




## Josep Stalin y su época según la percepción en jóvenes modernos


### Josep Stalin and his epoch as perceived by modern young people

Nikolay E. Goryachev<sup>1a</sup>, Alexander V. Martynenko<sup>2</sup>, & Timofey D. Nadkin<sup>3</sup>

Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev, Saransk, Russia<sup>123</sup>

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2354-6650><sup>1</sup>

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5097-8766><sup>2</sup>

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2677-8529><sup>3</sup>

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#### Abstract

The objective of the paper was to find out particularities of the way how I. V. Stalin's personality and controversial role in Russian history are perceived by modern young people. The principal method of this research was that of survey; it enabled the authors to consider the subject problem in an integrated way within the general context of everyday life history and the shared value set of the contemporary Russian society. The survey was conducted at the end of 2020 – beginning of 2021 among young students aged 15 to 18 (schoolchildren, vocational college students, and the university ones) in Saransk, Republic of Mordovia. In the course of the survey, the young people's evaluation of I. V. Stalin's person and activity was found to remain controversial, yet with a clear trend of positive views prevailing. The said trend is a representation of public opinion on this question current in the entire Russian society, with the latter basically characterized by the lack of consensus on a number of tough political and ideological topics. Materials of the paper are of practical importance for tailoring youth policy in the sphere of civic and patriotic education.

**Keywords:** Russia, Stalin, “Stalin era”, communism, Russian history, USSR

#### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo era descubrir las particularidades de la forma en que los jóvenes modernos perciben la personalidad de I. V. Stalin y su controvertido papel en la historia de Rusia. El método principal de esta investigación fue el de encuestas; permitió a los autores considerar el problema del sujeto de manera integrada dentro del contexto general de la historia de la vida cotidiana y el conjunto de valores compartidos de la sociedad rusa contemporánea. La encuesta se realizó a fines de 2020, a principios de 2021, entre jóvenes estudiantes de 15 a 18 años (escolares, estudiantes universitarios de formación profesional y universitarios) en Saransk, República de Mordovia. En el curso de la encuesta, se encontró que la evaluación de

<sup>a</sup>Correspondencia a la autora  
E-mail: [goryachev.nik93@mail.ru](mailto:goryachev.nik93@mail.ru)

los jóvenes sobre la persona y la actividad de I. V. Stalin seguía siendo controvertida, pero con una clara tendencia a prevalecer las opiniones positivas. Dicha tendencia es una representación de la opinión pública sobre esta cuestión actual en toda la sociedad rusa, caracterizada básicamente por la falta de consenso en una serie de temas políticos e ideológicos difíciles. Los materiales del documento son de importancia práctica para adaptar la política de juventud en el ámbito de la educación cívica y patriótica.

**Palabras clave:** Rusia, Stalin, “época de Stalin”, comunismo, historia rusa, Union Soviética

### Introduction

The relevance of the topic of this paper is associated with it being quite literally a national importance task for the contemporary Russia to cultivate civic identity and patriotic values among its rising generation and young people. Achieving this goal largely depends on the young Russians' attitude to the historic past of their country – to the Soviet epoch included, and it is Stalin's period that makes up an inseparable and essential part of it. With regard to this, the words of Somov (2007), the modern Russian historian, seem fair: “Acquiring new knowledge of history, up to a high extent of relevance, requires studying closely the "power of the people" and, in particular, its leader” (p. 60). In this case, Kharlamov (2013) notes that Russia has not had a government figure to be mentioned in the recent two decades as frequently as I. V. Stalin. It is his activity that is covered in a broad range of opinions and judgments: from the most negative to incredibly enthusiastic ones. Arguments over Stalin will hardly fade away in the nearest years, splitting our society into two parts which are actually opposing in terms of ideology. The scores of approaches to studying the leader's activity and opinions about him hinder evaluating him in an objective manner greatly. Anyway, we are obliged to arrive at such an evaluation, for invisible connections extended from it right up to the model of governance which is being formed in the 21st-century Russia.

