Russia’s New Domestic Scene: Economy, Nationalism, Power, Opposition

PONARS Eurasia Policy Perspectives
September 2017
Russia’s New Domestic Scene
ECONOMY, NATIONALISM, POWER, OPPOSITION

PONARS Eurasia
POLICY PERSPECTIVES
SEPTEMBER 2017
PONARS Eurasia is an international network of scholars advancing new approaches to research on security, politics, economics, and society in Russia and Eurasia. PONARS Eurasia is based at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. This publication was made possible in part by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Program Directors: Henry E. Hale and Marlene Laruelle
Managing Editor: Alexander Schmemann
Senior Research Associate: Sufian Zhemukhov
Research Assistant: Minhaj Abdullah

PONARS Eurasia
Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES)
Elliott School of International Affairs
The George Washington University
1957 E Street NW, Suite 412
Washington, DC 20052
Tel: (202) 994-6340
www.ponarseurasia.org

© PONARS Eurasia 2017. All rights reserved
Contents

About the Authors ix

Foreword xi
Marlene Laruelle, George Washington University

I. Reassessing the Complexity of Putin’s Regime

The Code of Putinism 3
Brian D. Taylor, Syracuse University

Is Putin’s Popularity Real? 9
Timothy Frye, Columbia University
Scott Gehlbach, University of Wisconsin–Madison
Kyle Marquardt, University of Gothenburg
Ora John Reuter, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Correction of Errors 15
HOW THE KREMLIN RE-EQUILIBRATED AUTHORITARIAN ELECTIONS IN 2016
Vladimir Gelman, European University at St. Petersburg and University of Helsinki

It’s Not All Negative 21
RUSSIAN MEDIA’S FLEXIBLE COVERAGE OF PROTEST AS A REGIME SURVIVAL STRATEGY
Tomila Lankina, The London School of Economics and Political Science

Russia’s 2016-2018 Election Cycle 29
POPULAR ENGAGEMENT AND PROTEST POTENTIAL
Regina Smyth, Indiana University

How Kremlin Efforts to Control the Regions May Be Backfiring 35
Ora John Reuter, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
II. Russia’s Economy in a Time of Trouble

Economic Crisis, Regional Finance, and Federal Response in Russia  
*Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, King’s College London*  
45

High-Level Corruption in Russia  
*Mark Kramer, Harvard University*  
51

Revising Russia’s Economic Model  
*The Shift from Development to Geopolitics*  
*Hilary Appel, Claremont McKenna College*  
*Vladimir Gel’man, European University at St. Petersburg; University of Helsinki*  
57

Lessons (Half) Learned  
*Comparing the 1998 and 2014 Ruble Crises*  
*Juliet Johnson, McGill University*  
63

III. National Identity, Nationalism, and Patriotism

A New Wave of Russian Nationalism?  
*What Really Changed in Public Opinion after Crimea*  
*Mikhail A. Alexseev, San Diego State University*  
*Henry E. Hale, George Washington University*  
71

What Is the Meaning of “National” in the Russian Debate about the National Interest?  
*Viatcheslav Morozov, University of Tartu*  
79

Misinterpreting Nationalism  
*Why Russkii Is Not a Sign of Ethnonationalism*  
*Marlene Laruelle, George Washington University*  
85

Everyday Patriotism and Putin’s Foreign Policy  
*J. Paul Goode, University of Bath*  
89

Russian Patriotism without Patriots?  
*Interviews (in Perm and Tyumen) Reveal the Limitations of Patriotic Education*  
*J. Paul Goode, University of Bath*  
97

The “Return of Stalin”  
*Understanding the Surge of Historical Politics in Russia*  
*Ivan Kurilla, European University at St. Petersburg*  
105
IV. Polarizing and Reconciling: Identifying Russia’s Foes and Friends

Emotions, Cognition, and the Societal Dynamics of East-West Polarization 113
Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, King’s College London

What Should Students Know about Russia’s Enemies? 119
CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICAL TEXTBOOKS
Serghei Golunov, Hokkaido University

Political and Social Attitudes of Russia’s Muslims 125
CALIPHATE, KADYROVISM OR KASHA?
Theodore P. Gerber, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Jane Zavisca, University of Arizona

Promoting Islam within the “Russian World” 135
THE CASES OF TATARSTAN AND CHECHNYA
Alexandra Yatsyk, Kazan Federal University
About the Authors

Mikhail A. Alexseev is a Professor of Political Science at San Diego State University.

Hilary Appel is the Podlich Family Professor of Government and George R. Roberts Fellow at Claremont McKenna College.

Timothy Frye is the Marshall D. Shulman Professor of Post-Soviet Foreign Policy at Columbia University.

Scott Gehlbach is Professor of Political Science and Romnes Faculty Fellow at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Vladimir Gel'man is Professor at the European University at St. Petersburg and Distinguished Professor at the University of Helsinki.

