts of democracy promotion strategies should be thus concentrated on the youth, susceptible to positive aspirations, but cautioned by various risks. This way, by taking into consideration available resources and incentives, through education, engagement and motivation of young people in certain directions, it might be possible to achieve favorable advancements and

more liberal environment in Russia in the long run, despite the loose structure of new “Komsomol” that has been proving itself as a loyal supporter of the state power (Andreichuk 2019).

### **1.3. Previous Research on International Educational Exchange Programs**

Heidi Erbsen in her recent article on the biopolitics of international exchange raises several important points for the current project (2018). By analyzing the case of suspension of the Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX) in the Russian Federation back in 2014, the author makes a convincing claim that some of the IEEPs, sponsored by the US and the EU specifically, reinforce ideological divides between participating countries, and, as a result, cause frustration of the actors concerned with their sovereignty. Originally planned with peaceful, cultural purposes in mind, international educational exchange programs have been continuously used as biopolitical tools “to promote...arguably international, norms and values” (71). This, in author’s opinion, together with politicization of the particular IEEPs can be seen as some of the reasons for their critical reception, affecting both the objectives of “national and internationally funded programs and international relations on a larger scale” (71).

Throughout the historical overview of ideologies behind educational exchange Erbsen mentions promotion of the international programs as means for transferring values abroad and maintaining them in the home country; tools in identity formation processes; form of “soft power for political socialization in specific regions of interest” (73); and even a “necessary ingredient” of “international institutionalism with a new type of ‘political internationalism’” (embraced as an idea during the Cold War period under president Eisenhower) (74). Interestingly enough, the author draws the line between the US and the EU sponsored programs. According to the findings, the focus of the American IEEPs, at least in their essence, is on learning about “the other” for national security, while the European ones rather aim at increasing cross-border economic efficiency in the EU and between its partners.

This overview allows me to suggest that these ideologies to a certain degree can be approximated on the case study of my interest<sup>3</sup>, however little does it tell us about potential mechanisms through which the goals of the IEEPs can be achieved. One of these mechanisms – political socialization, mentioned in the article, will be discussed at large in the following section of the chapter. Here, I would like to turn my attention to its alternatives.

Value transfer process and development of human capital are addressed several times by Erbsen throughout her work. According to the article citing previous works of Pierre Bourdieu and Gerhards and Hans (2016) international educational exchange bolsters students' identity, while assisting them with acquiring transnational skills. These skills can take form of either "hard economic or social capital" through practice of language, obtaining work experience, and deeper understanding of such important fields as commerce, finances or industry in general; or "softer forms of cultural knowledge" and adoption of particular behavioral norms. The important limitation here is that there could be a significant gap between acquired attitudes and manifested behavior, so that it might be problematic to observe an immediate effect of the obtained values on students' political participation practices.

One of the other concerns raised by scholars is that educational institutions might act like gatekeepers and miss their target audience. In practice this means that oftentimes programs, such as IEEPs, select participants that already subscribe to the promoted norms and values. Prior practices and experience, shared ideological views and family/parental influence could be some of the reasons enhancing one's chances to be involved in an international exchange program in the first place. Additionally, student's participation can be determined by his or her social status and the opportunity structure of the program.

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<sup>3</sup> Here we have to refer back to the mission statement of Bard College and the program itself (cited in the Introduction and further in Chapter 2). As a private institution with its own vision, legacy and values, in no way it should be associated directly with the ideologies promoted by the nationally funded educational exchange programs. Nevertheless, for the successful empirical section of this research it is important to envision the range of potential goals of the international exchange practice as a whole, as well as to outline mechanisms and channels through which they can be achieved.



All these points should and will be taken into consideration in the design of the empirical questionnaire for the data collection step of the research.

Finally, it might be worth mentioning here that other studies, such as “Exchange programs for educators: American and Russian perspectives” (Rapoport 2008), “International exchange program: findings from Taiwanese graduate nursing students” (Shieh 2004), and “Wine is for drinking, water is for washing: student opinions about international exchange programs” (Van Hoof and Verbeeten 2005) complement the highlighted key considerations about positive outcomes and the direction of the effects of the IEEPs, contributing to the students’ personal development and maturity.

#### **1.4. Psychological Factors of Political Socialization**

The grounds for the expectation that enrollment in an exchange program will result in higher levels of political involvement rest on assumption that a semester spent in another environment (country and university) will broaden one’s horizon by encountering new experiences, challenges, and contacts, both personal and professional. According to the self-assessment surveys of Erasmus students, and the studies reporting higher entry salaries and rates of professional mobility of those individuals, who had spent a semester or more abroad, argue that these altogether should enhance individual human capital and building competences of the students (Messer and Wolter 2007; Teichler and Jahr 2001).

From the political psychology perspective, the research of political socialization has established numerous factors affecting youth involvement in politics. While the prevailing approach views political interest and efficacy, both internal and external, as predispositions of political behavior (Barrett 2015), Jan Šerek with colleagues argue that this relationship can be in fact bidirectional (2017). By focusing on high school students in the Czech Republic the authors show that participatory experiences are influencing young people’s political beliefs and attitudes. Political participation results in the development of political interest; one’s feelings about own competences and abilities within political domain; as well as perceived responsiveness of the political system

to citizens' demands (353). The study distinguishes between different types of participatory activities, claiming that involvement in protest manifestations results in stronger positive effects on the aforementioned psychological factors than representational duties or volunteering. The authors conclude by advising parents and educators to encourage and support constructive forms of youth's engagement in participatory activities to foster their further political development (355).

In addition to that, Brian Christens, Andrew Peterson and Paul Speer (2011) investigate the mechanism of the relationship between community participation and psychological empowerment. The latter is defined by Douglas Perkins and Marc Zimmerman (1995) as a "mechanism by which individuals gain greater control over their lives, participate in democratic decision-making processes, and gain critical awareness of their social and political environments" (Christens, Peterson and Speer 2011, 339). Empowerment is a social process, which takes place within organizational context in a community, and, according to the study, is predicted by community participation (343). Christens, Peterson and Speer article further points out that this causality is not reciprocal, making political participation in a society a key aspect enhancing individuals' political interest and external efficacy.

### **1.5. Expectations**

While partisanship, electoral choices and overall political involvement can be influenced by multiple other factors, for instance by upbringing in a specific family environment (Feldman 2013), or by exposure to particular media and political campaigns (Leeson 2008; Lenz and Lawson 2011), the discussed literature allows me to expect that socialization and participation within active community of Bard College would in turn enhance political empowerment of Russian students, the range of their involvement practices and even their overall political interest. Thus, the primary hypothesis I will try to test in this project is the following:

*H1:* Enrollment in PIE exchange on average results in higher rates of political participation of Smolny bachelor students upon their return to their home country.

An important condition for this hypothesis to be justified is that during the educational exchange a student should be actively exposed to the variety of participatory and community activities, so that through experiential learning he or she might become increasingly aware and engaged. As it will be pointed out later in the second chapter, the environment of Bard College itself, with its student-led projects and campus initiatives, proximity to New York City, and the diversity of courses and public events exploring various political and normative issues, provide stable grounds for this requirement to be fulfilled.

In this study I am not placing any emphasis on the content of political participation. In other words, I am not interested in exploring whether one becomes more actively supporting liberal opposition or the existing political regime after the exchange period. Although, theoretically, I do not have any firm evidence to believe that time spent in an American educational institution might lead to formalization of strong anti-liberal views, an example of Sayyid Qutb<sup>4</sup> is anecdotally being used by some critics, aiming at cautioning students and researches against having too much appreciation for the US colleges and culture, as well as against making forecasts about their exclusively positive influence. Therefore, by not looking at the political participation directions, I do not exclude even the most remote possibilities of IEEPs effects, let alone keep my study apolitical and unbiased in its nature.

An important reservation for this hypothesis is that while this project intends to quantify students' overall engagement in political activity, operationalization of the questions on the data collection stage of the research focused rather on students' future intentions. One reason for this was to provide a uniform way of participation measurement for all students, including those, who by the time of surveying were under 18, and, thus, legally not allowed to fully participate in the political processes in the country. Another reason was to avoid potentially sensitive reactions to the request

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<sup>4</sup> Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian author, one of the originators of Islamist ideology, as well as the member of the Muslim Brotherhood, had vocalized his radical views and criticisms of American society particularly after his studies in the US.

of reporting one's current rates of involvement, which could have increased attrition rate from the survey.

*H2:* Students with prior experience in international settings and multicultural environments, who decide to participate in PIE, on average successfully pass the requirements to be admitted to the program.

This expectation follows from established observations and theory, claiming that students possessing transnational skills, adhering to liberal values and the norms encouraged by, in this case, an American institution will be favorably evaluated during the selection process. Prior experience for this matter is crucial, and can be easily measured by a binary question in a survey. Similar logic could apply to those students, whose families, and parents particularly, are liberal in their ideological views and are able to transfer some of their "hard" and "soft" capital to their children. This question, however, can be properly articulated and explored exclusively in the qualitative manner.

*H3:* Those students who stay politically disengaged after enrollment in PIE, are most likely to be people of higher socio-economic status.

It appears that most of the scholarship-sponsored places in the program are usually given to those applicants who, apart from being competitive students, also share Bard College's vision on the variety of normative questions. A part of the application form, which has to be filled prior to the selection process for the exchange program, includes several essay-type questions. Thus, those who remain apolitical and indifferent about civic issues after the program - are likely to be those students, who can afford self-financed participation in PIE, which may include a semester cost of living in the US, plane tickets and expenditures on learning materials. The logical chain behind such expectation might be the following: a student, who on the baseline, before the exchange, is not very much interested in civic engagement and political participation can pay for his or her way into the program. There is only a limited number of sponsored places available. Once enrolled,

such a student might not consider external expectations, or experience gratitude as well as other emotions, associated with winning an admission and a scholarship in a highly competitive circumstances. Hence, he or she can be primarily concentrated on the activities only they are interested in, without pushing themselves to interact with a broader community, learn more about the program, and engage in more institutionally-supported recreations and projects.

Both of the hypotheses two and three are not strictly based on the findings from the previous rigorous research. Moreover, in no way, they are central focus of the current thesis project, and cannot be generalized to other international educational exchange programs similar to PIE. I rather anticipate that such expectations might be tested and verified, as the data for the main research question (and hypothesis one) is collected.

It could be further explored whether demographic parameters such as students' home regions or cities of residence, prior to relocation to St. Petersburg; educational tracks (majors); and specific ideological views serve as additional important characteristics for the relationship of interest. Although they might not have a decisive role in the probability of one getting selected to the program, could be normally distributed across both groups, and might not necessarily be important for the hypothesis formulation step, these measures should be appropriately used as covariates in the analysis part of the project.

At the same time, an important consideration could concern the duration of the expected effects, and the substantive importance of intervening experiences, taking place immediately before or after the educational exchange program. For instance, it could determine, whether it is reasonable to include alumni in the sample of the study. Unfortunately, I have to treat this question as a limitation, and focus exclusively on the current student body of Smolny College.

