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Mapping the career preferences of Russian law graduates

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ABSTRACT

Interest in studying law has grown dramatically in Russia in the post-Soviet era. We know little about how law graduates distribute themselves among the available legal specialties. This paper begins to fill that gap by analyzing the results of an original survey of 2016 Russian law graduates. The sample is divided between full-time and correspondence students. Respondents were offered ten possible career paths, as well as options for uncertainty and plans to pursue non-law-related jobs. The results show an intriguing distribution and highlight the influence of respondents' educational choices and their attitudes towards the Russian legal system in their career choices.

In the decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of people studying law in Russia and in the prestige of legal careers (Vozneseskaia, 2015, p. 140). In the latter years of the Soviet era, less than 2 percent of the students pursuing higher education were studying law (Narodnoe, 1987, pp. 544–545). By 2012, this percentage had increased five-fold (Moiseeva, 2016, p. 7). The number of institutions offering legal education grew apace, increasing from about 50 in the 1980s to about 1,200 in 2017 (Maleshin, 2017, p. 297). This enhanced demand for legal education was driven largely by the introduction of the market, which created a wealth of new opportunities for those with legal training. Yet we know little about the initial career choices of Russian law graduates. In this article, I explore this question by analyzing the results of a survey of 2016 graduates drawn from across Russia. I am interested in what factors tend to be associated with their preferences.

Like most European countries, Russia has a divided bar. There is no single organization which all law graduates are eligible to join. Even the label for those with legal education is problematic. Rather than describing themselves as “lawyers” or “*iurist*”, Russians who work in the legal field tend to identify with their specialties. They would describe themselves, for example, as a litigator (*advokat*), a prosecutor (*prokuror*), a criminal investigator (*sledovatel'*), a notary (*notarius*) or an in-house counsel (*iuriskonsul't*) rather than as a *iurist*. In this

article, I will use *iurist* or lawyer only when speaking generically of those with legal education.

I begin with an overview of the survey. Before delving into the respondents' initial career choices, I lay out the available options. The bulk of the article is devoted to an analysis of the key factors that influence the respondents' career paths. The goal is not to build a predictive model, but to begin a conversation about how Russian law graduates choose their initial jobs.

Methodology

The existing scholarly literature on the Russian legal profession, which is voluminous, tends to bore in on the individual specialties. My approach is different. By surveying law students on the cusp of graduation, all potential career tracks are included for the first time.

Interviewers recruited by my Russian colleagues fanned out across Russia in the late spring of 2016 to talk with 2,176 prospective graduates from 163 law departments or *fakul'tety*. Two independent representative samples were created: one for full-time students and a second for correspondence students. This was deemed necessary because, as [Table 1](#) documents, the profiles of these two types of students are remarkably different. Among my respondents, 1,557 were full-time students and 619 were correspondence students.

Correspondence or *zaochnoe* education is an extreme version of what we know as distance learning. It is a carryover from the Soviet era and is available for any field of study. At present, it accounts for 70 percent of all law students

Table 1. Summary statistics for surveyed graduating Russian law students (results presented as percentages of each sample, not including those who did not respond).

	Full-time students	Correspondence students
Mean ages:	22.1	28.1
Geographic distribution:		
Moscow or St. Petersburg	32.2	12.8
Other European regions	39.9	58.2
Siberia and the Far East	11.7	15.2
Urals	15.5	11.2
North Caucasus	4.7	2.7
Activities before studying law:		
High school	92.1	34.7
Studied in different department	2.1	9.6
Member of work force	5.8	55.7
Means of paying for legal education:		
State	35.8	8.3
Parents	55.3	20.5
Self	6.8	69.2
Family's financial situation:		
Poor: difficult to cover the cost of basic necessities	13.6	16.4
Lower middle class: enough money for essentials, but had to save for big-ticket items	33.2	45
Upper middle class: enough for big-ticket items, but not cars	37.7	25.1
Rich: no financial worries	15.5	13.5

(Moiseeva, 2016). Those enrolled in *zaochnye* programs, known colloquially as *zaochniki*, are responsible for mastering the substantive content of courses on their own. They gather biannually to take exams. Students may take the correspondence route because their family or work commitments leave them without enough time to take regularly scheduled classes or because they lack the money to pay full-time tuition. Qualms about the quality of *zaochnye* programs persist from the Soviet era (Solomon, 1996) to the present day (Moiseeva, 2015).