Hence, it seems not accidental for this study to select exactly the personality of Stalin and “Stalin's epoch” as the object for value judgments of the public. They are still associated with cruel repressions and expulsion of as many as nations, on the one hand, and on the other hand – with constructing a powerful industrial complex, defeating the Nazi Germany, and creating a mighty power with its host of allies – a rival to the USA-headed Western world.

It should be noted that judgments of I. V. Stalin and his activity have undergone impressive transformations in the after-Stalin period of the Russian history. They have ranged from denouncing the “personality cult” under Khrushchev (1956) up to its actual rehabilitation after L. I. Brezhnev's coming to power – and from unfettered criticism of every Soviet aspect,

Stalin included, in the 1990s and early 2000s up to the present-day attempts of reinterpreting this paramount stage in the Russian history of the 20th century (Nadkin, 2010; Somov, 2007; Khasyanov, 2018).

### Literature review

In the post-Soviet period, “Stalin's epoch” and its place in the contemporary Russian history became one of the most discussed and debatable topics both in foreign and Russian historiography. So, in the 1990s, against the background of large-scale declassification of archive funds, the prevailing standpoint was criticism of the diverse aspects of Stalin's activity and results of his domestic and exterior policy (Volkogonov, 1990; Tsipko, 1990). Meanwhile, by the present day, a more balanced approach, too, has made its way out (Khaustov & Samuelson, 2010; Khlevnyuk, 2010). At the same time, judgments of the consequences of forced collectivization, mass repressions, famine of 1932–1933 and 1946–1947 remain substantially unchanged (Bondarev, 2005; Koznova, 2016).

Among the bulk of scientific literature published within almost 30 years of post-Soviet historiography, let monographs by Russian and foreign authors prepared within the “History of Stalinism” publishing project of ROSSPEN be noted especially. This project is distinguished by the broad range of topic discussed – from prerequisites of Stalinism to its “relapses” already in the after-Stalin period of the Russian history. So, the book by Löwe *Stalin* (2009) represents the biography of I. V. Stalin as one of the most ill-famed state and political figures. On the one hand, the author brings into question his economic successes, pointing out “enormous” human losses. However, on the other hand, he notes that the country has crushed Hitler's Germany almost on its own (Löwe, 2009).

The process of transition from joint leadership of the Politburo to Stalin's sole dictatorship, including his role in the formation of this system, the mechanism of decision-making and implementing, and action against Stalin's “revolution from above” is analyzed by Khlevnyuk (2010) in detail. The problem of mass repressions and Stalin's role in controlling the agencies of People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) in the repression period are evaluated in the monograph by Khaustov and Samuelson (2010), and Viola's book (2010) describes the world of Stalin's settlements for what it is. An account of the everyday and the extraordinary in Stalin's Russia of the 1930s is provided in works by Fitzpatrick (2008a, 2008b) using the case of the urban and rural life. One more focus area of the studies is exploring the causes and consequences of the 1932–1933 famine which were scrutinized in works of Kondrashin (2008), Davies and Wheatcroft (2011), Koznova (2016) studied the particularities

of peasants' ideas about the past, characteristic features and content of peasants' memory about Stalinism. Dramatic destiny of the Russian Orthodox Christianity on the eve and under “Stalin's socialism” is discussed in detail in the monograph by Odintsov (2014). A series of scientific conferences held within the “History of Stalinism” (2010, 2013) project are worth noting individually; at the conferences, researchers from the most diverse regions of Russia and foreign countries have been granted an opportunity to voice their viewpoints.

As for the post-Soviet period historians whose works have made a remarkable contribution to considering a broad range of social, economic, and demographic issues of the said period within individual Russian regions, as has been reported by Dobronozhenko (1994), Bondarev (2005), Khasyanov (2018), Nadkin (2010), Lomshin, et al. (2008), that are author who should be pointed out among them. On top of that, one should note biographies of I. V. Stalin authored by such researchers as Avtorkhanov (2017) and Martirosyan (2016) that were published in recent years. Scientific and practical importance of the above studies is associated with expanding the theoretical knowledge for both professional historians, teachers of the Russian history, and for students and senior schoolchildren, as it is so essential for putting together one's own opinion about such an ambivalent epoch.