## Chapter 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

Over 400 people enrolled in Smolny College, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences are eligible to apply for summer language intensives, scientific programs, PIE exchange, and leadership conferences hosted by Bard throughout their BA studies. The round of applications for a semester exchange opens up each spring and late autumn for the fall and winter term respectively. The applicants are required to submit a standard package of recommendation letters, transcripts, and statements of purpose. The selection process is non-discriminatory and strives to be unbiased. Each semester around 25 successfully admitted students leave for the exchange to the US<sup>5</sup>, as well as to the other campuses of the Bard network's institutions, partially or fully covered by the IILE.

It needs to be reiterated that according to Jennifer Murray, Director of Bard Abroad and Institute for International Liberal Education, the decision on enrolment of a candidate in a PIE program follows a comprehensive analysis of a student application. "Applications are scored according to a rubric that takes into account objective measures such as score on English test and GPA, as well as more subjective measures such as the recommendation letters, essay response, and demonstrated involvement on campus or with volunteer work. Applicants are scored against others in the same discipline" with the top performers from each subject area of Smolny College being admitted. In practice that means that if ten film and video majors are willing to participate in the program only three or four who have the strongest overall scores will be accepted, with the same logic applied to the top scorers from History, Literature, IR, and other majors of the Faculty.

The reasons for the hypothesized effects of the educational exchange may vary from active socialization of Russian youth with engaged student body in the US, to inspiration and motivation

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted here that the number of people chosen for an academic exchange in Bard is directly dependent on the number of American and foreign students undergoing their studies in St. Petersburg. As one of my sources has commented: "Although numbers vary, they are supposed to be as equal as possible to the number of American students per semester. [...] For example, [in] fall '19 we accepted 24 American students and sent 24 on PIE".

acquired through coursework, internships or community organized events during the exchange program. At the same time, one might suggest that a number of confounding variables and contextual factors can intervene in particular cases, and play a significant role in this relationship. In order to measure the effects of subjection to educational experience at the left-wing private American college, and the effects of life in a diverse and active student community on political awareness, involvement and civic engagement of Russian students upon their return, I run a survey among the whole student body of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The quasi experimental settings allowed the survey-takers to be divided into four groups: baseline – students in their first or second year, who are not yet eligible to apply for the exchange semester opportunities (one has to be at their fourth or later semesters of studies in order to qualify for the selection process); students who did not apply for the program; students who were not accepted to it; and treatment – students who successfully underwent the exchange, and came back to St. Petersburg to continue their studies.

It is important to mention that it is not entirely accurate to expect that these groups are going to be equally heterogeneous and similar to each other. The obvious limitation of such research design is that it is not legitimate to causally attribute positive political behavior effects to the students' participation in the exchange program per se. As Dolores Messer and Stefan C. Wolter argue in their paper on benefits caused by Erasmus and national mobility programs, unobservable differences between students, such as baseline level of motivation, cannot be controlled for (2007). It is therefore important not to judge the postulated effects merely on the basis of a probability of one being enrolled in the exchange (649). Furthermore, there is a possibility of a placebo effect instigated by the mere fact of the program's existence in the scope of the college's students' opportunities. A chance to spend time in the US through enrollment in PIE may by itself motivate students to collect achievements to their resumes, and become more actively engaged off and on campus.

In order to provide estimates that are not affected by endogeneity, and to get as close as possible to reliable causal inferences, matching based on a propensity score can be used as a strategy in this study. Building on the article “Auntie Knows Best? Public Broadcasters and Current Affairs Knowledge” by Stuart Soroka with colleagues, individuals from treatment group should be matched with those in the baseline or among those who were not selected for a program despite their wish, in accordance to their background characteristics outlined in the “propensity score”, or potential covariates that might predict receiving of the treatment (2013). “The difference in outcomes between these [...] groups is then the critical test of the impact of treatment” (727). Since this study is rather an observational one, and cannot be assessed as a randomized experiment, the application of the technique would have reduced potential bias by making the groups more comparable.

An important caveat here is that this case study and the sampling procedures involved, do not ensure the external validity of this project. In other words, my findings will not necessarily be generalizable to the whole population of students going abroad for the exchange from non-democratic regimes. This limitation will be addressed further in the conclusion of the thesis, however, in my view, it cannot devalue the importance of this study. Coming back to the discussion of the propensity score procedure and the Neyman-Rubin-Holland model of causal inference, we should acknowledge criticism of this approach, based on the number of untestable assumptions, as well as probabilistic allocation of treatment. We may also rather discuss attributable effects than the fair estimate of the causal linkage. Nevertheless, by applying mixed method approach and ensuring sensitivity of the results in the quantitative section of the study, I can justify my research strategies and validity of the results.

As a second stage of my project, I conduct a number of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the current students, who have experience of studying with Bard. This way, I can acquire informed results and make relevant conclusions. I believe that interpretative methods should help me validate my findings from the quantitative part of the research, and contribute to my understanding



of the research puzzle in respect to context and potential mechanisms through which the international educational exchange programs might be related to civil and political involvement of students.

My interpretative research strategy is the following. I first, reformulate my research question. In the *positivist part* of my project – I ask: does the enrolment in PIE semester exchange result in enhanced political participation of the Russian students of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences? In the *interpretative part*, by focusing on mechanisms through which the effects might be achieved, my research question would be: how do Russian PIE students reflect on their exchange program, and do they connect it with certain behavioral practices, attitudes and judgments they possess at the moment? I also inquire - how exactly do they think they were influenced by this experience, and the overall opportunity of living in the US for a bit less than half a year?

Ultimately, I am interested in agents' story-telling, interpretations and understanding of the exchange on the individual level. I use a convenience sample and a snowballing technique to choose my respondents among students, who were already exposed to this experience. I am not looking for a variation in respondents in regards to their participation (or non-participation) in various exchange programs (i.e. with other colleges than Bard), as I am doing it in the quantitative assessment. I also have a clear understanding of the context, and defined expectations only in application to PIE program based in the United States.

In my analysis I rely on the work of Mark Bevir (2006), providing an overview of the “philosophical analysis of the human sciences”, and treatment of data “as evidence of beliefs and meanings” (283). I interpret actions (in my case political participation practices) in relation to “a whole set of beliefs and desires” held by my respondents (283-284). In other words, through narrative I try to explain how certain beliefs of the students about their educational experience transfer into their actions after the return to Russia, and desires, embodied in their values and attitudes. The validity criteria is achieved by connecting my results from the interpretative stage

of the research with the analysis conducted on the survey data. This way, I can cross-validate, and make reasonable, coherent, and convincing conclusions, contributing to the holistic understanding of my research puzzle.

My final aim is to get a more substantial insight into the motivation and goal of the program itself by speaking to some of the program's administrators, to find out whether allocation procedure and selection of the participants is dependent on specific intentions to reward active students, and to advance their soft and hard skills in a particular way.

In this version - my research design would have not only properly excluded the confounding factors from the relationship I am interested in, but would have also anticipated and provided an insight into seemingly null results (in case those were obtained). Moreover, it would have tested an alternative explanation that involvement in liberal arts education system alone is the main contributor of further political engagement of students.

External circumstances have unfortunately introduced adjustments to my research plans. Not all of the described strategies were in fact utilized on the data collection and data analysis stage of my research. I could not successfully implement matching procedures, and conduct informant interviews to learn about Bard's and IILE's intentions for the semester exchange program. The first omission was due to the survey design, and personal data sensitivity issues, which prevented my collaboration with Bard in exchanging of some information on students. The second one - was due to the pandemic situation, and cancellation of conferences and events, which could have given me access to my interview subjects. I, nevertheless, consider it important to provide a full account of my research design intentions. Based on this learning experience – a more appropriate course of actions can be taken in the follow-up studies.

## **2.2. Procedure**

The survey for the quantitative section of my research was conducted online, in Russian, through Qualtrics. It was disseminated through emails connected to the institution's e-learning platform.

Data collection period took a little over two weeks, with the first announcement sent to the students of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and a reminder posted on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Moreover, with the help of several professors and staff members of Smolny College the link to the survey was spread through social networks and relevant student groups. Each stage of correspondence with the student body excluded an opportunity of a researcher to identify a single independent respondent, as all of the direct communications were restricted, and no personal data was transferred to and stored by the researcher. There were no systematic pilot studies run in advance, however, three other students (two alumni and one undergraduate) of Smolny College have read the questionnaire prior to its distribution, and provided feedback necessary for the improvement of its quality.

The funding provided by the CEU Grants Management Office was used for the purpose of increasing the sample of respondents. At the end of the survey each participant was assigned a random ID number that was later used for the lottery. On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 seven ID numbers were drawn through a random algorithm procedure to reward students with GiftCards of the bookshop “Podpisnyye Izdaniya”. The winners were announced in the email sent by the support staff member of the e-learning system. The certificates were distributed by one of the college professors, thus, again, preventing the researcher from identifying subjects.

This incentive, overall, allowed me to collect 240 responses. Among those, 174 - were fully complete, which means that the attrition rate from the survey was around 27 percent.

The side effect of survey’s distribution method was a big presence of master students-respondents. 31 answers to the survey (almost 18 percent out of the completed responses) were collected from this group. I did not intend to utilize these responses in the analysis, as master program follows a different structure and timelines of international educational exchange opportunities. It, nevertheless, might be interesting to look at the outcome measurements of this group from the exploratory perspective in other projects.

Another issue that I had was that the group of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> year students who did not apply for the exchange was represented only by 13 observations, and their responses to the outcome measurement questions were not completed due to the technical mistake. Although I reopened the survey for this specific group on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March (in a similar manner as the previous questionnaire), and kept it running for a week, no responses were collected. Thus, my initial aim to compare results between four distinct groups were not fully satisfied.

Despite that, three other groups were sufficiently present. The treated group contains the smallest number of observations – 23 students have been exposed to the program of interest (PIE at Bard College, New York), with three more students preparing to go for their exchange at the time of the survey.<sup>6</sup> 11 students participated in the alternative exchange programs with other college campuses either in Europe or Asia. 17 students' applications were rejected.<sup>7</sup> Finally, 72 students from the first and second year were not considered for the treatment just yet.

During the first week of June I conducted eight 40-minutes to hour-long semi-structured in-depth interviews for the qualitative section of my project. With the help of snowballing technique, I got a chance to speak with junior and senior students of Smolny College, who have already participated in PIE exchange.<sup>8</sup> Due to the pandemic constraints – all of the interviews were conducted online in Russian through Skype. The video setting of the calls has allowed me to establish a better rapport with my respondents, as well as to pay attention to their non-verbal communication signals. Prior to each of the conversations, I have informed my subjects about the way I am planning to collect, store and analyze the information provided by them during the interview, including their personal data, such as the recording of their voice and so on. All of the respondents have received the consent form, designed in consultation with GDPR Team of CEU, and agreed to its terms.

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<sup>6</sup> Here I only refer to the fully completed responses without missing data, so that they can be used for the analysis.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, however, that the information included in the survey does not allow one to make a conclusion on whether these applicants were eager to go to Bard New York or other institutions.

<sup>8</sup> For additional information see Appendix D.

In line with the research question for this complementary section – I have designed an interview guide, which I followed in all of the conversations with my respondents. Additional clarifying queries were formulated at the moment of each of the interviews.

