Governing Uncertainty through Education: The Administrative Role of Schooling in Contemporary Russia

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Abstract: Scholars have inquired about the role of schooling in Russia in ideological indoctrination (Korochkin, 2024) , construction of patriotic (Lovorn and Tsyrlina-Spady, 2015; Sanina, 2018) and loyal citizens (Koesel, forthcoming) , as well as identity-building (Zamyatin, 2012). This paper frames education in a novel way: as a governance tool for managing uncertainty, treating the highly standardized textbooks as bureaucratic outputs meant to mitigate geopolitical and domestic uncertainty in Russia. To that end, this paper examines how the Russian state mobilizes its education bureaucracy to govern growing political and social uncertainty through strategic management of knowledge.

In a context of geopolitical volatility, declining public trust and increasingly unpredictable global changes, Russia's recent curriculum reforms position schooling as a key site and administrative instrument to stabilize state-society relations. In other words, a unified and standardized curriculum seeks to reduce uncertainty by providing a coherent and state-sanctioned interpretation of Russia's civilizational identity, geopolitical role, relationship with the West and other relevant themes. Such curricular stabilization efforts link uncertainty reduction to social control by narrowing legitimate interpretations of political reality. First, the paper presents the education policy landscape in Russia. Building on that, empirically, the paper draws on qualitative content analysis of recent and relevant upper secondary (history and social science) that were centrally approved as part of the unified federal curriculum. The paper traces how through selective narration and evaluative language, the textbooks codify a risk landscape in which uncertainty is externalized (by carefully constricting the West as adversarial actor), while national coherence and loyalty are presented as the vital source of stability.

Overall, this paper aspires to contribute to debates on the governance of uncertainty by focusing on illiberal regimes, and how they use curricular instruments to shape risk perception, define legitimate knowledge, and engineer epistemic predictability. If education successfully reduces uncertainty, the implications extend beyond Russia: uncertainty reduction becomes a mechanism through which social control is normalized, dissent is delegitimized, and political complexity is rendered governable. This paper argues that Russia's education bureaucracy in fact functions as a resilience-oriented governance apparatus that seeks to manage uncertainty—rather than democratic participation—particularly amid a volatile and unpredictable geopolitical environment, in which maintaining societal control has become a central state priority.

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