Respondents – both full-time and correspondence students – were asked the same battery of questions. Topics ranged from their demographic and family background to their work history to their attitudes towards various legal institutions.

Legal specialties available to Russian law graduates

Respondents were asked what sort of legal specialty they planned to pursue after graduation. Table 2 lays out the results. Making sense of the table requires a few words of background about the options.

Advokaty

As to the private bar, Russia was a late developer. The emergence of legal specialists who represented private individuals and firms came only in 1864 as part of the larger reform of legal institutions in tsarist Russia (Huskey, 1986). These specialists became known as *advokaty*. Their primary function was to represent the accused in criminal cases, but their competence also extended to giving general legal advice, drafting documents and representing clients in civil cases.

Advokaty had a rocky ride during the Soviet period (Huskey, 1986). Eventually the Soviet regime came to recognize the need for *advokaty*, though the

Table 2. Career preferences among surveyed Russian law graduates (reported as percentages).

	Full-time students	Correspondence students
<i>Advokat</i>	10.8	6.2
Non- <i>advokat</i> litigator	3.5	2.7
Procurator	10.9	4.6
Investigator	13.7	11.5
Criminal justice – general*	3.1	12.5
<i>Iuriskonsul't</i>	13.7	11.1
Corporate lawyer	6.9	4.2
Lawyer for state	7.9	8.4
Judge	7.9	5.4
Notary	3.3	2.5
Unsure	13.3	19.7
Not lawyer	5.2	11.3

*Those who plan to work within the criminal justice system, but not as a *prokurator* or investigator.

independence from state control that is inherent in the attorney–client relationship was always viewed with suspicion by the authorities (Mrowczynski, 2016). The collapse of state regulation over *advokaty* as a consequence of reform efforts led by Gorbachev beginning in 1985 helped popularize this specialty. Their numbers grew dramatically, increasing from 12,550 in 1983 (Burrage, 1990, p. 434, n. 1) to 70,414 in 2014 (Otchet, 2015). But this robust growth masks the real story for it was during the Gorbachev era that *advokaty* began to face their first real competition. The regulatory free-for-all that characterized the Russian transition extended to the labor market for legal specialists. Anyone was free to hang out a shingle. The informal monopoly that *advokaty* had always enjoyed over the representation of clients in court was regularly flouted with no consequences. Leaders among the *advokaty* attempted to reestablish it in 2002 with the passage of a law on the bar (*advokatura*) (Federal’nyi, 2002). When interlopers challenged the provision granting *advokaty* the exclusive right to represent clients in court, the Russian Constitutional Court struck it down. At the end of the day, *advokaty* retain only the monopoly to represent the accused in criminal proceedings (Opredelenie, 2003).

Prospective *advokaty* are required by law to go through a structured two-year apprenticeship, supervised by licensed *advokaty* (art. 9, Federal’nyi, 2002). At the conclusion of that period, they can apply for membership. This requires them to pass an exam and to agree to live up to the ethical standards for *advokaty*. The passage rate for applicants hovered around 70 percent between 2009 and 2015 (Otchet, 2015).

Non-advokat litigators

Beginning in the late 1980s, law graduates who did not bother to become *advokaty* began to provide a full range of services. Being unregulated, these non-*advokaty* litigators were free to hit the ground running upon graduation. *Advokaty* tried to bring them into the fold. Perhaps if the monopoly over court practice for *advokaty* had held up, this might have happened. Even when it was scaled back to criminal work, many thought that the exclusion of these non-*advokaty* would spur them to join *advokatura*. But it did not. As Bocharov and Moiseeva argue: “*Turisty* without the status of *advokaty* do not feel that obtaining such status will give them solid economic advantages” (2016, p. 40). They are reluctant to pay the fees associated with becoming an *advokat* and to subject themselves to the ongoing obligations attached to being an *advokat*, which include providing free legal advice to needy citizens and living up to ethical rules. *Advokaty*, unsurprisingly, are annoyed by what they see as the low ethical standards of non-*advokaty* litigators. These non-*advokaty* litigators have remained largely elusive to researchers because they belong to no single association. Their numbers are reported to exceed 100,000.