Although the sample of my respondents is modest in its number, I tried to include representatives of several various majors, places of origin and social status in it, to have an opportunity to analyze various perspectives and narratives. Two of my subjects are non-Russian citizens, however, they are coming from the countries in the post-Soviet space, and by living in St. Petersburg, as well as studying in Smolny – they arguably are still familiar with the circumstances of the Russian political system and do share similar experiences with the rest of Russian students. While I would not make strong inferences from their political participation practices and intentions, I believe it is reasonable to learn from their examples about the impression and long-term influences this exchange program has on the variety of students.

It should be noted that the majority of the respondents in my sample, had experience with studying and living at Bard College's main campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, while the other two – participated in BGIA – Bard Globalization and International Affairs program. The latter is hosted in New York City, with students living in the dormitory on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and is comprised of a full-time internship and evening coursework. BGIA is mainly designed for students of international relations, political science and human rights majors, and is quite different from the traditional campus experience in Annandale. Nevertheless, both of the options are funded and organized within PIE's framework, and the hypothesized mechanisms through which IEEPs might achieve their effects, discussed at large in the first chapter of this thesis, are similar.

### **2.3. Dependent Measures**

The main response variable of political participation for quantitative analysis was constructed from the battery of questions tapping into its concept. Seven measures fully listed in the Appendix B were primarily based on the employed typology and main indicators of Ekman and Amnå (see Appendix A). I believe that it was helpful not to restrict the outcome of interest to only one

dependent variable, but instead look at the number of them, due to the fact that political participation is defined quite broadly by the theoretical chapter of this thesis. It also might be informative to look at the variation of responses to the questions, dependent on how costly are different practices in terms of a person's risk, commitment and resources required (time, donations and such).

The survey questions were worded in a form of a likelihood of a respondent to engage in a certain practice. The survey-takers were asked to indicate their intentions to each of the questions on a labeled 5-point scale with response options "Extremely likely", "Somewhat likely", "Somewhat unlikely", "Extremely unlikely", "Have a difficulty to choose an answer to the question". I am arguing that in its contextual meaning the last option, in Russian, can qualify for one of the points at the scale, equal to "Neither likely, nor unlikely" option, despite the fact that in English it might be seen and treated as an item non-response. The reason for it is the wording that is used in the language of the survey. It does not point to the refusal of a respondent to reply to the question itself, but rather to the inability of one to choose between four other suggested options. "Neither likely, nor unlikely" response does not have a word by word correct and fitting translation, which could have been used in the questionnaire.

Due to the possibility of heavy confounding in the studied mechanism, an aforementioned uncertainty in regards to the time-lag of an international exchange program effect, and concerns in regards to its durability, two additional blocks of outcome measurements were introduced. These variables employed attitudes and value types questions, frequently used by such survey agencies as Pew Research Center and its local partners. One block consisted of statements closely associated with traditional and survival values, as well as their opposites – secular-rational and self-expression values, used by Ronald Inglehart in his research (2006). In principle, nine statements, fully described in the Appendix B, should capture the difference between values that are salient in American and Russian framework. According to the article "Mapping Global Values" (Ibid) Russia scores higher than the US on the secular-rational dimension – attributing less

importance to religion, authority and national pride, while the United States leads on the self-expression scale – being in favor of homosexuality, quality of life (rather than economic and physical security), overall, pursue of happiness, and more trust in people (118). Similarly to the first block of the outcome measurements, respondents were asked to state their positions to each on a 5-point scale with options “Completely agree”, “Mostly agree”, “Mostly disagree”, “Completely disagree” or “Have a difficulty to choose an answer”. I am applying the same justification for treating the last option not as a non-response, but rather as a “Neither, nor” answer. Finally, the last block asked respondents how important it is for them to live in a country where certain political rights and liberties are guaranteed. One may argue that through educational experience abroad students first acquire positive attitude towards certain political participation practices, as well as belief in freedoms importance, and their fundamental role in the advancement of a political system. However, the subjection to a one-time experience abroad might not be enough for them to start being actively involved in pre-political and political activities themselves. Therefore, survey-takers were required to answer additional four questions on a 5-point scale with response options “Extremely important”, “Somewhat important”, “Somewhat unimportant”, “Extremely unimportant”, “Have a difficulty to choose an answer to the question”.

Thus, I first look at the response variables one by one, as I have not yet had a chance to observe the measures in pilot studies, and establish whether they are highly correlated with each other. Then, I try to define several separate dependent variables as a simple average of the responses to the corresponding block’s survey items about likelihoods of political and civic participation, adherence to defined values and possession of “liberal” attitudes. I reverse the scoring for the questions where agreement indicates more “traditional” and “survival” value-based preferences.

## **2.4. Moderators and Control Variables**

I hypothesize that there could be two moderators indirectly related to the relationship of my interest. The first one deals with the allocation of treatment. It might be so that students who have previous international experience - were able to acquire transnational behavioral norms, hard or

soft human capital in advance, prior to their time in the US with PIE. In principle, it might be easier for them to get through the selection process and get admitted to the program by highlighting relevant intentions and motivations in their application materials.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is little evidence to suggest that multiple exposures to the IEEPs might result in the added magnitude of soft skills and norms adherence of the students. Thus, I do not believe that it is realistic to expect those students from the “treatment group”, who have been abroad before for a longer period of time, to be on average more politically involved than other students from the PIE group. I only suggest that there would be more successful, i.e. admitted students to the program, than non-successful, among those who have already studied or stayed abroad for a longer time.

In order to test this expectation, I rely on the following questions in the survey:

- Do you have any prior experiences of studying / staying abroad for a long time (with the exception of the possibility of academic mobility in Smolny College and St. Petersburg State University)?
- Have you had an opportunity to apply for intensive summer programs such as BESLI or BSSI?
- Have you ever visited campuses of Bard College or CEU in the US or Europe?

All of these measures are binary, with “Yes” or “No” response options. While the first question directly approaches the expectation outlined above, the second and the third one are necessary to test whether some of the students have already had experience with Bard outside of the semester exchange program.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The logic here is the following: students, who already possess transnational human capital, might be more skilful in ‘guessing’ what the admission committee looks for in their application. Subsequently, they can intentionally or unintentionally add more focus on their personal experience or characteristics, which may score high in the subjectively evaluated sections of the application.

<sup>10</sup> As it was mentioned previously, throughout four years of bachelor studies Smolny College students have an opportunity to come to Bard for a month-long intensive summer program (BESLI or BSSI), and visit CEU in the framework of civic engagement conference.



Another moderator deemed as important is the socio-economic status of a student. Again, I am not expecting everyone from the “treated” group of a higher socio-economic class to be on average less involved in political and pre-political activities in comparison to their less privileged peers. It is rather possible that outliers – passively disengaged individuals, which can be observed in the results, are going to be of a higher socio-economic status. The reasons for this are explained in the “Expectations” section of this project.

In order to measure subjective income status of students the following three questions are used:

- What is your scholarship status?
- What is your employment status?
- How comfortable do you feel in your financial situation compared to your peers and social circle?

Since there is no objective class division in Russian society, it is not common to ask people about their earnings, and there is a high likelihood that most people would self-ascribe to the middle-class or middle income group – I chose these questions to understand socio-economic divisions that might exist between Smolny College students.

One might argue that people of similar social class might spend most of their time together in a homogenous group, thus, the question about being comfortable in one’s social circle will not capture valid information. I am arguing that, on the first place, students have to think about their peers in general, with whom they study or interact on a day-to-day basis. The environment of college and classes that are cross-listed between different study tracks and years - mix the student body to the extent that there is quite a low possibility that one might stay unaffected, or completely separated from the social diversity of the members of this community. Hence, students will likely compare themselves to the range of demographic and income groups.

Other key variables, which could theoretically hide or boost the effects of the treatment by creating a disturbance, would include demographic parameters of a student – sex; program of concentration

(major) one belongs to; geographic location of upbringing; and ideological views. All of these variables are directly asked for in the questionnaire. I am not planning to include age variable in statistical modeling, since bachelor students are likely to be quite similar according to this parameter with a small number of outliers present.

## 2.5. Steps of Analysis

Prior to running an analysis, I construct and justify my dependent measures – I perform correlation tests and factor analysis to achieve composite outcome variables. The reason behind it - is that, primarily, I measure an abstract concept, which might be composed of multiple different aspects and various behavioral practices and choices.

Further, to estimate the effect of participation in the exchange on students' political participation practices – I compare differences between individuals 1) who had experience with Bard PIE; 2) who went for an alternative academic mobility program to another institution either in Europe or Asia; 3) who applied for the exchange but was not selected; 4) and who were not yet satisfying the requirements to be admitted.<sup>11</sup> While initially I planned to estimate propensity scores, using logistic regression, and match observations on the basis of the propensity scores calculated from my data – I realized that I cannot do it appropriately. I fully describe this process in the following chapter. Thus, I decided to focus on the relationship between students' participation in the program and their expected political involvement without claiming that such a relationship is of causal nature.

Therefore, I, first, introduce the unadjusted estimates – the difference-in-means between students' experiences with the help of a one-way ANOVA and non-parametric tests for separate blocks of outcome variables combinations. After that I allow covariates in the equation, as there is a

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<sup>11</sup> Information necessary for division of individuals in the corresponding groups was acquired through questions embedded in the survey's branches. In other words, if one said that he/she applied for the exchange program, I inquired whether they actually got a chance to participate in it. Then, if a response option "no" was selected, I asked about the reasons for it – whether a student was admitted to the program of his/her choosing, and if "yes" – whether they received funding. For the lower college students - I tried to measure levels of their intentions – whether one was interested in the opportunity of exchange on the first place, and whether one was planning to apply for the particular program.

possibility of them having an influence on the outcome variable. I conduct a covariate adjusted multi-way analysis of variance. This way, I am aiming to achieve isolation of the treatment and an increase in the estimates' precision.

For the qualitative section of my research I, first, transcribe the recordings of my interviews. After that I perform open coding of the respondents' answers to the interview's questions, and systematize them on the basis of their frequencies - thematically, descriptively and then analytically into a coding list. Finally, I search for explanatory patterns between these codes, and describe my findings.

The outlined strategy, to my mind, provides the best explanation for the posed research puzzle, has a limited number of validity issues, and contributes to the discussion of the exchange opportunities and exposure to multicultural liberal settings as one of the extensions of the soft power principle.

## Chapter 3. Analysis and Results

### 3.1. Quantitative Section

#### 3.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

By looking at the descriptive statistics of the variables, we can say that most of the people, who took the survey were women. The majority of students either has the full scholarship or partial tuition waiver. Most are unemployed, and feel slightly uncomfortable in their financial situation compared to their peers and social circle. Overall, their ideological views are not clear, but the awareness is present, and it seems that these views are in the process of being formed. Generally, students did not have previous exchange experience, but most, from the lower college, were interested and intending to apply for the exchange semester. From the upper college – third and fourth years of studies – most of the students have applied for the academic mobility but less than half actually got selected for the program and went abroad (see Appendix C).

#### 3.1.2. Outcome Measurements

Prior to making decisions on averaging blocks of questions into separate dependent variables, I decided to analyze correlations between all outcome measurements used in the survey from all the respondents. This step informs the subsequent construction of the composite variables, as it is important to verify how closely the items are related to each other conceptually.

First, I am looking at the measures of political participation.