### **Methodology**

The principal method of the research is that of survey; the authors of the paper conducted the survey at the end of 2020 – beginning of 2021 among schoolchildren and students of educational organizations of Saransk – the capital of the Republic of Mordovia. Its data do not claim comprehensive and profound ideas about the research subject; however, the authors of the paper believe this dimension is designed to help achieving the said objective.

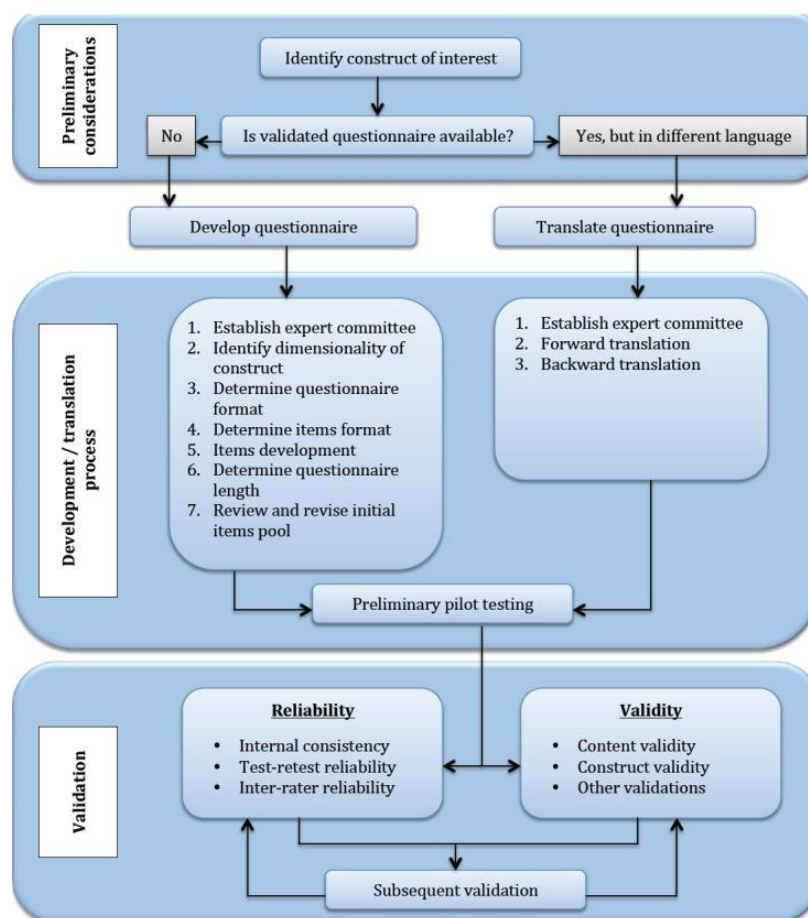
The items of the questionnaire were answered by 120 learners aged 15 to 18 of various social background. Among the respondents, there were 49 schoolchildren of grades 10-11 from several school of Saransk urban district, Republic of Mordovia (Yalga comprehensive secondary school, Comprehensive secondary school No. 11, Comprehensive secondary school No. 13), 42 students of year 2 from Saransk vocational college of food and processing industry, and 29 students of Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev (year 1 ones from the faculty of psychology and special pedagogy; year 2 ones from the faculty of history and law). Thus, the respondents represented three tiers of Russian education – general secondary education, vocational secondary education, and higher education. The informed consent was signed from the face of all the respondents. It was received either directly from the

respondents themselves (if they were 18 or older) or from their parents (if the respondents were younger than 18).

The questionnaire was constructed using the elements of already existing instruments. The efficiency of similar questionnaire survey as a research method in the declared range of problems is discussed by the team of scientists from Chuvash State University. In 2018, they conducted the survey among students of the said higher educational institution on the topic of historical memory and patriotism. Generalization of the empirical material of the survey granted its authors an opportunity to realize the whole complexity of problems associated with identifying the interpretation of factors on which formation of the civic stance in the rising generation depends (Vasilenko et al., 2018). We also relied on the model for the questionnaire development and translation process by Tsang et al. (2017) graphically represented at Figure 1. Due to its general character we followed these steps to ensure the suitability of the instrument, its reliability and validity.