Prokurory

Turning now to the staffing of the criminal justice system, *prokurory* have a much longer history than *advokaty*. They were introduced in the eighteenth century by Peter the Great. Though often rendered in English as prosecutors, their functions are broader. In addition to representing the interests of the state in criminal cases, like prosecutors elsewhere, *prokurory* are also charged with ensuring justice throughout the legal system. Barry and Berman argued: “[t]he procuracy is the cornerstone of the Soviet legal profession. It probably contains abler people than any other branch, and it has higher responsibilities” (1968, p. 24). The reputation of *prokurory* for competence and ferocity continued into the post-Soviet era. Mishina (2010, p. 10) describes them as “the most formidable [*groznye*] of all *iuristy*”.

Criminal investigators

The origins of criminal investigators or *sledovateli*, like *advokaty*, date back to the Great Reforms of 1864 (Titaev & Shkliaruk, 2016). They work together with the police to identify suspects and with *prokurory* to ensure their conviction. Because few of those accused are able to escape conviction in the Russian system, the power to point the finger, which lies primarily with *sledovateli*, takes on critical importance. Unlike *prokurory*, who work within a bureaucratic hierarchy headed by the General Procurator, investigators can be found within a number of departments, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Investigative Committee. Because they are spread out across the criminal justice system, determining their total number is difficult.

Other careers within the criminal justice system

Many Russian law graduates take jobs within the criminal justice system other than as prosecutors or investigators. In the survey, I deliberately left this open-ended. The most obvious option would be as a policeman, though a law degree is not mandatory for all such jobs.

Iuriskonsul'ty

The transition from state socialism to the market brought profound changes to the role of in-house counsel in Russia. During the Soviet era, when the means of production were controlled by the state, these *iuriskonsul'ty* were state employees. Like other employees of state enterprises, their primary goal was to ensure that their factory fulfilled the production quotas set by the annual economic plan. The few analyses of Soviet *iuriskonsul'ty* emphasize both the lack of prestige of this position and their large numbers, estimated to be well in excess of the

number of *advokaty* (Burrage, 1990). Because there was no organization to which in-house counsel belonged, we cannot know precisely how many there were.

Privatization launched enterprises into a new legal landscape in which profits were king and the need for plan fulfillment was a distant memory. But the status of *iuriskonsul'ty* within the enterprise remained unchanged. Much as in the Soviet era, *iuriskonsul'ty* tended to be peripheral figures (Hendley *et al.*, 2001). Illustrating this point, most were not key players in the privatization process.

With the relaxation of the norms governing representation of clients in court in the late 1980s, many *iuriskonsul'ty* jumped ship and opened general practices of their own. Unfortunately, this process was not documented at the time, making it impossible to know the exact numbers. But observers suspect that relatively few of these former *iuriskonsul'ty* bothered to jump through the hoops necessary to become *advokaty*.

Corporate lawyers

Corporate lawyers who focus on transactional law were superfluous in the planned economy of the Soviet era. Even now, they are not common. As foreign firms have opened offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg to serve their multinational corporate clients operating in Russia, domestic law firms have arisen to compete with them. Naturally, corporate lawyers abound in these firms.

Lawyers in the state bureaucracy

Law graduates who go to work for some state agency or institution that is not part of the criminal justice or judicial systems have also largely escaped scrutiny. Yet we know that the state soaks up large numbers of legally-trained specialists.