Theodore P. Gerber is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Serghei Golunov is Professor at the Kyushu University Center for Asia-Pacific Future Studies.

J. Paul Goode is Senior Lecturer in Russian Politics at the University of Bath (UK).

Henry E. Hale is Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Co-Director of PONARS Eurasia at the George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs.

Juliet Johnson is Professor of Political Science at McGill University.

Mark Kramer is Director of Cold War Studies at Harvard University and a Senior Fellow of Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies.

Ivan Kurilla is Professor of History and International Relations at the European University at St. Petersburg.

Tomila Lankina is Associate Professor at The London School of Economics and Political Science.

Marlene Laruelle is Research Professor of International Affairs, Director of the Central Asia Program and Co-Director of PONARS Eurasia at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs.
Kyle Marquardt is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at the University of Gothenburg.

Viacheslav Morozov is Professor of EU-Russia Studies at the University of Tartu (Estonia).

Ora John Reuter is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Senior Researcher at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

Gulnaz Sharafutdinova is Senior Lecturer in the Russia Institute at King’s College London.

Regina Smyth is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Law at Indiana University.

Brian Taylor is Professor of Political Science in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University.

Alexandra Yatsyk is Head of the Center for Cultural Studies of Post-Socialism and Associate Professor of Sociology at Kazan Federal University.

Jane Zavisca is Associate Dean for Research and Associate Professor of Sociology in the College of Social and Behavioral Science at the University of Arizona.
Foreword

Marlene Laruelle
George Washington University

Since the so-called conservative turn of 2012 and the Ukrainian crisis, the Russian regime has been facing new challenges, among them the economic slowdown and what for several years appeared to be a decline in popular mobilization. As such, the Kremlin has sought to avoid domestically controversial issues and strategies as it prepared for what it hoped would be a low-key and uneventful 2016-18 cycle of parliamentary and presidential elections.

In this volume, PONARS Eurasia experts address “Putinism” as a system, looking at its central and regional mechanisms, changes in its strategies toward the opposition, and its flexible media coverage. The authors also revisit Russia’s economic model, reactions to the crisis, and efforts (or the lack thereof) to address endemic high-level corruption.

Interactions between the regime and the population on issues related to nationalism and patriotism are explored in order to better comprehend patterns of mobilization or demobilization of public opinion on topics identified as relevant to national identity and Soviet memory.

Last but not least, we look at a range of perspectives on the notion of diversity and the identification of foes and partners. Russia remains a very diverse country in terms of its regional components, and local contexts matter, even as citizens share similar perspectives on Russia’s place in the international order.
I. Reassessing the Complexity of Putin’s Regime
Is Vladimir Putin a pragmatist or an ideologue? And if he is an ideologue, then what exactly is Putinism? Putin seems like an unlikely founder of an -ism, and for many years, experts tended to depict him as a pragmatist. Recently, however, especially since the domestic tightening of the screws from 2012, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the subsequent war in Ukraine, Putin is said to have gone ideological.

This memo argues that “Putinism” does indeed exist and that it has for some time, but that it is a mistake to see it as a coherent ideological scheme. Rather, Putinism is best thought of as a “code.” A code is both more and less than an ideology; more, because it involves not just ideas but other stimuli for action, and less, because it is not a coherent and encompassing system of thought. Further, although it would be a mistake to see Putin as a pure ideologue, it would be equally mistaken to reduce Putin’s actions to simple pragmatism. Rather, as the sociologist Max Weber observed long ago, rational self-interest is not the only motive for human action. In addition to what Weber called “instrumental rationality,” other important motives for human behavior include values or ideas (“value rationality”), emotion (“affect”), and habit (“tradition”). I refer to this combination of motives that fall outside the realm of instrumental rationality—habit, emotions, and ideas—as a code.

This memo can only provide a rough outline of the contents of this code, a sketch rather than a portrait, with little nuance and limited evidence. My goal is to suggest a way to think about Russian behavior that gets beyond the pragmatist-or-ideologue distinction. This code is not Putin’s code, but the code of Putinism, which means these beliefs, emotions, and habits are shared to a large extent by other members of Putin’s team. Although he is obviously the most important person in the system and its central decisionmaker, he has surrounded himself with people who share similar backgrounds and beliefs. Further, this code took some time to develop and show itself, becoming readily apparent in the aftermath of the Beslan terrorist attack of September 2004 and Ukraine’s Orange Revolution in December 2004. Although somewhat dormant during the Medvedev interregnum, the code of Putinism has returned in full form since Putin’s
return to the presidency in 2012. The basic components of the Putinist code are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Habits</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statism, including great power statism</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Respect/disrespect and humiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism</td>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Resentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatism/anti-liberalism</td>
<td>Unity/anti-pluralism</td>
<td>Vulnerability/fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-masculinity</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Putinist Ideas**

Perhaps the most fundamental component of Putin’s thinking is that he is a **statist** (*gosudarstvennik*). In his first major **statement** as ruler, in December 1999, Putin declared that building a strong state was “the key to the rebirth and rise of Russia.” But what kind of state does the Putinist code envision? The evidence suggests that, contrary to initial claims that the state must be democratic, the Putinist code gives the state primacy over the individual. The Putinist state is a traditional Russian “service state”—not one that provides services to its citizens, but one that expects citizens to serve it.