**Figure 1.**

A model for the questionnaire development and translation process (Tsang et al., 2017)



Its reliability and validity as well as ethical compliance with generally recognized standards in the field was also discussed and approved by the ethics committee of Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev before the start of the research study.

Alongside this, the general scientific cognition method was used in the paper; the particularities of using it in humanitarian studies were scrutinized by Kovalchenko (2003).

Within this method, the object was conceptually broken down into constituent parts to be subsequently explored individually. In this case, it was various focus areas, aspects, and facets of activity of I. V. Stalin in leading the Soviet state through the lens of their perception by the contemporary young people that were used as such constituents.

## Results

The questionnaire “Stalin's period in consciousness of the contemporary generation” included the total of 31 items. At the beginning of the questionnaire, schoolchildren and students had to answer some questions (items 1-7) about their place of residence, age, social background, and what year or grade they studied at (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*General statistics on questions 1-12*

Question No.	Text of the question		
1	Please specify your residential settlement (where you were born or spent your school years).		
<b>Respondents</b>	<b>school students</b>	<b>college students</b>	<b>university students</b>
Answers, %	urban dwellers 73%	62%	84%
	rural dwellers 27%	38%	16%
2	Please give the name of the educational institution you are studying at currently.		
Answers, % of the surveyed from the total number	41%	31%	28%
3	Please specify the current grade (year) of your study.		
Answers, %	grade 10 — 58%	year 1 — 36%	year 1 — 62%
	grade 11 — 42%	year 2 — 64%	year 2 — 38%
4	Please specify your age are at the point of the survey (completed years).		
Answers, %	15 years old — 9%	16 years old — 36%	17 years old — 7%
	16 years old — 61 %	17 years old — 38%	18 years old — 36%
	17 years old — 23%	18 years old — 20%	19 years old — 41%
	18 years old — 7%	19 years old — 6%	20 years old — 9%
			21 years old — 7%
5-6	Clarifying questions		

7	Please give the social status of your family.		
Answers, %	Workers		
	64%	72%	43%
	Employees		
	22%	13%	43%
	Individual entrepreneurs	3%	14%
	6%		
	Unemployed		
	8%	12%	0%

Source: compiled by the authors.

In questions 8-13, they were also asked to say if they were interested in the history of Russia, in what years I. V. Stalin was the head of the Soviet Union, and what their attitude to his person was (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
General statistics on questions 8-12

Question No.	Text of the question		
8	Are you keen on your country's history?		
Answers, %	Yes		
	80%	95%	100%
	No		
	20%	5%	0%
9	If you are (not) keen on it, why?		
The most frequent answers (for the positive option).	— it is interesting for me;	— it broadens my outlook;	— it broadens my outlook;
	— it broadens my outlook;	— I am keen on learning new things;	— I love my Motherland;
	— I am keen on learning new things.	— it is important for my development.	— it is an important aspect of my development.
10	What is your attitude to the personality of I. V. Stalin in our history?		
Answers, %	Positive		
	51%	64%	40%
	Negative		
	38%	26%	60%
	I do not know this person		
	11%	10%	0%
11	What personality (past / present) would you compare with I.V. Stalin within the framework of Russian history (indicate not more than 2 personalities with a brief justification of why you think so).		
Most common answers	- Ivan IV (tough ruler); - Peter I (drastic transformations).	- Ivan IV (repression against the elite); - V.V. Putin (confident policy in	- Ivan IV (due to the change in management methods); - V.V. Putin (competent foreign and domestic policy

		overcoming the country's backwardness).	at the critical moment for the country).
12	What personality (past / present) would you compare with I.V. Stalin within the framework of world history (indicate not more than 2 personalities with a brief justification why you think so).		
Most common answers	- Napoleon Bonaparte (drastic transformations); - A. Hitler (totalitarian government).	- W. Churchill (equal in historical importance); - A. Hitler (quickly eliminated the backwardness of their countries and used the same methods of government).	- M. Thatcher (decisive measures, significance for history); - M. Zedong (the importance of personality in the history of his country).