Judges

We know more about judges than faceless bureaucrats. Like other countries with civil law legal traditions, Russian judges have always seen themselves as civil servants, not as policy makers. During the Soviet period, their loyalty to the Communist Party was a better predictor of selection and endurance than competence. Reforms to the judicial selection system began under Gorbachev and continued under Yeltsin. Ultimately, Russia followed the European model and created commissions to which those aspiring to the bench could apply (Trochev, 2006). Applicants must be graduates of law *fakul'tety* with at least five years' experience, though relatively few come onto the bench with such minimal experience.¹ Surveys of judges reveal the most common route to the judiciary to be through the courthouse. Becoming a judge after working as a private lawyer – either an *advokat* or a *iuriskonsul't* – was less likely (Mishina, 2010;

Volkov & Dzmitryieva, 2015). The number of courts and, consequently, the number of judges has increased dramatically in the post-Soviet era. The 1990s witnessed the creation of new courts for post-Soviet Russia, including the constitutional court, the *arbitrazh* courts, and the justice-of-the-peace courts. By 2015, there were 34,000 judges, which represented a four-fold increase since 1999 (Volkov & Dzmitryieva, 2015, p. 167).

Notaries

European notaries have little in common with notaries in the US. In Russia, just as in the rest of continental Europe, becoming a notary requires a law degree. As Shaw (2009, p. 396) explains in her study of notaries in Poland and Hungary, “the *raison d’être* of notarial activities is still that of the Roman scribes: to enhance the security of legal transactions and therefore the trust of the parties involved”. During the Soviet period, notaries worked for the state. According to Mishina (2013), ending up with a job in a notary’s office was the “least attractive” option. In the post-Soviet era, notaries experienced an “astonishing evolution” (Mishina, 2013). Their functions have been privatized and their societal status enhanced. Like *advokaty*, notaries are licensed and belong to a national association. To become a notary, law graduates must complete a year-long apprenticeship and pass an entrance exam.

Explaining the career preferences of graduating Russian law students

Table 2 documents the respondents’ initial career choices. Evaluating these data is complicated by the complete absence of prior information about how law graduates have distributed themselves. Without comparative reference points, it is impossible to assess whether the numbers are high or low. But there is no question that they are intriguing and create a baseline for future research.

Educational path

The chaotic nature of the Russian legal education landscape since the late 1980s creates a quandary for many prospective students. Not only do they have to decide whether to study law on a full-time basis or by correspondence, but they also have to make their way through a thicket of possible venues, both public and private. Tables 2 and 3 present information about the variation in educational choices for my respondents by legal specialty.

Legal education in Russia is an undergraduate enterprise. In the Soviet era, all law *fakul’tety* were state institutions; students paid no tuition. Demand consistently outpaced supply, with up to 40 applicants competing for each spot (Mishina, 2013, p. 6). As state control disintegrated in the late 1980s and the advent of the market brought greater attention to law, entrepreneurs saw a

Table 3. Type of legal educational institution attended among surveyed Russian law graduates (reported as percentages).

	Type of educational institution			
	Full-time students		Correspondence students	
	State	Private	State	Private
Full sample	83.5	16.5	46.3	53.7
<i>Advokat</i>	83.5	16.5	40.5	59.5
Non- <i>advokat</i> litigator	76.5	23.5	31.3	68.7
Procurator	89.4	10.6	55.6	44.4
Investigator	74.1	25.9	50	50
Criminal justice – general*	66.7	33.3	41.9	58.1
<i>Iuriskonsul't</i>	94	6	42.4	57.6
Corporate lawyer	87.1	12.9	36	64
Lawyer for state	79.3	24.7	54	46
Judge	87.1	12.9	71.9	28.1
Notary	81.3	18.7	40	60
Unsure	80.6	19.4	42.7	57.3
Not lawyer	80.3	19.7	47.8	52.2
Chi ²	0			0.15

*Those who plan to work within the criminal justice system, but not as a *prokurator* or investigator.

market niche in legal education. New law *fakul'tety* proliferated. Not only did existing institutions of higher education open law *fakul'tety* but, for the first time, private law *fakul'tety* were created.