Putin is not only a statist, but a **great power statist** (*derzhavnik*). He said in 2003, “All of our historical experience shows that a country like Russia can live and develop in its existing borders only if it is a great power. In all periods when the country was weak—politically or economically—Russia always and inevitably faced the threat of collapse.” Russia should be a great power not only so it will not be pushed around globally, but also so it can resist infringements on its sovereignty and stand up to those lecturing Russia about the deficiencies of its domestic political system—hence the concept of “**sovereign democracy**” propagated in 2006-2007 by Putin’s deputy chief of staff Vladislav Surkov.

The need for a strong state internally and externally, and for forceful resistance of Western pressure, is connected to another core Putinist idea, that of **anti-Westernism** in general and **anti-Americanism** in particular. This anti-Americanism has been evident from at least 2004, when after the Beslan attack Putin blamed outside forces who “want to cut from us a tasty piece of pie”; two years later he attacked “Comrade Wolf” who “knows who to bite and doesn’t listen to anybody.” According to Russian leaders, the United States developed the technology of “**color revolutions**” as a form of political
warfare against Russia, most importantly during Ukraine’s 2004 Orange Revolution and 2014 Euromaidan. As Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev put it earlier this year, “The Americans are trying to drag Russia into an inter-state military conflict, using the Ukrainian events to bring about a change in power [in Russia] and in the final analysis dismember our country.”

A final ideational attribute of Putinism is what might be called conservatism but is more properly seen as anti-liberalism. Philosophically, liberals tend to stress the importance of individual rights and freedoms, and have a generally positive view of human nature and the possibility of rational progress. Conservatives, in contrast, tend to stress the group over the individual, be more skeptical about human nature, and prioritize order and tradition over change and reform. In 1999 Putin stressed that Russia was historically very different from liberal America and England, contending that “collective forms of life have always dominated over individualism” in Russia and that the Russian people look toward the state and society as a whole for support rather than believe in their own efforts. This collectivist and statist orientation is decidedly conservative. Putin’s embrace of conservativism has become more explicit in his third term as president, with his defense of traditional values and spirituality.

**Putinist Habits**

It is common in political analysis to attribute someone’s behavior to things they believe; it is much less common to claim people act politically based on things they do without really thinking. Referring to this as “habit” is in a certain sense misleading, because the issue is not whether someone smokes or bites their fingernails. Rather, when Weber emphasized the importance of “traditional” behavior “determined by ingrained habituation,” he was referring to an “almost automatic reaction” without reflection or deliberation.

One key impulse of Putin and his team which fits our understanding of a habit is the desire to establish control. This includes a distrust of spontaneous action. For Putin and many of his close associates, this habit is at least in part an attribute either acquired or strengthened by time working for the Soviet secret police, the KGB. As Russian sociologist Olga Kryshtanovskaya put it in 2007, “What is ‘disorder’ in the eyes of a man in uniform? It’s the absence of control. If there is not control, there is the possibility of independent influence. And the siloviki [people with backgrounds in the security services, law enforcement, and the military] perceive the presence of alternative centers of power in the country as a threat to the country’s integrity.”

Closely related to this attitude about control is a commitment to order. Putin and most of his closest associates made their careers as bureaucrats, not as politicians, and are therefore used to hierarchical organizational structures. This habitual orientation was evident in the first slogan adopted by Putin to explain his goals as president, the
“vertical of power.” It is also apparent in Putin’s obvious distaste for revolutions, which he sees not as spontaneous domestic uprisings brought on by popular dissatisfaction but as events instigated by someone, often outsiders, particularly the United States.

Habits favoring control and order also lead into a preference for **unity**, or what more politically might be called **anti-pluralism**. Ideationally, this is connected to conservative and anti-liberal ideas that stress the importance of national unity and downplay the importance of individual freedoms and expression. Putin **maintained** in 2003 that it would only be possible for Russia to achieve its “strategic goal” of returning to the ranks of the great powers through “consolidation…mobilization…[and] the uniting of forces.” Dmitry Medvedev, at the time head of the presidential administration, went further, **arguing** in 2005 that “if we cannot consolidate the elite, Russia could disappear as a single state.”

There is a general connection between habits favoring control, order, and unity and ideas that are statist, anti-liberal, and anti-Western. Putin has repeatedly emphasized the need to unite against foreign and domestic enemies for the good of the country. This continual linking of domestic critics and foreign adversaries represents a return to a traditional “besieged fortress” image of Russia, a tendency that resonates naturally with the Putinist team.