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Source: compiled by the authors.

According to the survey findings, the absolute majority of schoolchildren and students are interested in the history of Russia in a certain way. Meanwhile, the history of their state is of interest for the university students (100% of the surveyed ones) to a larger extent, and, respectively, for the vocational college students (95%) and schoolchildren (80%) to a smaller extent. The most popular answers are "broadening one's outlook", "wish to know the past of one's nation", and "without knowing history, development is impossible".

The part of the respondents who remain indifferent to history (20% of the surveyed schoolchildren and 5% of the vocational college students) have given the following reasons to back up their standpoint: "it is not interesting for me", "I do not think the knowledge of history will be useful for me in my life", and "the past does not teach one anything".

In the course of the survey, the authors were first and foremost interested in the young people's attitude to I. V. Stalin's personality and activity. Only a minor part of the surveyed has noted they had no special idea about this person. Slightly over one third have voiced their negative attitude to the activity of this leader of the USSR. The principal proportions of such respondents have turned out to be among representatives of the university students.

Over half of the total number of the surveyed ones has spoken positively about Stalin's person and activity. To the largest extent, this viewpoint was represented in the vocational college students participating in the survey. Here, the most frequent reasons were the following answers: "owing to I. V. Stalin, the USSR gained the victory in the World War II", "there was order and no corruption under him", and "everything was just, there were no rich and poor". As the grounds of critics, the following were mentioned frequently: "the bloody dictator", "held repressions, camps, and denunciations", "shot people" (see Table 3).



**Table 3***Associations the respondents have with I. V. Stalin's name*

Question No.	Text of the question		
13	What associations with I. V. Stalin's name do you have? Please select 3 from the suggested series		
Answers, %	school students	college students	university students
	The victory in the Great Patriotic War 36%	48%	46%
	The policy of repressions 15%	12%	16%
	The personality cult 11%	6%	12%
	Total control over the life of the public 11%	7%	10%
	The just leader who has created the social state 10%	10%	6%
	The leader who has created a powerful industrial complex of the USSR 10%	11%	7%
	Total censorship 7%	6%	3%

Source: compiled by the authors.

The remaining 18 items of the questionnaire were conventionally subdivided into three units, based on the periods commonly singled out in the Soviet history. With the first unit (questions 14 through 18), it was expected to find out knowledge and ideas of the students and schoolchildren about I. V. Stalin's policy in the period of accelerated industrialization of the late 1920s — 1930s (see Table 4).

**Table 4***The respondents' attitudes toward I. V. Stalin's repressive policy*

Question No.	Text of the question		
14	How do you understand the term "policy of repressions"?		
Answers, %	school students	college students	university students
	- extermination of "enemies of the people"; - coercive measures; - extermination of one's own population.	- extermination of "enemies of the people"; - political violence; - coercive measures.	- massive violence against one's own people; - fighting "enemies of the people"; — fighting the internal opposition.
15	Who was repressed in the USSR in the years of I. V. Stalin's rule?		
Answers, %	Peasantry 21%	25%	35%
	Intellectual class 9%	10%	13%
	Workers 13%	15%	20%

	The military	11%	9%	11%
	Clergy	8%	6%	12%
	The political elite	10%	8%	8%
	The nobility	9%	8%	1%
	Merchants	8%	9%	0%
	Boyars	11%	10%	0%
16	Do you know any facts about your relatives being repressed (great-grandmothers, great-grandfathers, other relatives)?			
Answers, %	Yes, there was someone repressed in my family			
		5%	8%	13%
	No, my family had no-one repressed			
		26%	32%	41%
	I do not know anything about it			
		69%	60%	46%
17	What does the term "dekulakization" mean?			
Answers, %	The correct answer			
		63%	72%	94%
	The incorrect answer			
		37%	28%	6%
18	Did the policy of "dekulakization" have the positive or negative nature?			
Answers, %	The negative			
		26%	15%	49%
	The positive			
		21%	32%	5%
	It was a necessary policy of the state			
		9%	16%	11%
	It was a consistent process			
		5%	5%	23%
	I do not know anything about it			
		39%	32%	12%