*Table 1. Correlation matrix for measures of political participation*

	Pol. discussions	Volunteering	Recycling	Voting	Donations	Org. membership	Protests
Pol. discussions	1	<b>0.203</b>	0.116	<b>0.296</b>	<b>0.331</b>	<b>0.323</b>	<b>0.502</b>
Volunteering	<b>0.203</b>	1	<b>0.212</b>	0.119	<b>0.268</b>	<b>0.492</b>	<b>0.244</b>
Recycling	0.116	<b>0.212</b>	1	<b>0.226</b>	<b>0.309</b>	<b>0.243</b>	<b>0.222</b>
Voting	<b>0.296</b>	0.119	<b>0.226</b>	1	<b>0.245</b>	<b>0.182</b>	<b>0.312</b>
Donations	<b>0.331</b>	<b>0.268</b>	<b>0.309</b>	<b>0.245</b>	1	<b>0.430</b>	<b>0.335</b>
Org. membership	<b>0.323</b>	<b>0.492</b>	<b>0.243</b>	<b>0.182</b>	<b>0.430</b>	1	<b>0.460</b>
Protests	<b>0.502</b>	<b>0.244</b>	<b>0.222</b>	<b>0.312</b>	<b>0.335</b>	<b>0.460</b>	1

According to these values, overall, the survey's questions were able to capture relevant political practices, since most of the relationships are significant and positive. I highlight associations significant at the 0.05 level and lower. While most of them are not strong, only few are not correlated: participation in political discussions and recycling; and volunteering in community projects and voting. Fairly strong associations are between participation in political discussions and participation in protests; volunteering in social-oriented projects and political movements; donating money to media, NGOs and political organizations and taking membership in politics; being a member or a volunteer of a political party and participating in a political protest.

The next step for me is to see whether it would make sense to average the value outcome measure. It needs to be reiterated here that this block was introduced to the survey to test whether students exposed to the exchange program in the United States update their beliefs in line with values salient in the American context. Questions used in this section were, hence, a mix of statements tapping into traditional, survival, secular-rational and self-expression values. While I was not planning to combine all of them into one composite measure – my intention was to check whether some of these questions are related closely enough, so that certain sub-indexes can be constructed for the subsequent analysis.

*Table 2. Correlation matrix for measures of pre-dominant values*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Social diversity	1	0.057	0.122	<b>0.207</b>	<b>0.151</b>	0.111	0.087	0.101	<b>0.188</b>
2. Work	0.057	1	<b>-0.317</b>	-0.127	<b>0.186</b>	<b>-0.152</b>	<b>0.338</b>	-0.046	0.106
3. Religion	0.122	<b>-0.317</b>	1	<b>0.196</b>	-0.002	<b>0.389</b>	0.013	-0.035	-0.021
4. Influence	<b>0.207</b>	-0.127	<b>0.196</b>	1	0.019	<b>0.360</b>	0.011	0.028	0.117
5. English	<b>0.151</b>	<b>0.186</b>	-0.002	0.019	1	-0.075	0.071	<b>0.266</b>	0.075
6. Family	0.111	<b>-0.152</b>	<b>0.389</b>	<b>0.360</b>	-0.075	1	-0.023	0.033	-0.060
7. Environment	0.087	<b>0.338</b>	0.013	0.011	0.071	-0.023	1	-0.060	<b>0.309</b>
8. Network	0.101	-0.046	-0.035	0.028	<b>0.266</b>	0.033	-0.060	1	-0.041
9. Env.economy	<b>0.188</b>	0.106	-0.021	0.117	0.075	-0.060	<b>0.309</b>	-0.041	1

Here, not that many indicators are related to each other, which intuitively makes sense, as the questions try to capture various aspects of one's life and beliefs. Some of the weak associations that can be highlighted here nevertheless – are positive links between importance of hard work

and universal involvement in environmental protection; non-importance of religion and disagreement with traditional view of the family as a heterosexual union; disagreement with the need to protect one's culture from foreign influence and support for homosexual relationships; support for universal involvement in environmental protection and priority of environmental problems over economic growth; and, finally, a negative link between appreciation of hard work and non-importance of religion.

Overall, while it seems that the first measure of political participation can be averaged and presented as a composite variable, the values section cannot be treated in the same way. Questions within the block should rather be looked at separately, unless the results of factor analysis can suggest alternative way of approaching this issue.

Finally, I look at the correlation matrix of attitude-type questions.

*Table 3. Correlation matrix for attitudes' measures*

	Freedom of expression	Freedom of media	Freedom of internet	Freedom of assembly
Freedom of expression	1	<b>0.613</b>	<b>0.368</b>	<b>0.610</b>
Freedom of media	<b>0.613</b>	1	<b>0.449</b>	<b>0.571</b>
Freedom of internet	<b>0.368</b>	<b>0.449</b>	1	<b>0.439</b>
Freedom of assembly	<b>0.610</b>	<b>0.571</b>	<b>0.439</b>	1

Most of the associations here are significant, positive and fairly strong. It is important for students to live in the country where they can both openly say what they think, criticize the state, have free media, and be able to participate in demonstrations. Thus, it seems that this measure can be averaged as well.

To verify my conclusions about the first and the third block of outcome variables I looked at the measures' reliability, reflected in Cronbach's alpha. In fact, the resulting alpha coefficients are high for both of the sets of questions – 0.74 for political practices and 0.79 for attitudes. It, thus, supports my previous suggestions that two blocks of questions used in the survey, indeed, tap into the underlying constructs I am interested in, and all of the variables can be used for the construction of two separate indexes for consecutive analysis.

At the same time, according to some authors (Sijtsma 2009), Chronbach's alpha should be viewed as a lower bound for the measure's reliability, not in any way a test for dimensionality. For my analysis it might mean that by putting my trust exclusively in this measure and correlations observed above, I can overlook distinct underlying associations in-between these two sets of variables. Indeed, the results from principal component analysis suggest that more than one factor can be extracted for the political participation set of measures. Attitude block of questions, on the other hand, can be averaged, as there, only one factor is sufficient.

Factor loadings for the key outcome variables indicate that participation in political discussions, voting and protesting are related to each other more than other items. The same applies to volunteering in community-oriented projects and taking membership in a political party, organization or union. In case the recommendation to create two sub-indexes from the block of political participation questions on the basis of this analysis is followed – I would have to exclude items, which on theoretical level are important for the typology employed in this study. An additional complication for such a decision is that different rotations of factors deliver conflicting results in terms of variance they explain. I, thus, believe that it is more beneficial to adhere to the previous decision to construct one index for this whole set of questions. This way, I can achieve a more parsimonious measure, and preserve all of the items, capturing the variety of political and pre-political activities and orientations of my respondents.<sup>12</sup>

For the second block of measurements – I specifically employ exploratory factor analysis to uncover latent structure in this set of variables. A relatively low value of 0.55 of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure shows that the data is not entirely suitable for factor analysis, as the correlations present within the set might not yield fully distinct and reliable factors. It is, nevertheless, possible to make an attempt to find a solution with this KMO as well. According to

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<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of consistency and accountability – I apply the same analytic procedures to these two alternatively constructed outcome variables. In fact, none of the steps of analysis deliver substantively different results from the ones described in details later in the chapter. Documented procedures and findings for this approach can be obtained from the author upon the request.

the scree plot (see Appendix C) and Eigenvalues exceeding 1 – it is advisable to employ a three-factor solution. Despite that, none of the rotations yield meaningful factor loadings that would capture sufficient variance from most of the variables. The procedure rather merely supports observations made from the previous correlation analysis. Therefore, it appears that it would be preferable to analyse items from the second block one by one.

### 3.1.3. Difference-in-means

In this section, I first analyse my findings descriptively, and then move to the statistical tests. In order to properly interpret outcome measures – I rescale the averages from 0 to 100. This allows me to gauge how big or small substantive differences between groups are.

I also eliminate observations, which are not fully completed or do not belong to the conditions I am interested in. This way, my overall data loss is around 49 percent. I, nevertheless, argue that for this project I have sufficient number of units in each of the groups I intend to analyse.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to that, I decided to compare my main treatment and control groups of students to the subset of survey participants who had experience with alternative exchange programs in Europe or Asia. While theoretically I do not have clear expectations from this type of treatment on the main outcome of my interest – political participation intentions, I believe that it is important to consider this group of students in the analysis, as it may bring an additional insight into my project. Moreover, if literature on the value transfer and human capital is right, regardless of which particular international educational exchange is in question, it should bolster students' identity, while assisting them with acquiring transnational skills (Gerhards and Hans 2013; Erbsen 2018). This, in turn, might be reflected in the employed outcome measurements.

From the mean values recorded in the table below – one may notice that, indeed, on average, students who had Bard-specific exchange experience appear to be more politically engaged and committed to democratic values of freedom. Both of the indexes' means are several points larger

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<sup>13</sup> Listed fully in the "Procedure" section of Chapter 2.



for PIE students than for the first and second years, unaccepted applicants, and students, who have taken part in other academic mobility programs.

*Table 4. Mean and standard deviation values of composite variables by student groups*

	<b>Lower College</b>		<b>Not Accepted</b>		<b>Other Programs</b>		<b>PIE</b>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Political Participation	54.9	19.89	50.71	21.48	52.68	25.62	61.43	22.87
Attitudes	87.17	13.11	87.5	13.56	88.54	14.8	91.5	13.73

Although it is yet to be determined whether these differences are statistically significant, the similar trend is unobservable for the value outcome measures.<sup>14</sup> One might argue that PIE students seem to be more in agreement with the statement that hard work is fundamental for achieving success in life, and more opposed to the idea that a family can only be a heterosexual union. I will test these two items, despite the fact that all the other questions within this block delivered quite mixed results.

Interestingly enough, if instead of the broader concept of political participation I was eager to find out in which specific practices students would be willing to engage – from the data of my survey I could see that PIE students are more inclined to costly political activities. Particularly, this applies to volunteering in community-oriented projects, donating money to political organizations, media and parties; becoming a volunteer or a member of a party, organization or a union; and participating in demonstrations or protest activities.

*Table 5. Mean and standard deviation values of all political participation variables by student groups*

	<b>Lower College</b>		<b>Not Accepted</b>		<b>Other Programs</b>		<b>PIE</b>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Political discussions	79.43	30.95	71.25	35.61	81.25	33.92	79	34.37
Volunteering	64.87	34.32	37.5	33.93	60.42	32.78	68	31.89
Recycling	74.04	33.82	87.5	23.65	66.67	32.57	80	23.94
Voting	65.71	39.5	67.5	38.98	70.83	43.74	64	40.88
Donations	26.92	32.92	26.25	32.92	27.08	36.08	39	39.58
Org. membership	32.69	33.54	22.5	32.34	29.17	39.65	39	34.67
Protests	41.03	36.48	42.5	38.13	33.34	34.27	61	34.67

<sup>14</sup> The full table is available in the Appendix C.

From the items of the final outcome measurement block – only students’ responses to the question on the freedom of assembly deserves specific attention. Among respondents, students exposed to American exchange experience seem to value the right to freely attend a protest or demonstration the most. All the other points are arguably equally important for all of the Smolny bachelor students. Thus, it appears that the high value of the attitude composite variable for the PIE group is driven mostly by one item, so, if necessary, it can be regarded separately.