The explosion in law *fakul'tety* has greatly eased the pressure on applicants, whose numbers have skyrocketed. About half of all applicants are admitted somewhere (Moiseeva, 2016, p. 8). In this new world, the goal is to obtain a “budget place” (*biudzhethnoe mesto*), for which no tuition is required. The competition for these spots, which are offered to less than 20 percent of all law students, almost all of whom attend state schools, remains intense (Moiseeva, 2016). Rumors of corruption persist, but are difficult to verify (Osipan, 2012). The remaining 80 percent of law students are expected to pay tuition.² This represents a huge shift in the Russian educational landscape, but is not unique to law students.

Full-time versus correspondence study

Whether the decision to study law full-time or via correspondence can fairly be framed as a choice is unclear. Unlike the full-time student cohort, most of whom are taking their first tentative steps toward adulthood by enrolling at a law *fakul'tet*, *zaochniki* have more constraints on their freedom of movement, both literally and figuratively. Students who opt for *zaochnoe* education tend to come from families with fewer financial resources and less education (see Table 1). For the most part, they are older and tempered by the workplace. They may not have the luxury of devoting themselves entirely to their studies. If they want to pursue opportunities open only to those with law degrees, then the correspondence track may be their only alternative. Table 2 indicates that this fork

in the road – full-time versus correspondence – influenced career paths upon graduation.

Litigation specialists

An interest in litigation was more common for full-time students than for correspondence students, amounting to 14.3 percent of the former compared with 8.9 percent of the latter. Among this group, it is striking that, for both samples, more than twice as many were committed to becoming *advokaty* than were planning to take the easier road of representing clients in court without the benefit of any sort of license. Moreover, the data suggest that these non-*advokat* litigators were not closing the door permanently on becoming *advokaty*. When asked whether they might take the *advokatskii* exam in the future, over 30 percent of this group said yes, which was well in excess of the results for other specialties.

Criminal justice specialists

Table 2 documents the strong interest of Russian law graduates in careers in the criminal justice system. Taken together, those who are committed to becoming *prokurory*, *sledovateli*, or other related jobs add up to about 28 percent of each sample. Moreover, as compared to others, hopeful *prokurory* and *sledovateli* were more committed to their career paths. Respondents were asked what job they wanted when they entered the law *fakul'tet*. The correlation rate for career preferences at the beginning and end of their education was higher for these two criminal justice tracks than for other specialties. Almost half of those who came into the law *fakul'tet* thinking of such careers stuck by their guns as opposed to about a third of those interested in litigation.

Although about the same percentage of both samples planned careers in criminal justice, precisely what type of job they wanted differed. Full-time students were attracted to the *prokuratura* whereas correspondence students saw their future in the less prestigious bowels of the system. Indeed, these two categories of *prokuror* and jobs in criminal justice other than *prokuror* or *sledovatel'* are almost mirror images of one another. The percentages of the sample of full-time students were 10.9 and 4.6, respectively. For *zaochniki*, they were 3.1 and 12.5. This speaks to the pragmatism of the respondents and their recognition of the divergence in opportunities available.

Judges

Full-time students are more attracted to the bench. Almost 8 percent plan to work in the judicial system, compared with 5.4 percent of correspondence students. This is unexpected and reflects a shift away from recruiting new judges

from *zaochniki*. Surveys of judges show that over half those who came to the bench between 2001 and 2008 had law degrees earned through correspondence study. But for those who became judges after 2009, a clear majority had been full-time students (Volkov *et al.*, 2016, p. 86). This change not only reflected a desire for judges with better training, but was also a natural consequence of requiring that judicial assistants (*pomoshchniki*) have law degrees as a prerequisite for the job. The previous policy had allowed *pomoshchniki* to study law via correspondence while working for the courts (Petrova, 2012).