Source: compiled by the authors

The first unit of questions has shown gaps in knowledge of the schoolchildren and vocational education students in the country's pre-war history. In particular, most respondents picked correct answers to the question about the social composition of those repressed in the 1930s — opting for peasants, workers, the military, the clergy, party and Soviet leaders. Meanwhile, about one third of the surveyed ones marked definitely wrong answers: the nobility, merchants, and even boyars. This gives evidence about their being not good at particularities of the social structure of the USSR population in the said time period.

The greater part of the respondents knows nothing about the fact if there was anyone repressed among their maternal or paternal relatives. Only slightly more than one third of the respondents could speak with confidence about having or not having the repressed ones, and the smaller part have noted they had such relatives in their family.

The question about the dekulakization policy, or dispossession of the kulaks, has returned controversial judgments. While there were no special discrepancies in the answers as for the said term, the opinions on the very policy did vary. About one third of the surveyed ones

have abstained from evaluating this policy. Slightly more than one third are sure that it had a negative nature. Meanwhile, all the rest are not only sure that it was of a positive nature, but also that it was necessary, as it enabled agriculture to develop, and that it was a consistent process of development of the Soviet village. The second unit of questions (items 19 through 24) touched on evaluating I. V. Stalin's role during the years of the Great Patriotic War. Results of the survey are given in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
*Opinions about I. V. Stalin's policy in 1941-1945*

Question No.	Text of the question			
Respondents	school students	college students	university students	
19	What positive points in the policy pursued by I. V. Stalin can you name?			
Frequent answers	Creation of a strong state	Victory in the war	Creation of the most powerful industrial complex	
20	Did the policy pursued by Stalin help defeat the Nazi Germany in the years of the Great Patriotic War?			
Answers, %	Yes	54%	61%	78%
	No	7%	3%	7%
	I do not know anything about it			
		39%	36%	15%
21	Do you know any Great Patriotic War heroes — natives of the Republic of Mordovia? (Please give 3 or 4 names of the heroes.)			
Answers, %	Could give the names			
		31%	26%	86%
	Could not give the names			
		69%	74%	14%
22	What difficulties did citizens of Mordovia face in the years of the Great Patriotic War? (Please give some of them in brief.)			
Frequent answers	famine	low wages	lack of workforce	
23	Do you know the concept of "Sura defense line"?			
Answers, %	Yes	54%	56%	82%
	No	46%	44%	18%
24	Do you know any names of your relatives — participants of the Great Patriotic War or homefront workers? (Please give some of them.)			
Answers, %	Gave 1-2 names of relatives			
		21%	32%	46%
	Gave 3 and more names			
		12%	10%	22%
	Could not give any name			
		46%	42%	27%
	Have no relatives			
		21%	16%	5%

Source: compiled by the authors.

One third of the respondents has abstained from any judgments. However, the majority of the surveyed ones have answered the question “Did the policy pursued by Stalin help defeat the Nazi Germany?” in the positive. Meanwhile, the question asking to give exact names of the Great Patriotic War heroes — natives of Mordovia — has turned out difficult for many students. Let it be noted that a greater part of the university students has specified the heroes' names. However, the figure was only slightly over one third among the schoolchildren, and less than one third — among the vocational college students. This confirms the young people aged 15-17 have poor knowledge of the history of their native land.

When evaluating the situation in the Soviet rear, a greater part of the surveyed ones believes that in the war years, the principal issue was hunger, lack of workforce, and low wages. The absolute majority of the surveyed have noted they had participants of the Great Patriotic War or Homefront workers among relatives. Meanwhile, it was a greater part of the university students, about a half of the vocational college students, and slightly over one third of the schoolchildren who could give their relatives' names. The items of the third unit (questions 25 through 31) were aimed at checking the knowledge about events of the period after the war. It should be noted that point 28 presents multiple responses to the questions, which influenced the percentage of responses (see Table 6).