*Table 6. Mean and standard deviation values of all attitude variables by student groups*

	<b>Lower College</b>		<b>Not Accepted</b>		<b>Other Programs</b>		<b>PIE</b>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Freedom of expression	84.54	16.82	86.84	15.29	89.58	12.87	88	17.85
Freedom of media	87.83	15.54	86.84	19.31	91.67	12.31	92	13.92
Freedom of internet	95.72	9.48	93.06	11.52	93.75	11.31	95	12.5
Freedom of assembly	81	25.94	81.94	22.37	79.16	27.87	91	20.26

One additional observation concerns deviations of the data points in all three outcome measurement blocks. Overall, students had more varying opinions on their future political behaviors than on certain value statements and measures of democratic attitudes. Particularly, the biggest variability in responses can be observed in connection to “costly” political participation practices – questions on voting, donating money to political parties, organizations and media, taking membership in certain institutionalized structures, and participating in protest activities. At the same time, these student groups demonstrate more homogenous views on democratic freedoms, specifically regarding media and internet, as well as on the concept of “foreign influence” and importance of personal network. This might mean that it is easier for students to reply to questions from the second and third block, and on average, their positions are quite democratic. When it comes to political participation, however, students either have very distinct ideas on how much involved they are planning to be in politics in the coming years, or they might be uncertain in their assessment of their future practices.

Figure 1 below graphically displays the main point of my research interest – distributions of the composite measure of political participation by student groups. In line with the previous

conclusion the box plots show that the data collected through the survey appears to be quite scattered. The figure also implies that the data is more variable for the groups of students who have undergone exchange programs. This is expectable given the small number of observations within these categories (23 students in the PIE group, and 11 students in the other programs group). There are, however, no outliers present.

While PIE student group demonstrates higher political participation median value than the groups of not accepted students and of those who went for alternative exchange programs, it is yet to be determined whether they are in fact different.

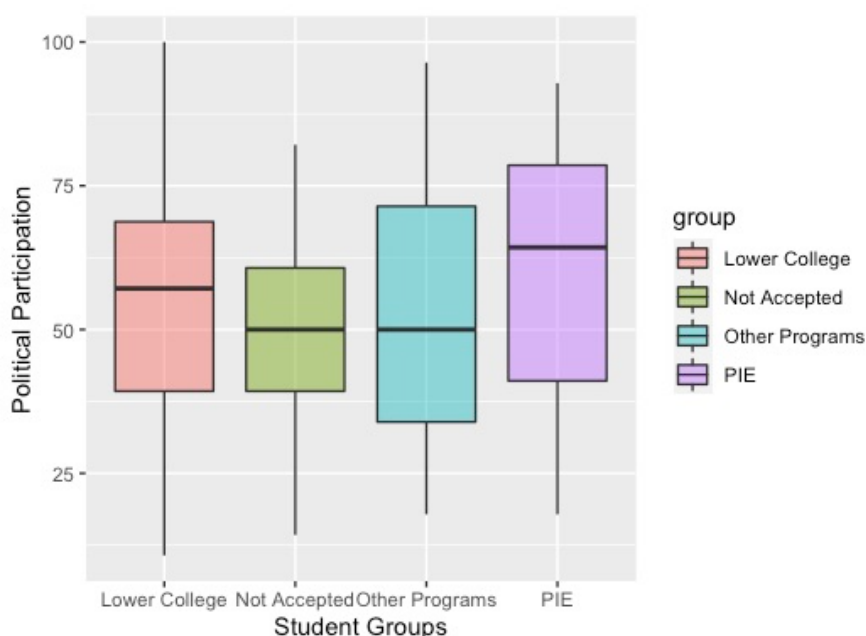


Figure 1. Box plots of students' political participation intentions

It would have been an example of naïve causality if one was to make conclusions based on the data from the groups as they are. Since this study was not in control of allocation of the treatment, as well as of how random it was – it is not possible to expect that groups of students are close to each other in their key attributes and overall characteristics. Hence, the estimation of the exchange program effect on students' political interest and participation practices would not be accurate.

In order to eliminate potential bias, and to address said concerns, together with the problem of unobserved confounders – the subsequent analysis should be made on the subsets of groups under study. In other words, treatment's effect size should be estimated by matching - comparison of

those units of analysis who received treatment with those who would have an equal probability to receive the same treatment, but in reality remained in the control. This probability is referred to as the propensity score (Rudas 2018, 173).

In order to successfully employ matching procedure, the researcher should have a very good idea about variables associated with treatment assignment, and should make her best attempt to include most of these variables in the matching procedure. This has to deal with the problem of endogeneity and the so-called “ignorable treatment assignment” assumption (Morgan and Winship 2007). Omitted variables present major problems for non-experimental studies, since they create a biased estimate of the effect. At the same time, without full information on the present covariates, the test of condition in which treatment assignment of observations is independent of the outcome might be unattainable (Olmos and Govindasamy 2015).

One of the issues that I had to encounter while planning implementation of this method of analysis was a realization that my dataset might not contain the sufficient amount of information and covariates that could have explained students’ allocation into the exchange program. Although I collected a number of demographic parameters – such as students’ sex, age, geographic location of upbringing, and socio-economic status; details on one’s educational journey – major, experiences abroad, previous exchange programs; as well as information on their ideological views – these might not be decisive for the selection committee’s decisions. As it was mentioned above, the key parameters evaluated by the program’s administrators are applicants scores on English test, GPA, recommendation letters, essay responses, and demonstrated involvement on campus or with volunteer work. Since I did not have access to this information on the organizational level, and since most of the students do not have a possibility to accurately assess their own fit in the program according to the Bard’s criteria – arguably the most crucial information for application of the matching technique was not available for me. Therefore, I can not successfully determine the covariates that influence group assignment.

Perhaps in other version of the study one may request survey respondents to self-assess and report their own levels of involvement in volunteer activities, their knowledge and fluency in English, as well as their current GPA scores. On the basis of these covariates it would have been possible to achieve some sort of balance, and remove certain, though probably not all of the problems, related to self-selection and groups' similarities.

In the current project I had to proceed without this information. Thus, I decided to focus on the hypothesized relationships - to determine whether they exist, and to address the question of causality in the follow-up studies.

In order to compare differences between more than two groups and treatments I can turn to analysis of variance or nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test, in case some of the assumptions for the independent-measures ANOVA are not met. The validity of the ANOVA depends on three main points: 1) the observations within each sample should be independent; 2) the populations from which my sample's groups are selected must be normal; and 3) these populations must have equal variances (Gravetter and Wallnau 2013, 421).

Although it can be argued that measurements of students' political participation intentions, values and attitudes are related to each other due to the shared group-level characteristics – similar destination of the exchange program, system of education and so on, independent observation assumption is, nevertheless, satisfied. Primarily, this is achieved by aggregation of the mean scores of students' political participation intentions for each group and by their comparison.

To check the normality assumption, I am analyzing the ANOVA model residuals for all groups together. The QQ plot below (Figure 2) shows that most of the points fall approximately along the reference line, so that I can assume normality. This conclusion is supported by the Shapiro-Wilk test. The p-value is not significant ( $p = 0.07$ ), hence, null hypothesis stating that the data is normally distributed cannot be rejected.

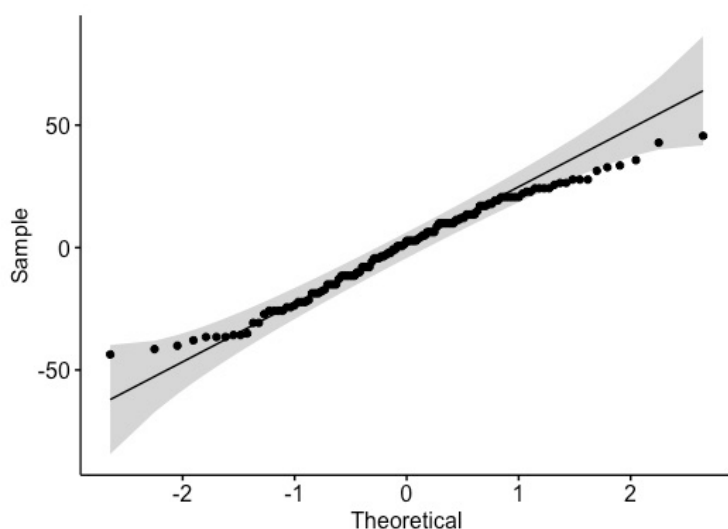


Figure 2. *QQ plot of the residuals for ANOVA political participation model*

For the assumption of equal variance, I perform Bartlett's test. Unlike some other approaches, Bartlett's test can work with more than two groups and does not require equal sample sizes across them. According to this test ( $p = 0.48$ ), there is no evidence to suggest that there is significant variance across four groups in the composite measure of students' political participation intentions.

Based on satisfied assumptions I can proceed with a one-way ANOVA to determine whether difference-in-means outlined above in the descriptive part of this section is, in fact, statistically significant. The analysis of variance indicates that there are no significant differences between the four student groups,  $F(3, 119) = 0.76$ ,  $p = 0.52$ , generalized eta squared = 0.02. In other words, political participation intentions of students, who have returned to Russia after participating in PIE exchange semester, do not appear to be statistically different from other Smolny College's bachelor students.

I repeat the procedure to test four other observations highlighted above: PIE students' overall score of democratic attitudes, high regard for the freedom of assembly, as well as respondents' diverging reactions to the statements that hard work is a key for success, and that family is, exclusively, a union between a man and a woman.

Assumption of normality is violated for each of these response variables. I, thus, turn to the Kruskal-Wallis test to determine whether samples in my study originate from the same distribution

or if there are significant differences between treated and control groups of students. The outcomes of the tests indicated no significant differences among educational exchange program conditions.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.1.4. Multi-way Analysis of Variance

For the next step of analysis, I could have either chosen multiple linear regression or multi-way ANOVA. I decided in favour of the analysis of variance primarily because all of my hypothesized covariates and controls are discrete variables measured on nominal or ordinal scale with few categories present.

In order to run adjusted models – I need to recode several variables to simplify my interpretations of the estimates. I turn student groups variable into a dummy, indicating presence and absence of PIE exchange experience. I exclude eleven respondents who have been enrolled in alternative academic mobility programs at other universities. Similarly, I change the variety of students' majors into a dummy format, where mathematics, history, art and natural sciences tracks are coded as zeroes, while social sciences and philosophy that teach students to critically reflect on politics and social structures, are coded as ones. Students' self-reported ideological views are analysed qualitatively and recoded on the basis of their level of formation. Most of the students vary in terms of their understanding of a concept of ideology itself, rather than in terms of the left-right division. Thus, the first level of this variable represents a complete absence of respondent's ideological views, while the last one accounts for one's established political preferences. If a student was to describe what they believe in without using political terms and concepts – they would have qualified for the middle category in this three-level factor. Finally, the geographic location of students' upbringing is represented through a dummy, where regions are divided between those with more and less diverse political life. I utilize presence of Navalny's regional offices in a federal subject as a proxy measurement for this classification.<sup>16</sup> One might argue that

<sup>15</sup> Test for the composite democratic attitude outcome –  $H = 3.11$  (3,  $N = 123$ ),  $p = 0.37$ . Test for the outcome measurement "freedom of assembly" –  $H = 4.52$  (3,  $N = 123$ ),  $p = 0.21$ . Test for the "work" value –  $H = 1.25$  (3,  $N = 123$ ),  $p = 0.74$ . Test for the "family" value –  $H = 1.78$  (3,  $N = 123$ ),  $p = 0.62$ .