As I noted earlier, new graduates cannot go directly onto the bench. Their law degree qualifies them to work as *pomoshchniki*. Some are content with such positions. A significant number have an ultimate career goal of becoming judges themselves and tolerate low salaries while working as *pomoshchniki* until they have at least five years of legal experience which is the minimum required to be a judge (Volkov & Dzmityrieva, 2015, p. 176). Salaries are the same for *pomoshchniki* across Russia but play out differently due to variations in the cost of living. This explains why respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg, where the cost of living is the highest in Russia, are less interested in becoming *pomoshchniki* than their counterparts from the hinterlands.³

Notaries

Interest in becoming a notary is low for both samples, constituting about 3 percent. This might seem to contradict what I said earlier about the popularity of this specialty. In reality, it reflects the pragmatism of these law graduates. The number of notaries is controlled by the national organization and relatively few new notaries are licensed each year. Between 2006 and 2011, the last years for which we have official data, the average increase in the number of slots for notaries was 93 (Federal'naia, 2012).

Business law specialists

Interest in careers in business law – which includes becoming a *iuriskonsul't* or a corporate lawyer – was greater among full-time students (20.6 percent) than among correspondence students (15.3 percent). The same trend is present for aspiring corporate lawyers. Given the relative newness of corporate law as a specialty, the fact that almost 7 percent of full-time students planned to seek jobs in this field is notable. So too is the propensity for these nascent business lawyers to come from Moscow or St. Petersburg. While over 30 percent of the sample of full-time students hails from Russia's two largest cities, the percentages jump up to 40 and 53 for corporate lawyers and *iuriskonsul'ty*, respectively.

Undecided graduates

Some respondents were not ready to commit to a specialty upon graduation. Not everyone is prepared to make firm (or even tentative) career decisions in their twenties. I was surprised that the incidence of uncertainty was higher among *zaochniki* (19.7 percent) than for full-time students (13.3 percent). I had assumed that correspondence students came to the study of law with firm plans. Either this is not true or reality had thrown a wrench into their plans.

Uninterested in legal careers

Less surprising is the fact that *zaochniki* were more than twice as likely as full-time students to opt out of working in the legal field upon their graduation. Many correspondence students are simply seeking a university degree to give them a leg up in their job. A majority did not have law-related jobs when they entered the law *fakul'tet*. They may be staying put. In addition, we have always known that a significant number of Russian law graduates never practice law in any capacity (Maleshin, 2017).

State versus private law fakul'tety

A second factor related to educational choice is whether to study law at a state or private institution. Private law *fakul'tety* are a post-Soviet phenomenon. But many state institutions of higher education that had no prior track record in legal education took advantage of the regulatory vacuum to open law *fakul'tety*. Put more bluntly, fly-by-night legal education can be found in both state and private law *fakul'tety*. State law *fakul'tety* are uniformly regarded as more prestigious than their private brethren. The greater availability of “budget places” along with their higher prestige makes state law *fakul'tety* more appealing.

As Table 3 clarifies, full-time students were significantly more likely to opt for state law *fakul'tety* than were correspondence students; 83.5 percent of full-time students attended a state institution, compared with 46.3 percent of correspondence students. This table also reveals several intriguing patterns. Within the criminal law specialties, aspiring *prokurory* are more likely to have attended state *fakul'tety*, while the less ambitious respondents who were seeking lower-level jobs in this field tended to be graduates of private *fakul'tety*. This holds true for both full-time and correspondence students. It suggests that the connections obtained through attending higher-ranked institutions are more essential for *prokurory*. Those who want less high-profile jobs may only need to tick the box for a university degree; the prestige of the institution may be irrelevant.

As to others destined to work in the state sector, the desirability of connections also helps explain the predilection of prospective judges for state law *fakul'tety*. Full-time and correspondence students who share this goal are

unified in their distaste for private institutions. As to those who seek other jobs within the state bureaucracy, the results were mixed. *Zaochniki* preferred state law *fakul'tety*, but their full-time colleagues were more likely to attend private law *fakul'tety*.

The type of connections that state law *fakul'tety* yield may be less important for some jobs in the private sector. For example, prospective notaries tended to be from private *fakul'tety*. Likewise, respondents who showed an interest in litigation but did not want to become *advokaty* were more likely to have attended private institutions. This trend is visible for both samples. The picture is more mixed when it comes to potential careers in transactional law. Full-time students who aspired to work as in-house counsel or as corporate lawyers flocked to state law *fakul'tety*. Yet the trend was just the opposite among correspondence students with similar goals. These *zaochniki* may have already had a foothold in companies and just needed the sheepskin to make their leap to the next level.