Another habitual tendency that has marked the Putin era is personal **loyalty**. A St. Petersburg journalist described Putin in an interview as “a friend to his friends,” which is both a “strong and weak point” of his personality. Loyalty to “the guys” and sticking together was a key part of the social code in Putin’s childhood milieu. Putin’s demonstration of loyalty to his two key patrons, former St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak and former president Yeltsin, played a crucial role in his rise to the top. Loyalty is not just a personal characteristic, however, but a more general feature of the system, with loyalty to the “clan” or “team” being seen as a key practice.

The final habit that is part of the code of Putinism is **hyper-masculinity**. Even the most casual observer of Russian politics is familiar with Putin’s penchant for macho displays: demonstrations of his judo prowess, fishing and riding horseback bare-chested, tranquilizing a tiger, hanging out with a biker gang, and so forth. These are not just stunts, according to a different St. Petersburg journalist, but the realization of Putin’s “childhood dreams.” Putin also has a tendency to use criminal slang to emphasize his toughness. Although this tough talk and behavior is clearly in part a public relations construction and legitimization tool, it also seems to reflect habitual tendencies that affect how the Russian leadership sees the world.
Putinist Emotions

Emotions, like habits, are often disregarded by social scientists trying to explain political behavior, especially that of elites. Feelings are things to be ignored or suppressed or controlled, to allow the rational part of the brain to do its work. Psychological research, however, show that emotions are fundamental to decisionmaking.

The first emotion of central importance to the Putinist code is respect. More specifically, the Putinist elite feels that it has been disrespected, offended, even humiliated, in particular by the West. In February 2000, Putin emphasized the danger of disrespecting Russia, declaring: “Anyone who offends us will not last three days.” This feeling of having been disrespected has intensified in recent years, with the Russian economist Igor Yurgens observing in 2014 that “both Putin and his closest circle are overcome with feelings of humiliation and betrayal.” Similarly, foreign policy analyst Sergei Karaganov has noted a “feeling of humiliation and a desire for revanche” on the part of “a significant part of the elite and the population as a whole.” The political commentator Stanislav Belkovsky, emphasizing the importance of emotion to decisionmaking, stated that Putin felt that he had “tolerated humiliation from the West for many years” and that the annexation of Crimea was not so much a pragmatic defense of Russian interests but the “redemption of his own humiliation.”

Closely related to this feeling of disrespect is the emotion of resentment. The fancy/pretentious way this emotion is discussed in academic literature is to use the French term ressentiment, a feeling experienced when one group takes another group as an example or model but then feels angry and frustrated when it is unable to meet the standards, whether objectively or subjectively, of the exemplary unit. Multiple Russian scholars have highlighted the importance of ressentiment, including PONARS Eurasia members Sergey Medvedev and Eduard Ponarin.† The political scientist Olga Malinova notes the inherent tension between Russia’s position of “pupilhood” vis-à-vis the West in terms of building democracy and capitalism in the 1990s versus its perceived status as an equal great power. Resentment was all but inevitable under the circumstances.

A final emotion that is an aspect of the Putinist code is vulnerability or even fear. This claim probably sounds dubious, given the amount of power wielded by Putin and his government and the degree of popularity Putin has enjoyed over the last 15 years in Russia. But close observers of Putinism insist that this feeling is genuine. Former Kremlin insider Gleb Pavlovsky has described among the elite “an absolute conviction

† For more on mass emotions in Russia today, see: Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “Emotions, Cognition, and the Societal Dynamics of East-West Polarization,” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 355, September 2014.
that as soon as the power center shifts, or if there is mass pressure, or the appearance of a popular leader, then everybody will be annihilated. It’s a feeling of great vulnerability.” Further, Pavlovsky maintained that Putin believed that Russia was not ready for an elite rotation of power without score-settling: “Putin always said, we know ourselves, we have not reached that stage yet; we know that as soon we move aside, you will destroy us. He said that explicitly: you’ll put us up against the wall and execute us.”

Implications

Is Putin a pragmatist or an ideologue? He is both and neither, sometimes one and sometimes the other. His politics and decisions are motivated by a combination of circumstances, rationality, ideas, habits, and emotions. He has a mentality and certain goals, but not a detailed road map. He is, in short, a human being.

Importantly, these elements can reinforce one another. The idea of Russia as a strong state at home and abroad is connected to habits of control and order, as well as feelings of resentment and disrespect. The overlap and blurring between the elements is what makes it a cohesive code or mentality. Reducing the motives of Putin and his ruling team to just one thing—whether rationality or ideology—misses a lot of the story.

Outside observers and foreign interlocutors need to resist the tendency to dismiss the code of Putinism as either a product of irrationality or propaganda and instead understand how it shapes Russian government behavior at home and abroad. For the Kremlin, Russia’s domestic and international situation is quite precarious and the West is out to get Russia and makes common cause with Russia’s domestic opposition; as a result, strongly centralized “manual control” is necessary to hold the state together.