<sup>16</sup> Alexei Navalny, the key non-systemic opposition political figure, was aiming to compete in 2018 Russian presidential elections. For the campaign purposes a number of regional offices of a politician and activist were opened

the choice of locations for these offices was determined by strategic factors and external circumstances conducive to the development of an alternative political agenda in each of the regions. Thus, if the assumption that social environment positively influences one's political participation is correct (as cited in Huckfeldt 1979, 581), the inclusion of such variable in my model would be important. Alternatively, I used the index of Russian regions protest levels (Semenov 2018). This index reflects the total number of public events with protest requirements in each of the Russian federal subjects for the period of 2012-2016. The events were considered by the authors of the index regardless of the formats and number of participants, with the primary data taken from Integrum.<sup>17</sup> The results of the model with this alternative control variable are not substantively different from the ones reported here. These results might be obtained from the author upon the request.

Variable selection for the model was determined by pre-analysis plan outlined in the second chapter of this thesis (sections 2.4 and 2.5), as well as by the stepwise regression analysis. All of the assumptions for the test of political participation model are satisfied.

*Table 7. Estimated marginal means for students' political participation intentions*

		Mean	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Intercept		38.906	16.738	61.073
Ideological views	In formation	10.917	1.404	20.43
	Formed	14.041	5.048	23.034
Socio-economic status	Less comfortable	-6.156	-22.935	10.624
	Quite comfortable	3.738	-11.662	19.139
	More comfortable	4.917	-13.359	23.194
Major	Social Sciences & Philosophy	10.169	2.079	18.259
PIE exchange		3.053	-6.345	12.451
Prior experiences abroad		0.505	-7.794	8.804
Sex	Female	-1.584	-12.659	9.49
Region of origin	With Navalny's office	3.945	-4.01	11.899
n	110			

prior to the elections. Now, these offices operate in 41 federal subject of Russian Federation, focusing on solving regional problems, conducting anti-corruption investigations, fighting for the environment, supporting independent candidates for local elections, and running other socio-political campaigns.

<sup>17</sup> information agency and one of the largest diversified media companies in the CIS.



The model explains a small share of variance in the response variable – around 14% (adjusted R-squared = 0.143). I found a statistically-significant difference in average students' political participation intentions yielded by presence and level of their ideological views ( $F(2, 99) = 5.08$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and type of their major ( $F(1, 99) = 6.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). There are no interactions between terms.<sup>18</sup>

*Table 8. ANOVA table (Type II tests) for composite measure of political participation intentions*

	<b>Sum Sq</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>F value</b>	<b>Pr(&gt;F)</b>
Ideological views	3521	2	5.082	0.007**
Socio-economic status	2015	3	1.938	0.128
Major	2155	1	6.221	0.014*
PIE exchange	144	1	0.415	0.52
Prior experiences abroad	5	1	0.014	0.904
Sex	28	1	0.081	0.777
Region of origin	335	1	0.968	0.327
Residuals	34294	99		
n	110			

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed significant pairwise differences between students with no ideological views and those, who are in the process of forming them ( $p < 0.05$ ), as well as between students with no ideological views and those, who have clear political preferences ( $p < 0.001$ ). Significant pairwise difference is also found between students of social science and philosophy majors in comparison to all other programs of concentration ( $p < 0.01$ ). No significant difference in mean political participation intentions was identified for students with and without PIE educational exchange experience. Therefore, it can be concluded that even with regard to potential covariates in the relationship of my interest – the primary hypothesis of this project does not find support. Russian students' enrolment in Bard College's Program in International Education does not have effect on students' political participation intentions.

Since assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance are violated for alternative dependent measures – composite outcome for democratic attitudes, as well as items from the value questionnaire's block – I do not conduct adjusted tests with them. I believe that evidence from

<sup>18</sup> Due to the space limits, I do not include multiple versions of the model with different interactions.

non-parametric analyses reported in the previous section of this chapter, as well as conclusions derived from the multi-way ANOVA for the composite political participation measure, allow me to conclude that participation in the international exchange program in the US does not result in Russian students enhanced political participation.

### 3.1.5. Hypotheses 2 and 3

In order to test the second hypothesis of my research suggesting that students with prior experience in international settings and multicultural environments on average are successful in being admitted to PIE – I first have a look at the Pearson's Chi-squared test. In fact, the p-value is lower than the 0.05 significance level, so that I can reject the null hypothesis that participation in PIE exchange is independent of students' prior experiences abroad.

I then employ logistic regression to identify strength of the effect this independent variable has on one's enrolment in the international educational exchange program.

*Table 9. Regression results and odds for a statistically significant variable*

	<b>Regression coefficient</b>	<b>Odds</b>
Prior experiences abroad	1.083 (0.481)*	2.955
Constant	-1.776 (0.326)	
n	112	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The odds represented in the right column of Table 9 are interpreted as probabilities. It can be calculated that there is a 75% chance that prior experience abroad will lead to one's successful enrolment in PIE.

For the final hypothesis I update my multi-way ANOVA model, even though from the previous section I could have concluded that there is no evidence to suggest that students who stay politically disengaged after enrollment in PIE, are people of certain socio-economic status. Indeed, this model has much lower explanatory power than the previous one (adjusted R-squared = 0.057), and there are no significant differences between groups under study. Given that there is no relationship between involvement in international educational exchange and students' political participation intentions – I do not pursue this hypothesis any longer.

*Table 10. ANOVA table (Type II tests) for composite measure of political participation intentions reduced model*

	<b>Sum Sq</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>F value</b>	<b>Pr(&gt;F)</b>
Socio-economic status	2467	3	2.135	0.1
PIE exchange	513	1	1.332	0.251
Socio-economic status*PIE exchange	2211	3	1.913	0.132
Residuals	40058	104		
n	112			

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### 3.2. Qualitative Section

In contrast to defined expectations, the results of the quantitative part of my research confirmed only one of the hypotheses. The central question of this project was found to be inaccurate in its presumption. Not only it cannot receive a positive answer, but, as follows from the analysis, there is no relationship between Russian students' enrollment in international educational exchange program and their consequential political participation intentions.

Nevertheless, the chosen strategy for the interpretative section of this project has not been affected by these results. Since I am interested in students' narratives and individual reflections on their exchange experience in the US, I am not in any way constrained or influenced by the findings from my survey data.

Content analysis of interviews collected among students of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences<sup>19</sup> revealed patterns indicated by the intersection of the main and subsidiary codes. To confirm the semantic connection between the codes – excerpts from the interviews are given in the sections describing the results below. The code table that was used in the analysis is presented in the Appendix D.

#### 3.2.1. Program's Effects

As follows from the analysis of the interviews, during their reflections, the majority of respondents did not explicitly mention political participation intentions or involvement in direct manifest

<sup>19</sup> A general sample of respondents is presented in the Appendix D.

political activities covered by Ekman's and Amna's typology. This way, it could not be consistently perceived and recorded as a single code. Latent forms of participation were, on the other hand, covered more broadly. In some cases, students mentioned that their media consumption practice has changed, in others – that their ideological views and understanding of certain social issues have developed:

...for me it was such a breakthrough thing, I took a course called "Writing on International Affairs", and it was actually about journalism in general, and we read very very different newspapers and media that write about news in America, and we tried to write something ourselves, and for me it certainly was such an insight into the American news, because before that I somehow didn't really follow anything very much, and I didn't read the New York Times every weekday, and didn't listen to their podcasts, how am I doing it now, yes... In general, it struck me that there are free media, and there are a lot of them, and they write very different things in very different ways. (Respondent 4)

...for example, I was at the Bernie Sanders rally in Queens and probably this influenced my beliefs, because I began to think more about the social sphere of the state, that I was more interested in some kind of leftist ideas. I somehow became strongly against some libertarian beliefs. (Respondent 1)

Bard College and the United States in many ways, probably open for Russian students problems and opportunities that they ignored, in the sense of some kind of civic engagement - for many it turns out, well, I hope that it turns out that, let's say racism is a real problem, that the problem of sexual harassment is serious too, because in Russia it's easy to pretend that this is absolutely not there, especially when the vast majority of the population supports you, even the professors there. And after Bard College, I hope that for, for many - these topics have become more relevant and more pressing. (Respondent 7)

This, in turn, seemed to affect students' desire to participate in local, community-based initiatives (or to start their own), and engage in more dialogs dedicated to societal problems:

...because of this, I began to think a lot about what is happening back home, and what can I personally do about it, and somehow I got some kind of consciousness that there is some community - big or small, and you can in a certain way work for its benefit, and do something like that. That's why I think, based on this logical chain, I worked as an observer on a volunteer basis during St. Petersburg's elections that were held in September, it was interesting (laughs)... and then we started, we launched an initiative against harassment at our faculty, and there we just got such a company, everyone went to Bard, everyone realized their civic position and began doing something. (Respondent 4)

We had a lot of power and will - the cohort that returned to Smolny. We started discussing what we can do, what we can change in Smolny, what we can negotiate there, for example, with BGIA, what we can do about the water fountains, how can we contact the Student Union, well, we had a feeling that we'll bring the change. (Respondent 3)

I believe in something like small deeds. [...] It's not that I actually participate in some kind of activism till this day, but I can say that my only activism is to talk on in the ears of all

my friends and acquaintances, about these problems that are often not noticed. (Respondent 7)

With that, students were cautious about extending their activities further to conventional forms of political participation. Partially, this was explained by the knowledge of negative experiences with protest movements and activism among respondents' close circle of friends or family, absence of safe space for students' action, and fear of sanctioning from the state:

Civic consciousness - yes, or something like that, of course, I would like it to become more spread in Russia, so that people understand that everything that happens to them, everything that happens, roughly speaking, with political power and the state - this is directly related to them. I would like to see more of this, of course, and perhaps, if we choose between not having anything or having at least some organizations, even with which I do not quite agree - it is better to have at least some organizations with which I do not quite agree. [...] but for now if I speak for myself - I do not belong to any activism or movements yet, because... well, there were some negative experiences of my close people, and I was strongly advised not to get involved in this whole thing, and I follow these recommendations. (Respondent 5)

I think... I don't know, I'll only say for myself, maybe for others it's not the case. Well, it's just that except for the faculty, well, in my life — there aren't any other spaces where I can act relatively safely and calmly. So that I can do something. I don't quite imagine it, I think, I assume that for many - it is the same thing. (Respondent 4)

...politics is not my thing at all, I don't understand it, and honestly I don't really want to understand it. My nerves are dearer to me. (Respondent 6)

Interestingly enough, only one of the respondents has actively expressed her antipolitical stance. It was not possible to encourage the student to elaborate more on the reasons for that, but I can cautiously suggest that in this case it could be related to the socio-economic status of the program's participant, in line with expectations formulated in the Hypothesis 3. Since my sample of respondents is not extensive and I cannot verify this suggestion – this could be explored further in some similar interpretative studies.