**Table 6**  
*Opinions about I. V. Stalin's policy in 1946-1948*

Question No.	Text of the question			
Respondents	school students	college students	university students	
25	Do you know about the famine of 1946 — 1947?			
Answers, %	Yes	57%	66%	87%
	No	43%	34%	13%
26	What difficulties of the post-war period do you know? (Please give some of them in brief.)			
The most frequent answers	Famine	low wages	post-war devastation	
27	Which of the periods (the war years or the first years after the war) were more difficult for the rural population of the USSR and Mordovian ASSR in particular?			
Answers, %	The war years			
		69%	62%	51%
	The post-war period			
		31%	38%	49%
28	Where from do you know the history of post-war development of the Soviet Union? (Several options can be selected, 100% of the total number of variations.)			
Answers, %	From the course of history at my educational institution			
		76%	72%	69%

	I am currently studying history		
	23%	28%	35%
	From my relatives		
	37%		
		34%	21%
	From my friends		
	12%	15%	13%
	From the mass media		
	17%	16%	21%
	From the Internet		
	47%	51%	32%
29	Please express your own opinion about I. V. Stalin's policy if it has not been covered by the questionnaire items.		
The most frequent answers	He is the bloody dictator plus the talented leader.	Our country developed rapidly in this period.	Stalin's policy combines in itself both excesses and cruelty with the upswings and victories of our state.

Source: compiled by the authors.

Most surveyed ones have answered the question if they know about the famine of 1946—1947 which affected villages of the Middle Volga regions, Mordovia included, in the positive. Hunger, lack of workforce, low wages, and devastation were given as the most frequent answers to the question about the post-war village and city problems.

At the end of the survey, the authors focused on identifying the sources from which the respondents obtain information about Stalin and "Stalin's epoch". So, they have offered the schoolchildren and students a possible series of answers without limiting the number of options to mark. The vast majority has opted for the "knowledge received from the course of history at school and other educational institutions" variant. Less than a half get their information from the Internet-based sources. Slightly more than one third of the surveyed have mentioned relatives as their source. Less than a quarter of the respondents have opted for the "currently studying the period in question" and "from the mass media" variants. A minor part has given the "from acquaintances" option. Table 7 demonstrates the answers to the generalizing questions of the questionnaire survey. The respondents expressed their opinions on its content and difficulties they faced when doing it.

**Table 7***The respondents' opinions on the questionnaire survey*

30	Which questions were difficult for you and why?		
The most frequent answers	No. 15 (little knowledge on this topic); No. 21 (new to this question).	No. 17 (not familiar with this topic); No. 21 (not familiar with this topic).	No. 16 (the family does not remember such cases).
31	Was this questionnaire survey interesting for you?		
Answers, %	Yes, rather interesting 75%	78%	83%
	No, rather boring 3%	3%	2%
	Interesting, but there are comments 22%	19%	15%

Source: compiled by the authors

### Discussion

The complexity of analyzing the attitude of today's Russians to Stalin and, more broadly, to the phenomenon of Stalinism is due to the ambiguous nature of this historical personality, that, on the one hand, combined totalitarian, repressive methods of governing the country and, on the other hand - the ability to implement large-scale socio-economic projects that brought the USSR to a leading position in the world, making the Soviet Union a global superpower. Stalin's supporters among our contemporaries appeal right to the last argument. There is an ambiguous attitude towards Stalin and his contemporaries. As Bykova (2013) notes, an ambiguous attitude towards Stalin was also characteristic of the leader's contemporaries. By the way, this situation is not unique: for example, in Indonesia Muhammad Suharto is highly honored, and in Chile - Augusto Pinochet, cruel dictator generals who made their countries successful and rapidly developing regional economies (Reyes, 2014; Hefner, 2012).