Russia’s besieged fortress mentality is real. The impact of this code has been captured well by pro-Kremlin Russian journalist Dmitry Babich: “Living without enemies and having a besieged fortress mentality is indeed stupid. However, living in a besieged fortress and not having a besieged fortress mentality is downright idiotic.” Putin and his team are not idiots. Rather, their life experiences (including feelings, habits, and values) reinforce this fortress mentality.
Is Putin’s Popularity Real?

Vladimir Putin has managed to achieve and maintain strikingly high public approval ratings throughout his time as president and prime minister of Russia. Kremlin spin doctors help carefully manage Putin’s public image via a heavy dose of propaganda in the state media, punctuated by the occasional shirtless photo or publicity stunt to emphasize his masculinity, and reinforced by a substantial public opinion operation that includes periodic large surveys of the mass public. Whether or not these methods are effective, there is little doubt that the Kremlin cares deeply about the level of popular support for Putin. Indeed, observers in Russia are quick to point to Putin’s high approval ratings (often in contrast to other leaders) as a source of legitimacy. As in other autocracies, popular support for the ruler is thought to be a key determinant of the tenure and performance of the regime.

Yet, there is a nagging suspicion that Putin’s approval ratings are inflated because respondents are lying to pollsters. Although repression is typically not the first option for contemporary dictatorships, the possibility remains that citizens will be penalized for expressing disapproval of the ruler. Even a small probability of punishment may be sufficient to dissuade survey respondents from expressing their true feelings about the ruler. Alternatively, and not mutually exclusively, respondents may lie to pollsters to conform to what they perceive as a social norm—in this case, supporting Putin.

Timothy Frye is the Marshall D. Shulman Professor of Post-Soviet Foreign Policy at Columbia University. Scott Gehlbach is Professor of Political Science and Romnes Faculty Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Kyle Marquardt is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at the University of Gothenburg. Ora John Reuter is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Senior Researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
Determining the extent of dissembling in public opinion polls is a challenge not only for researchers studying public opinion, who have used Russian polling data to explain patterns of regime support, but also for autocrats themselves, who typically lack the tools of free and fair elections or open media with which to gauge their “true” support among the public. Indeed, although Western politicians in democracies are often portrayed as obsessed with polling, in some ways it is in nondemocratic regimes that credible survey responses are most important.

Research Design

To explore the extent to which survey respondents truthfully reveal their support for Putin, we contracted the Levada Center to place questions on the January 2015 and March 2015 rounds of their nationally representative survey (Vestnik). Both rounds included the standard question used to gauge support for Vladimir Putin: In general, do you support or not support the activities of Vladimir Putin?

The concern that our research design seeks to address is that respondents might misreport their support for a political leader when asked directly. To gauge the extent to which survey respondents actually support Putin, we employ a version of the widely used “item-count” technique, often referred to as a “list experiment.” The idea of a list experiment is to give respondents the opportunity to truthfully reveal their opinion or behavior with respect to a sensitive topic without directly taking a position that the survey enumerator or others might find objectionable. Previous work has used the item-count technique to study a range of sensitive topics, including vote buying in Lebanon and voting for Putin in the 2012 presidential election.

The list experiment is implemented by providing the respondent with a list of items and asking not which apply to the respondent, but how many. Thus, in a classic example, respondents are asked how many of a list of events (“the federal government increasing the tax on gasoline,” “professional athletes getting million-dollar contracts,” “large corporations polluting the environment”) would make them angry or upset. Randomly-assigned respondents in the treatment group receive a longer list, which includes the potentially sensitive item, than do respondents in the control group. Continuing the example, respondents in the treatment but not control group see a list that also includes the item “a black family moving in next door.” Respondents in the treatment group are thus given the option of indicating that they would be angered if a black family moved in next door while maintaining ambiguity about whether it is this or one of the other items on the list that would make them angry: they merely include that item in their count of upsetting events.

Interpretation of results from a list experiment is straightforward. Differences in the average responses for the treatment and control group, respectively, provide an estimate of the incidence of the sensitive item. In the example above, the mean number of items
provoking anger for respondents living in the U.S. South who were randomized into the treatment group is 2.37, vs. 1.95 for the control group, implying that 42 percent of Southern respondents would be angered by a black family moving in next door.

In our setting, the potentially sensitive attitude is not supporting Putin. To judge the extent of any such sensitivity, we implemented two versions of the list experiment. The first version, which evaluates support for Putin alongside previous leaders of Russia or the Soviet Union, reads as follows: 

*Take a look at this list of politicians and tell me for how many you generally support their activities:*

- Joseph Stalin
- Leonid Brezhnev
- Boris Yeltsin
- [Vladimir Putin]

Members of the control group receive the list without Putin, whereas members of the treatment group receive the list with Putin. Respondents view the list and manually circle a number from 0 to 4 on a card. The wording “support their activities” mirrors the direct question discussed above.