When it comes to the mechanisms through which the described effects were achieved, it appears that most of my assumptions described in the first chapter of this thesis were correct. While political socialization and empowerment were not necessarily the only factors, contributing to this relationship, they certainly were at play. The students widely reflected on the variety of community participatory activities, though mainly of volunteering and not protest manifestation character,

courses with a socio-political focus, overall cultural experiences, and relationships both private and professional, which in their opinion became central for their stay in the US during PIE, and for their subsequent development:

Well, I talked a lot with the person I'm now in a relationship with, and he is a big supporter of Bernie Sanders, and since he was very actively following this whole campaign, I became much more involved in this and began to understand much more. (Respondent 1)

I had a course, which was called "Power Politics", and the course was super interesting, because as part of the course various activists came to us three or more times and talked about their work. (Respondent 5)

Students who spent their semester at Bard's campus in Annandale were encouraged to participate in volunteering projects with the Center of Civic Engagement. This involvement was rewarded by organized trips and excursions to New York City and other towns around campus. Although this incentive was well assessed by most of the respondents, they talked with pleasure and interest about their experiences with assisting farmers, teaching kids from low-income families, sorting donations at the church, organizing potluck dinners with seniors of black community in Kingston and so on:

...if you want to go to New York for free, without having to pay something like \$36 back and forth for the trip, then you can participate in a volunteering project. That's it, nothing more. If you do not want to go to New York for free - you do not need to participate. It was interesting for me to take part in a volunteering project, that's why, yes, I kind of helped, but it wasn't like for the purpose of the trip [...] we just had to sort the food to... umm, they either once a week, or somehow else, I already forgot, they feed the needy, so we just had to help them prepare the space. Well, actually - there's nothing too big or global, some people went to the farm there, some helped with the children. That is, you know, more like another additional opportunity to check out the American culture, and to do something else. (Respondent 6)

Among other main influences of the program, the most common one was a motivation to compare life and "way of things", including politics and social situations, between two countries.

Students mainly focused on discussions revolving around the educational process, particularly the quality of teaching and learning in Smolny in comparison to Bard. In all of the cases it was found to be inferior. All of the respondents, who covered this point, highlight that they still believe that Smolny is one of the best faculties in Russia, but they get upset by the lack of preparation for

seminars by some of the professors, lack of interest for the process from their peers, and worse organizational structure and equipment of the college:

It becomes much more obvious when the professor is not ready for his lecture, and in Smolny it happens quite often .. fortunately, it does not apply to the professors with whom I mainly work here [...] but we have professors, who are trying to rely solely on some kind of charisma, or on charisma which they only think that they have - but this is not always the case so... yes, in general - this is a sad picture. (Respondent 7)

...after Bard it was impossible for me to imagine that I would come to the class, take out the phone and start scrolling social media feed and... well, I could not understand why about half the class I went to, half the people there really came just for that. Well then, I don't understand why to go to the university at all. (Respondent 3)

The way it is structured there, there it is done again *for* people, there it is done so that a person who has some troubles, really can feel comfortable, so that they can overcome everything and become only better, but here for some reason this system is a little lame, and well, is somehow different. (Respondent 8)

Apart from that, students were encouraged by their experiences to think about Russia and opportunities there in future. Some of the respondents started to consider emigration. This was either due to the professional reasons, better universities abroad and promising academic career prospects, or due to their changed views of the country itself:

Before I left, I was like, damn, here we are, of course, everyone says that you need to emigrate from Russia or leave, but no, we need to change Russia, and all that... but then I realized that probably it will not be possible to change Russia and in the end mmm you need to head off, as they say. (Respondent 2)

...after America, well, oddly enough, my stay in America, it made me think a lot about my life in Russia, and how everything is arranged in Russia, I think this was also facilitated by the fact that during... well, the professors encouraged us during classes... because often we read materials specifically about America there, and we would give perspectives of the people from other places in the world, and how certain things work back home. (Respondent 4)

Not all of the observations made by the participants of the program were critical of their experiences in Russia. Students were impressed and at times shocked by inequality, poverty, visible on the streets of New York City, racism, and absence of affordable health care and education in the US:

After that I began to look in a completely different way at free health care, regardless of its quality - it is a huge privilege! And free higher education, excuse me, well, it is so well spread and works in Russia and Belarus, and in these countries, it gives so many

opportunities in life, which teens from America may often see as something beyond their dreams. (Respondent 3)

It was also interesting to compare different parts of America, different, I don't know, specifics of the cities, which are also very far from Russian reality, and not always in a good way. (Respondent 8)

Finally, as a result of this international educational exchange experience students emphasized that they gained the variety of academic and professional skills, self-confidence, motivation, independence and maturity:

Before it seemed to me that only those who have a lot of money can go to America, now I think, damn, in principle, I can do it as well, and everything became, all kinds of dreams about something else - they became more real. (Respondent 2)

I think that after the exchange I began to look at my opportunities in not such a bad way, because before that...of course, I have been studying English for a long time and all that stuff, and in Smolny I also communicate and debate in English, but the question was - can I live in an English-speaking environment and feel comfortable? I realized that I can and I feel very comfortable there, and that this is it [...] when you find yourself at Harvard, when you make friends from there, and when you communicate with them, then you understand that these are the same people, with the same thoughts as yours, and perhaps your thoughts are even, well, if not deeper, then at least they are on the same level. And so you think - hmm, maybe I thought something wrong before that, maybe it's worth reconsidering my attitude to universities in general, to elitism, and so on. (Respondent 5)

...this is probably an opportunity to get to know yourself a little better, to understand what you want, what is valuable for you [...] my personal worries with which I went through this experience really made me more mature. (Respondent 6)

All of these – are in line with the aforementioned works of Pierre Bourdieu, Gerhards and Hans (2016), and findings of the previous studies of IEEPs.

### **3.2.2. Selection into the Program**

While the collected material allows me to investigate more of interesting reflections and program evaluations of the students, I believe, this is beyond the scope of the current project. With that, I would like to turn my attention to the mechanisms of selection into the program, and the opportunity structure of PIE.

When talking about their motivations for applying for the exchange with Bard, students noted that they were mostly driven by curiosity, as well as desire to see their partner campus and American



liberal arts education for themselves. Another important reason was an opportunity to go to the United States. Here it needs to be emphasized that none of the respondents said that they had an idealized picture of America – a certain impression, created by the popular culture and world cinema, or a specific urge to go there. On the contrary, most of the students rationally regarded this as a rare chance to visit the country that is much further away than Europe, and an opportunity to spend some time abroad in a capacity of a temporary resident and not a traveler. Additional important considerations were related to the financial component of the program, high number of accepted applicants, and easier, transparent application procedure:

I don't think that America was some kind of my dream that came true because I was accepted to BGIA. Probably just among all of the options that I had, where to apply for an exchange - it was the simplest...well, it wasn't like any other general exchange program of St. Petersburg State University, where you need to fill in a lot of things, some forms, and it is not clear where are you actually going. This is a proven place, a proven road, which many people take. (Respondent 1)

Although none of the respondents could definitely guess how the selection process to the program is organized, most of them said that prior the exchange they were quite active in their extracurricular work, and that they devoted a substantive part of their application to descriptions of these activities. Some – used to be members of the Student Union or ecological initiative at Smolny, others – participated in debate tournaments, European Youth Parliament, and other volunteering projects:

Actually, for 3 years I was a head, yes, of a project dedicated to children in an orphanage. There we organized various events for them, mainly sport activities. (Respondent 8)

Apart from that more than half of the students had prior experiences abroad with language schools, conferences and NGOs:

Somewhere in 2016 I went to Austria for a language course, and there I lived in the dorm... (Respondent 2)

In fact, I've been to New York before, I studied there when I was a teenager, I went for courses. After that I went there with a friend... (Respondent 6)

There is a chance that I spoke to the most active and exceptional program participants because of the way I recruited the respondents for my interviews. One might argue that there could be self-selection bias present. However, based on the findings from the quantitative section of this study, complemented by these interpretative observations, I can conclude that this exchange program, indeed, rewards students with specific characteristics and experiences. One more argument in favor of the conclusion that PIE, to a certain extent, functions as a gatekeeper – is that it does not seem to recruit students from certain majors, or does it very rarely:

It seems to me that it's strange that people from some majors travel more often, and some majors, unfortunately, do not go at all, and it is not clear what is causing this, because among other majors there are also very motivated students, who really know why they need to go for an exchange and what they want to learn there on campus [...] I think Computer Science and Complex Systems folks, I personally don't know anyone who would pass the selection... (Respondent 8)

To conclude, Program in International Education of Bard College seem to provide a unique opportunity for students to go abroad – most of my respondents reflected on the fact that they felt grateful for the chance to study in the US for free, without having to pay for accommodation, and, in certain cases, even for the flight tickets – but, majorly, the program supports those applicants, who might have already followed international norms and aimed at active community-oriented behaviors.

## Conclusion

The origin of this project is an observed paradox. While some politicians and public figures are searching for the new tools of soft power and influence, investing in various projects, including international educational exchange programs, researchers rarely empirically assess the effects of these costly and bureaucratically demanding ventures on their main target audience – hundreds of students, coming to Europe and the US from less favorable contexts.

The goal of my study was to identify the relationship between Russian students' involvement in an educational exchange in the US and their subsequent political participation intentions. The case program chosen for this project provided me with an opportunity to not only explore the main research question, but also to have an insight into the overall liberal arts education system, mechanisms through which a relationship in focus can be explained, and to determine whether the selective approach of the admission process is biased in its nature.

The results of my research are twofold. On the one hand, statistical analysis of my survey data, collected at the first stage of this project, shows that there is no difference between students' political participation intentions, conditional on whether they were involved in Bard College's Program in International Education or not. The predictors that were found to be associated with positive changes in students' political behaviors are the program of concentration (major) one belongs to, and the level of student's ideological views development. This way, the respondents who are studying social sciences and philosophy, as well as those who have clear ideological stances, on average, are found to voice more politically engaged intentions. On the other hand, however, the interviews taken at the complementary second stage of this research helped to shed more light on educational exchange program's influences. According to the findings, after the exchange students in many ways update their views on the realities of their experiences back home, and start to adapt their latent political participation practices accordingly. In other words, students expand the range of their "pre-political orientations" and civil "stand-by" activities after they come back from the semester spent with Bard's program in the US (Ekman and Amnå 2012). These

results correspond with the ideas, expressed by the authors of the typology employed in this study. As expected, youth in a non-democratic context rather chooses to focus on latent political participation practices, because of the fact that these are not associated with risk and sanctioning from the state.

The undisputed finding from both parts of the research is that the majority of students, who get admitted to the program in question, has the advantage of previous experiences abroad. Before going to the US, they might already possess transnational skills, be community-oriented, and can adhere to the norms, emphasized in Bard's mission.

The described results should be taken with caution. First of all, this study will benefit from a replication with proper matching procedure introduced, so that the discussion of the results could revolve around causal effects. Second, it might be illuminating to run an extended version of interpretative research with a larger sample of respondents, including those who did not go to PIE. This, might give a better explanation of differences between students' views and involvements, as well as exclude the possibility that the whole student body of Smolny College is exceptional in its multidisciplinary interests and activities. This direction of further research might additionally rule out or confirm the placebo effect of the program's presence in educational curriculum of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences. During interviews some of the respondents mentioned that they believe PIE motivates a lot of students to work harder on their first years in college, since they can see the potential reward for their efforts. It is left for the future to uncover whether such a motivation extends to students' extra-curricular activities, such as volunteering and work on campus.