As this suggests, the pedigree of a degree matters for certain employers. Corporate law firms, in particular, pay attention to where applicants studied law (Ivanov, 2013). Attending a state institution already provides a leg up, but a degree from one of the elite state law *fakul'tety* helps even more.

Source of payment for legal education

Full-time and correspondence students diverged sharply in terms of how they paid for their education (see Table 1). While over a third of the former had *biudzhetye* places, less than 10 percent of the latter received such state stipends. Instead, they mostly paid their own way.

State stipends are ostensibly awarded on the basis of merit. While some less-deserving students may obtain a *biudzhetye* place thanks to well-placed bribes, it is still fair to assume that having such a place is a marker of high achievement. With that in mind, the career choices of these top students is intriguing and unexpected. Rather than flocking to the jobs that have long enjoyed prestige, they opted for careers that have been invented or reinvented in the post-Soviet era. For full-time students, the highest concentration of *biudzhetyniki* are among those who aspire to become *iuriskonsul'ty* and who want to litigate, but without the benefit of becoming an *advokat*. The former job was the worst nightmare for Soviet-era law graduates and the latter was not even dreamt of. By contrast, working in the criminal justice system, which would have been an appealing option in the past, attracted comparatively few of these high achievers. This speaks to the fundamental shifts in the legal services marketplace in post-Soviet Russia.

Attitudes toward judicial independence

The survey explores the variation in respondents' attitudes towards the Russian legal system based on their job choices. One of the survey questions went to the

heart of their assessment of judicial independence in Russia. Respondents were given the following two statements and asked which best reflected their point of view:

\$Judges in Russia are basically independent from representatives of federal and local power.

\$Judges in Russia are basically under the control of representatives of federal and local power.

As Table 4 shows, correspondence students were generally more optimistic about the courts than were their full-time colleagues. This holds true not just for the two samples as a whole, but also for each of the career options with a single exception. In an odd twist, *zaochniki* who hope to become judges are luke-warm at best about the capacity of the courts to resist outside pressure. The reasons why are not immediately apparent. The responses of full-time students who want to go onto the bench make more sense. Their confidence in the upstandingness of their future coworkers significantly outpaces that of adherents to other career paths.

This pattern is not limited to judges. More generally, a cleavage in attitudes is observable between those who intended to work for the state and those who planned to go into private practice. Along with judges, those who are destined to work in the criminal justice system and the state bureaucracy were more likely to believe in the independence of the courts. By contrast, most of those who hoped to work with private clients were openly suspicious of the courts, fearing that they would bend to the will of politicians. Such findings would

Table 4. Attitudes regarding the capacity of Russian courts for independence among the surveyed Russian law graduates (reported as percentages).

	Full-time students			Correspondence students		
	Independent*	Dependent**	No response	Independent*	Dependent**	No response
Full sample	45.6	40.7	13.6	51	37.5	11.5
<i>Advokat</i>	43.2	52.4	5.4	46.8	40.5	12.7
Non- <i>advokat</i> litigator	50	50	0	55.8	42.3	1.9
Procurator	55.6	25.9	18.5	66.3	25.6	8.1
Investigator	51.5	39.7	8.8	51.2	35.3	13.5
Criminal justice – general***	50	33.8	16.2	48.9	40	11.1
<i>luriskonsult</i>	37.9	51.5	10.6	52.2	40.3	7.5
Corporate lawyer	44	44	12	50.5	37.6	11.9
Lawyer for state	50	36	14	56	32.8	11.2
Judge	71.9	21.9	6.2	51.7	35.4	12.9
Notary	40	53.3	6.7	47.9	39.6	12.5
Unsure	35	43.6	21.4	39.3	44.4	16.3
Not lawyer	43.3	40.3	16.4	46	40.8	13.2
Chi ²	0.051			0.013		

*Judges in Russia are basically independent from representatives of federal and local power.