The second version of the list experiment places Putin alongside various contemporary political figures:

*Take a look at this list of politicians and tell me for how many you generally support their activities:*

- Vladimir Zhirinovsky
- Gennady Zyuganov
- Sergei Mironov
- [Vladimir Putin]

Although the basic research design is straightforward, there are a number of additional considerations, which we discuss below.

**Findings**

**Baseline results**

Respondents to Levada’s *Vestnik* have for years reported high levels of support for Vladimir Putin. The January and March 2015 waves of the survey are no exception: when asked directly, 86 percent of respondents in January and 88 percent in March reported that they supported the activities of Vladimir Putin.
Our list experiments also suggest a high level of support for Putin. The estimates from the four experiments (historical/contemporary, January/March) are in fact quite similar, ranging from 79 percent support in both rounds of the historical experiment to 81 percent support in the January contemporary experiment. Taken at face value, these estimates imply a small but not trivial degree of social desirability bias among respondents to the two surveys. Depending on the survey wave and experiment wording, estimates of support for Putin from the list experiments are five to nine percentage points lower than those from the corresponding direct question, with a high probability that the true value is greater than zero. Nonetheless, there are reasons to suspect that the levels of support implied by our list experiments are either over- or underestimates. We discuss each possibility in turn.

**Floor effects**

List experiments can fail to guarantee privacy if none or all of the items on the list apply to respondents in the treatment group—a situation referred to as floor and ceiling effects, respectively. Thus, for example, a member of the treatment group in the example above who indicated that she was angered by all four items could be identified as upset if a black family moved in next door. In our setting, in which not supporting Putin is potentially sensitive, floor effects are the primary concern: respondents in the treatment group who indicate that they support none of the figures on the list implicitly reveal that they do not support Putin.

Common advice for minimizing floor and ceiling effects is to include items on the control list whose incidence is negatively correlated, thereby ensuring that the typical count lies somewhere between none and all of the items on the list. Unfortunately, our analysis of responses to the direct questions presented above suggests that public approval of virtually any pair of political figures is positively correlated among Russian respondents. Further complicating the issue, many Russians appear unsupportive of any politician—with the possible exception of Vladimir Putin, whose support is the question of this paper.

Lacking a design solution to the problem, we examine the potential consequences of floor effects in our setting. In the January survey, 33 percent of respondents indicate that they support precisely one of the four historical leaders on the treatment list, and 37 percent of respondents indicate that they support precisely one contemporary politician on the treatment list. If we were to very conservatively assume that all such respondents in fact support none of the political figures on the list, but are afraid of revealing that they do not support Putin and so indicate that they support one, then estimated support for Putin would drop to 47 and 44 percent, respectively. Similar results apply to the March experiment.
These sharp lower bounds on support for Putin assume not only that there are no individuals in the treatment group who support Putin but none of the other figures on our historical and contemporary lists, but also that there are no individuals who support precisely one of the figures on the control list but not Putin. Although we cannot directly test these assumptions, neither is terribly plausible. To the extent that they do not hold, support for Putin will be higher than the lower bounds derived above.

**Artificial deflation**

Potentially working against any floor effects is the possibility of artificial deflation, in which “estimates are biased due to the different list lengths provided to control and treatment groups rather than due to the substance of the treatment items.” In our setting, artificial deflation could arise if the inclusion of Putin provides a strong contrast that reduces the attractiveness of other figures on the list, such that (for example) respondents underreport support for Sergei Mironov when listed alongside Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Gennady Zyuganov, and Vladimir Putin (the treatment condition) but not when listed alongside only the first two figures (the control condition). Such an effect would reduce our estimate of support for Putin from the list experiment and thus increase our estimate of social desirability bias.

To identify possible bias resulting from artificial deflation, we included two “placebo” experiments in the March survey. The idea in each case is to examine the incidence of artificial deflation by including a “potentially sensitive” item that is not in fact sensitive, thus isolating deflation from the effect of social desirability bias and allowing comparison with direct questions about the same items. In the first placebo experiment, we retain the focus on political figures but present a list of non-Russian leaders:

*Take a look at this list of politicians and tell me for how many you generally support their activities:*

- Alexander Lukashenko
- Angela Merkel
- Nelson Mandela
- [Fidel Castro]

We assume that respondents will be willing to reveal their support for Fidel Castro, the “potentially sensitive” item in the list experiment, when questioned directly: he is well known in Russia but has little connection to contemporary political debates. In the second placebo experiment, we present a list of respondent characteristics, which we can verify directly from responses to the standard battery of demographic questions:

*Take a look at this list of characteristics and tell me how many apply to you:*

- Male
- Female
Examining each of the placebo experiments in turn, we find that the difference in estimated support for Castro between the direct question (60 percent) and the list experiment (51 percent) is nearly identical to that for Putin—this despite the fact that social desirability bias is unlikely to inflate support for Castro when respondents are asked directly. In contrast, we find no evidence of deflation in the “over 55” experiment: both in the direct question and the list experiment, approximately 28 percent of respondents are estimated to be over 55. These results suggest that there may be something distinctive about list experiments that are used to gauge support for political figures.