As it was mentioned before, it is hard to measure the duration of such treatment's effects on students' beliefs and behaviors. Although some of my respondents from the senior year of college, who went abroad more than a year ago, shared their impressions and evaluations of the program in a similar way to their junior colleagues, it remains being a limitation of this study.

Finally, the external validity of this project is arguable. In this case study I dealt with a very specific cohort of students, who study in one of the rarest higher educational institutions in the Post-Soviet space, and who live in St. Petersburg, the second biggest city and the cultural capital of Russia. While the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences is a part of the traditional St. Petersburg State University, the organizational structure of education in Smolny with its small seminar-styled classes, flexible curriculum dependent on student choices, and small ratio of students to professors, remains being unique. It might be argued that those high school students who apply to this faculty on the first place, knowing about double-degree partnership with American college, and capable of passing a very high score on state exams to be admitted to study there, are already quite outstanding. Therefore, all of the generalizations from my findings should be done in a consistent and thoughtful manner.

Despite all of these considerations, the current project seems to be the first, and yet quite a successful attempt to study international educational exchange programs, and youth exposure to multicultural liberal settings in the context of their political effects.

## Appendix A. Employed Typology

Table 11. Typology of different forms of disengagement, involvement, civic engagement and political participation

	Non-participation (disengagement)		Civil participation (latent-political)		Political participation (manifest)		
	Active forms (antipolitical )	Passive forms (apolitical)	Social involvement (attention )	Civic engagement (action )	Formal political participation	Activism (extra -parliamentary political participation)	
						Legal/ extra - parliamentary protests or actions	Illegal protests or actions
<b>Individual forms</b>	Non -voting  Actively avoiding reading newspapers or watching TV when it comes to political issues  Avoid talking about politics  Perceiving politics as disgusting  Political disaffection	Non -voting  Perceiving politics as uninteresting and unimportant  Political passivity	Taking interest in politics and society  Perceiving politics as important	Writing to an editor  Giving money to charity  Discussing politics and societal issues, with friends or on the Internet  Reading newspapers and watching TV when it comes to political issues  Recycling	Voting in elections and referenda  Deliberate acts of non -voting or blank voting  Contacting political representatives or civil servants  Running for or holding public office  Donating money to political parties or organizations	Boycotting , boycotting and political consumption  Signing petitions  Handing out political leaflets	Civil disobedience  Politically motivated attacks on property
<b>Collective forms</b>	Deliberate non - political lifestyles, e.g. hedonism, consumerism  In extreme cases: random acts of non - political violence (riots), reflecting frustration, alienation or social exclusion	*Non -reflected * non - political lifestyles	Belonging to a group with societal focus  Identifying with a certain ideology and/or party  Life -style related involvement: music, group identity, clothes, et cetera  For example: veganism, right -wing Skinhead scene, or left -wing anarcho - punk scene	Volunteering in social work, e.g. to support women 's shelter or to help homeless people  Charity work or faith - based community work  Activity within community based organizations	Being a member of a political party, an organization, or a trade union  Activity within a party, an organization or a trade union (voluntary work or attend meetings)	Involvement in new social movements or forums  Demonstrating, participating in strikes, protests and other actions (e.g. street festivals with a distinct political agenda)	Civil disobedience actions  Sabotaging or obstructing roads and railways  Squatting buildings  Participating in violent demonstrations or animal rights actions  Violence confrontations with political opponents or the police

Source: Ekman and Amnå, "Political Participation and Civic Engagement", Table 2, 295.

## Appendix B. Survey's Outcome Measurement Questions

### Block 1:

1. How likely are you going to discuss politics and societal issues with friends or on the Internet this year?
2. How likely are you going to volunteer in community-oriented projects or do social work this or next year?
3. How likely are you going to recycle this or next year?
4. How likely are you going to vote in the next elections?
5. How likely are you going to donate money to political parties, organizations or media this or next year?
6. How likely are you going to become a volunteer or a member of a party, organization or a union this or next year?
7. How likely are you going to participate in a demonstration or a protest activity this or next year?

### Block 2:

1. It is a good thing for any society to be made up of people from different races, religions and cultures.
2. It is important to work hard to get ahead in life.
3. Religion is important for the development of good moral values.
4. Our way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence.
5. Knowledge of English is a primary skill that is crucial for success in the world today.
6. Family is a union between a man and a woman.
7. There are small steps that should be taken by everyone to protect the environment.
8. It is important to have a strong personal network to succeed in the world today.
9. Protecting the environment should be given priority by both the society and the government, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs.

### Block 3:

How important is it to you...

1. To live in a country where you can openly say what you think and can criticize the state?
2. To live in a country where the media can report the news without state censorship?
3. To live in a country where people have access to the internet without government censorship or interference?
4. To live in a country where you can freely attend a protest or a demonstration?

## Appendix C. Supplementary Tables and Figures

Table 12. Descriptive statistics for the demographic variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
Sex	220	0.88	0.38	0	2	-1.26	2.57
Scholarship status	219	2.35	0.88	1	5	0.51	0.26
Employment status	219	0.80	1.04	0	3	0.62	-1.36
Socio-economic status	218	2.68	0.77	1	4	-0.30	-0.21
Presence of ideological views	199	1.20	0.85	0	2	-0.38	-1.52
Prior experiences abroad	199	0.24	0.43	0	1	1.20	-0.56
Interest in exchange	80	0.98	0.16	0	1	-5.97	34.08
Intention to apply	80	1.69	0.56	0	2	-1.59	1.52
Fact of application	80	0.84	0.37	0	1	-1.80	1.24
Fact of participation	79	0.47	0.50	0	1	0.12	-2.01
Region of origin	239	0.66	0.48	0	1	-0.66	-1.58
Major	231	0.25	0.43	0	1	1.17	-0.64

Figure 3. Scree plot for EFA of value-focused survey's block

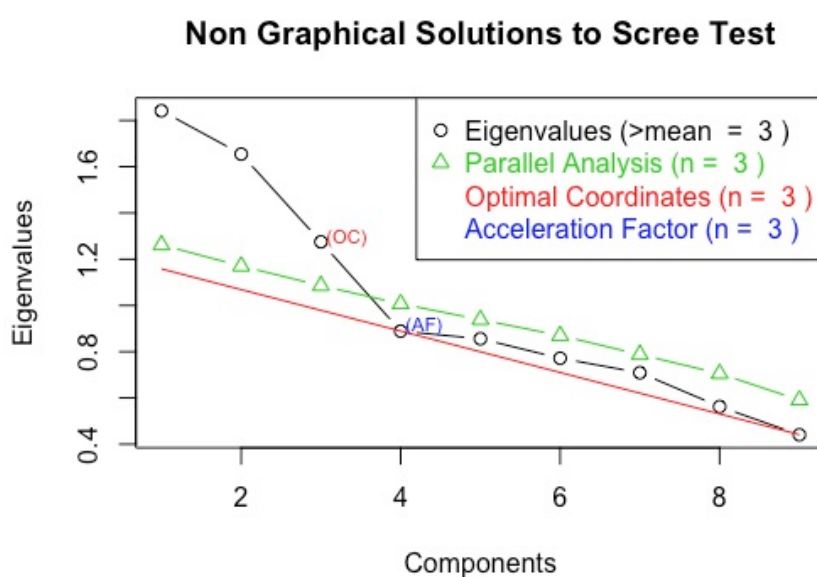


Table 13. Means and standard deviations of all value variables by student groups

	Lower College		Not Accepted		Other Programs		PIE	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Social diversity	83.33	21.57	95	10.26	77.08	32.78	86	21.75
Work	76.28	23.11	78.75	21.88	68.75	28.45	80	16.14
Religion	67.95	26.69	82.5	16.42	66.67	30.77	71	28.58
Influence	90.71	17.15	96.25	9.16	95.83	9.73	95	10.21
English	63.46	25.70	66.25	30.65	68.75	28.45	61	29.83
Family	75	30.95	81.25	25.49	66.67	35.89	83	26.73
Environment	86.69	19.27	92.5	18.32	87.5	22.61	92	17.26
Network	75.33	22.76	81.58	14.05	81.25	11.31	80	16.14
Env.economy	61.51	29.56	68.42	24.78	64.58	22.51	69	23.14



## Appendix D. Interviews and Codes

Table 14. Table of respondents

	Year of Studies	Age	Sex	Place of Birth	Social Status	Major
1	Third	21	F	Nizhny Novgorod/Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Lives by herself, works at the university part-time	IR, Political Science, Human Rights
2	Third	21	F	Moscow	Lives by herself, works part-time	History of Civilizations
3	Fourth	22	F	Minsk, Belarus	Lives in the dormitory, does not work	Literature
4	Fourth	21	F	Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic	Lives with the boyfriend, does not work	IR, Political Science, Human Rights
5	Third	20	M	Saint-Petersburg	Lives with parents, works at the university part-time	Economics
6	Fourth	22	F	Saint-Petersburg	Lives with the husband, does not work	History of Civilizations
7	Third	20	M	Almaty, Kazakhstan	Lives in the dormitory, does not work	Philosophy
8	Fourth	21	F	Saint-Petersburg	Lives with parents, does not work	Cognitive Studies

Table 15. Coding frame

Code	Description	Subcodes	Descriptions
Program's effects	Main organizing code. Contains respondents reflections on lasting changes in their lives, and influences instigated by PIE exchange experience	Comparative perspective	Which aspects of life and education students start to compare between Russia and the US after the exchange?
		Academic and professional development	Descriptions of academic and professional improvements
		Personal growth and network	Which students' personal traits have been developed or enhanced? How did the program assist respondents with their professional contacts and friendships?

Impressions and evaluations	Contains respondents overall evaluations of their experiences abroad	Cultural experience	Reflections on new environment and travel experiences in the US
		Perceptions of the world and opportunities	Descriptions of changes in respondents' worldview and future plans
		Community oriented practices	Reflections on involvement and opinions on various community oriented initiatives
		Motivation	Descriptions of increased ambitions and urge to work
		Political and ideological views	Do political or overall ideological views of respondents change or develop throughout and after the program?
		Positive evaluations	Descriptions of positive aspects of the program and time in the US
		Issues	Descriptions of negative aspects of the program and time in the US
		American college and campus	Assessments of American college system and reflections on campus life
		Differences in comparison to Smolny or Russia	Students' statements and observations on differences in their educational exchange experiences in comparison to what they are used to back in Russia
		Racism, poverty and health care	Descriptions of important US-specific issues, that affected and impressed the respondents
		Jetlag, time difference, distance from home	Specific issues respondents struggled with during their exchange
		Volunteering at Bard	Descriptions of students volunteering experiences with Bard's Centre for Civic Engagement
		Professors in the US	Students opinions on professors and reflections on their importance

Selection into the program	Contains descriptions of students motivations and reasons for participating in PIE, as well as their beliefs on how the selection process is organised	Motivations	Students explanations on why they chose PIE as their IEEP
		Individual experiences with applications	Reflections on the process of application

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