At present, the attitude towards I. V. Stalin's person remains ambiguous: from assessing him as a criminal who initiated terror against the Soviet people, to a great ruler who led the country to victory (Yarlykova & Yu, 2020; Pavlovets, 2017). It is evident from the obtained results that evaluation of I. V. Stalin's person and activity by the young people remains ambivalent, which is quite explicable.

However, there is a clear trend of positive judgments prevailing. Clearly, this is in no small way promoted by the wish to see Russia strong, by addressing to the heroic past of nations populating it, enhanced propaganda of traditional values, and strengthening of the armed forces

against the background of relations with the West at large worsening (Vasilenko et al., 2018; Somov, 2007).

On the other hand, a significant part of the young takes an unbiased look on I. V. Stalin's policy, its obvious negative and positive outcomes included (Roshchupkin, 2016). Among the latter, there is industrialization of the country, creation of the modern armed forces, clear change in the social and cultural spheres. Meanwhile, the responsibility for unjustified repressions conducted against various categories of the population, especially peasantry, is not taken away from Stalin and his entourage. Among the respondents, it is the university students who have proved to be more inclined to criticize actions of the “leader of the nations”; in particular, more frequently, their answers were more profound, and they contained fewest of all inaccuracies in facts.

At the same time, it must be noted that in the Russians' public consciousness, support for Stalin's personality has been growing steadily in recent years. For instance, according to the 2019 survey conducted by Levada Center, the total level of positive attitude to the Soviet leader hit its maximum value for all the years of surveying: it was each second participant of the survey (51%) who stated their admiration of Stalin, respect or affection for him. The most significant growth (12 percentage points) was demonstrated by “respect” — this attitude to Stalin is held by 41% of the respondents, and it is the most widespread one, too (Dergachev, 2019).

The political scientist Schulmann comments on this situation mentioning some remoteness of the modern Russians from that epoch: “These events are further and further away. Accordingly, the living historical memory goes away, too, so Napoleon is a cake and not the man who attacked Russia, Hitler is a meme, and Stalin is the ‘Kuban Cossacks’. That's some quite distant past. So the attitude is like one to King Arthur” (Why a record number of Russians sympathize by Stalin, 2019).

The importance of demythologizing the "Stalinist myth" in modern Russian historical culture is also noted by Linchenko and Ivanov (2017). With regard to the above, it seems appropriate to suggest it as a recommendation that the historical past be made relevant (including the period of Russian history discussed in this paper) in the form of “round tables”, quests, and scientific circles at all steps of Russian education. The specified forms of work allow not only getting the young generation interested in their country's past, but they also render talking about its difficult and debatable pages more open and informal.

### **Limitations of the study**

It is necessary to recognize that there are certain limiting factors of the research presented in this article. First of all, these limitations are associated with a small sample size of respondents who took part in the survey. It is quite possible to assume that with a more massive survey, the picture of attitudes towards Stalin's personality in the youth environment will undergo certain adjustments. At the same time, the authors of this article have many years of experience in communicating with students in the course of teaching and are quite familiar with the main opinions of the younger generation expressed about Stalin during discussions at classrooms, student round tables and conferences. And these opinions, in general, resonate with the results of the survey analyzed in the article.

### **Conclusion**

The survey analyzed in the paper has revealed a controversial attitude to I. V. Stalin by the young students, which in general is a representation of public opinion on this question current in the entire Russian society, with the latter basically characterized by the lack of consensus on a number of tough political and ideological topics. Among these, alongside the attitude to the Soviet past, the present-day issues occupy an important place. In this sense, the Russian "today" and the Soviet "yesterday" turn out to be closely interrelated, and the Russians' bitter dispute as for whether the Crimea is "ours" and if the combating Donbass is to be supported goes together with no less heated debate about Stalin and Stalinism as a historical phenomenon.

We are sure that rethinking of the Soviet legacy is an important part not only of the modern Russian humanities, primarily historical science, but also of the cultural mainstream. The indiscriminate denigration of the Soviet period in the "90s" was replaced by a more balanced approach, implying "the separation of the grains from the chaff" and, moreover, the cultivation in the Russians' collective memory of the impressive success and achievements, heroism and victories, which marked, among other things, the Stalinist era as well.

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