Net Effects

One way of thinking about the offsetting impact of floor effects and artificial deflation is to add the estimate of artificial deflation from the Castro experiment (nine percentage points, assuming that none of the difference between the direct question and the list experiment is due to social desirability bias) to the lower-bound estimate of support for Putin under maximal floor effects (roughly 45 percent). This puts support for Putin in the mid-50s. At this point, the question is how many of the 33-37 percent of treatment-group respondents who say they support precisely one political figure are telling the truth. Although this question warrants further analysis, it seems implausible that most of these respondents in fact support nobody but are lying to hide their dissatisfaction with Putin. Indeed, we cannot exclude the possibility that Putin is as popular as implied by responses to the direct question.

Conclusion

Estimates from our list experiments suggest support for Putin of approximately 80 percent, which is within ten percentage points of that implied by direct questioning. Various considerations suggest that this figure may be either an over- or underestimate, but in any event, the bulk of Putin’s support typically found in opinion polls appears to be genuine. Of course, respondents’ opinions may still be shaped by pro-Kremlin bias in the media and other efforts to boost support for the president, but our results suggest that Russian citizens are by and large willing to reveal their “true” attitudes to pollsters when asked.
After Russia’s wave of protest during the 2011-2012 election cycle, the country’s authorities embarked on an effort to prevent anti-regime mass mobilization during subsequent election periods. They made a series of institutional changes and implemented a “politics of fear” to weaken the political opposition. Before the 2011-12 elections, the opposition had organized an effective negative campaign against Kremlin candidates. Now, as the September 18 parliamentary elections approach, the Russian leadership is confident that they have substantially reduced the risk of public protest. Analyzing the Kremlin’s 2016 parliamentary election campaign sheds light on how Russian authoritarianism survives.

**A Repressive Turn: Lessons Learned by Autocrats**

The first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union were accompanied by a remarkably low degree of political protest inside Russia. Most instances of anti-regime mobilization brought together only a few hundred activists at best. This is why the appearance of tens of thousands of protesters on the streets of Moscow and other Russian cities during the 2011-12 “winter of discontent” was perceived by the Kremlin as a major challenge to its general strategy of containing dissent. From the perspective of maintaining authoritarian rule, the problem was related not only to tactical mistakes the Kremlin made during the election campaign but also to the regime’s overall use of carrots rather than sticks. This approach included coopting semi-loyal actors as junior partners in a broad pro-Kremlin coalition, the use of only light repression toward opponents, and the vocal rhetoric of liberalization heard during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. By the time Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency, however, it became clear that this containment strategy had been exhausted. The major implication for Russia’s rulers of the 2011-12 protests was that even shallow liberalization posed a threat to the preservation of the authoritarian status quo. Thus, the regime felt it should tighten the screws and use sticks if it wanted to stay in power.

*Vladimir Gel’man* is Professor at the European University at St. Petersburg and Distinguished Professor at the University of Helsinki.
Hence the “politics of fear” that immediately followed the 2011-12 elections (as well as in the wake of the Crimean annexation and subsequent confrontation with the West). A desire to avoid the risk of anti-regime mobilization during the 2016-2018 election cycle lay at the heart of these changes. Apart from that, the repressive turn of the Russian regime was also driven by economic constraints. An economic recession against the backdrop of declining global oil prices and international sanctions (and counter-sanctions) left no room for the regime to buy the loyalty of Russian citizens any longer. In fact, welfare spending in Russia decreased before this year’s elections.

After 2012, the Kremlin targeted the infrastructure of organized dissent, following not only the model of late Soviet repression but also replicating the tactics of the authoritarian regime in neighboring Belarus. For example, the crackdown of the anti-Putin rally in Moscow in May 2012 and the incarceration of dozens of randomly chosen participants was nearly a carbon copy of similar developments that took place in Minsk after Belarus’ 2010 presidential election.

A combination of harsh new regulations and selective enforcement has now become the essence of a systematic and consistent “politics of fear.” The menu of repressive policies includes:

1. Harassment and intimidation of real and potential oppositionists—both individuals and organizations (first and foremost NGOs, considered nodes of anti-regime networks);
2. Increased control over information (replacement of leadership in media outlets and extending anti-extremist laws);
3. Regime-induced hysteria of “culture wars,” effectively employed by the Kremlin as a tool to consolidate public opinion around the regime and publicly discredit opponents.