**Judges in Russia are basically under the control of representatives of federal and local power.

***Those who plan to work within the criminal justice system, but not as a *prokurator* or investigator.

not be a surprise among experienced legal professionals. We would expect those who are called upon to challenge the state regularly, such as *advokaty*, to grow cynical over time. By the same token, veteran state workers would be expected to become defensive about the institutions where they work. What is more unexpected is that graduating law students, who were not differentiated by their future specialties in their classes, would naturally divide themselves in this way. It suggests that, rather than learning their pro- or anti-state attitudes on the job, they arrived at law *fakul'tety* with these mindsets.

Yet their time studying law left its mark. Respondents' attitudes towards judicial independence diverge sharply from those of Russian society at large. The question I asked them replicates one included on a national survey fielded in 2008 by INDEM, a Moscow public policy institute. Less than 20 percent of those surveyed by INDEM agreed that judges are basically independent from outside pressure. Almost 60 percent took the opposite position; they saw judges as being under the thumb of federal and local officials. The remaining 20 percent refused to take a position (Gorbuz *et al.*, 2010, p. 391). The opinions of the youth surveyed as part of this project were much the same. This hints at the success of the process of socializing law students into the profession – the views of my respondents differ significantly from those of their generational cohort.⁴ The results of the INDEM survey hue more closely to the common wisdom about courts than do the views of the surveyed law students. Public opinion polling consistently shows low levels of trust in the courts (Levada, 2016).

The contrast between the views of ordinary Russians and the surveyed law students is remarkable. As a group, both full-time and correspondence students were more than twice as likely to express confidence in the capacity and willingness of Russian judges to stand up to political actors than were Russians without legal education. They were also markedly less likely to refuse to express an opinion on this score. Both of these findings can be at least partially explained by the very fact that the surveyed students have been enmeshed in the study of the legal system for four years. Unlike average Russians, for most of whom courts are remote, law students study the courts carefully. The pedagogical predilection for lecturing, which emphasizes the law on the books over the law in action, creates a generally positive image of the courts. This teaching style leaves few opportunities for students to challenge their teachers.

Preliminary conclusions and next steps

The prestige of many specialties is in flux. In terms of sheer numbers, a preference for criminal justice is dominant. But these tend to be students who attended the less prestigious private law *fakul'tety* and/or completed a correspondence degree. By contrast, working as a *iuriskonsul't*, which was previously a last-

ditch alternative, now seems to be popular among high flyers. Careers in corporate law or as a non-*advokat* litigator, both of which are new possibilities for Russians, are similarly popular among the *biudzhethniki*, who were marked as the best among their cohorts. Becoming a notary, which the secondary literature indicated had grown in appeal with its post-Soviet privatization, was greeted with less enthusiasm by respondents.

Without doubt, the strongest link with career choice is full-time versus correspondence education, confirming our original intuition that these two groups need to be studied separately. As we have seen, these two groups diverge on many scores. This one marker denotes profound differences in socio-economic background and age which, in turn, influence the opportunities open to respondents. *Zaochniki*, many of whom were footing the bill for their education by holding down jobs while studying law, tended to enroll in lower-prestige private *fakul'tety*. This colored their options upon graduation. They are more likely to pursue jobs in the state sector. Given that they are older and more experienced than their full-time colleagues, the fact that these correspondence students were more likely to be uncertain of their next steps upon graduation is puzzling and worthy of further investigation.

Notes

1. In their survey, Volkov *et al.* (2016, p. 171) found that the mean age for judges at the time of appointment was 34. On average, judges had 10.5 years of legal practice before coming to the bench.
2. Tuition at Russian law *fakul'tety* is lower than at US universities, but the amounts still represent a financial burden for most Russian families. The amounts vary depending on the prestige of the *fakul'tet*. Tuition for correspondence programs is generally lower than for full-time study.
3. None of the 79 *zaochniki* who hoped to become a judge hailed from Moscow or St. Petersburg. For full-time students, 15 percent of aspiring judges were from these cities.
4. Among respondents in the INDEM survey born after 1988, 18 percent said judges were independent; 55 percent said they were not independent; and 27 percent expressed no opinion.

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