As a result, the number of participants in anti-regime protests has visibly decreased. Hundreds of activists fearing criminal prosecution have fled the country. Many independent organizations have either closed down or had their voices diminished via self-censorship or stigmatization as foreign agents and national traitors. Although the number of political prisoners in Russia remains relatively low in comparison to many authoritarian regimes around the world, it greatly exceeds their number before 2012. The use or threat of violence against regime opponents has also expanded; the February 2015 murder of Boris Nemtsov was just the tip of the iceberg.

As Russia heads into next month’s parliamentary elections, the Kremlin’s repressive turn has had a predictably devastating impact on opposition parties and their supporters. Instead of the enthusiasm and hope that existed before the 2011 parliamentary election, doom and gloom now dominate the Russian opposition landscape.
Loyal opposition parties, such as the Communist Party (KPRF) or Just Russia (JR), have aligned with the Kremlin and criticized only some of its policies.

Meanwhile, disloyal opposition parties have come under severe pressure. They have been denied participation in a number of sub-national elections and their mobilization capacity is very low. The Party of People’s Freedom (PARNAS), an umbrella for various anti-regime activists, has experienced major schisms. It also failed to cooperate with the opposition Yabloko party, leading them to compete for the same limited pool of voters. Russia’s most visible opposition leader, Alexey Navalny, was legally disqualified from balloting.

The disarray among Russia’s opposition represents a striking contrast to the 2011 parliamentary election, when Navalny and other leaders effectively organized a negative anti-regime campaign under the slogan “vote for anyone but United Russia!” At the time, they were able to minimize the share of pro-Kremlin votes to under 50 percent, while loyal opposition parties managed to increase their representation.

Rewriting the Rules of the Game

Before the current campaign, the parliamentary electoral system was changed once again. While the 2007 and 2011 elections were held under a proportional representation (PR) system with a seven percent barrier for entry, there now exists a mixed electoral system with a five percent threshold, similar to the system in place from 1993 to 2003. During that time, one side effect of a mixed electoral system was the outsized influence of local leaders, given the Kremlin’s weak central political control that inhibited Moscow from building a strong and disciplined ruling party. After the recentralization of a hierarchical “power vertical” under Putin, the full PR system gave regional chief executives (governors) only a small chance to place their nominees in parliament while they remained responsible for delivering local votes to the Kremlin and the ruling United Russia (UR) party. The restoration of a mixed electoral system provides governors with a balanced combination of positive and negative incentives to actively support the center. Unsurprisingly, the geography of single-mandate districts in many regions reflects gerrymandering in favor of rural areas, where local political machines can operate in full swing without serious resistance.

As for the proportional races, most pre-election surveys predict a secure victory for United Russia. According to August 2016 data from the Public Opinion Foundation, 45 percent of respondents intended to vote for UR (a slight decrease from 56 percent in December 2015). The Kremlin’s satellite parties—KPRF, JR, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)—could get around 10, 8, and 8 percent, respectively. In some single-mandate races, Kremlin-sponsored and/or governor-sponsored nominees are running as independents rather than as UR candidates. In addition, UR left vacant about fifteen single mandate seats thanks to tacit agreements with KPRF and JR. In all, experts
consider there to be only around 30 competitive single-mandate seats out of 225, and opposition candidates have a serious chance only in a handful of races.

Another factor stacking the deck was the change to the electoral schedule. All previous parliamentary elections have been conducted in December, while the upcoming one is set for mid-September. This move aimed to decrease public interest in the elections thanks to the summer vacation season. This will decrease voter turnout, offer greater room for manipulation on election day, and diminish the potential effects of negative campaigning by the opposition. Holding earlier elections may also be considered a pre-emptive move against protest voting, given the expectation of increased voter dissatisfaction in the winter due to Russia’s economic situation. Meanwhile, the Kremlin is trying to avoid any major scandals or accusations about electoral unfairness. Ella Pamfilova, who previously served as the government’s ombudsperson and who has argued for “clean” elections, was tapped to replace Vladimir Churov, notorious chair of the Central Electoral Commission since 2007. Some regional electoral commissions were also reshuffled.

Such measures, however, serve as camouflage. As one political technologist linked with the Kremlin has confessed on Facebook, the presidential administration made it clear to the lower levels of the “power vertical” that UR must get two thirds of the seats in parliament by whatever means necessary. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, however, “honesty should be imitated to avoid the discontent of politically-concerned urban residents.” In the provinces, “imitation of honesty will be abandoned, and elections should be conducted there as usual, through administrative pressure and a very special counting of votes” (i.e., overt fraud). As a result, a number of observers expect that UR will readily restore the two-thirds majority it held from 2007 to 2011.

Last but not least, the reaction of Russian voters to political change during the 2011 parliamentary elections (who behaved contrary to many predictions) may be regarded as involution rather than revolution. According to a July 2016 Levada Center survey, Russians are demonstrating their lowest-ever interest in elections. Only 46 percent of respondents said they discuss election-related matters (in October 2011, this share was 62 percent), only 33 percent agreed that the parliamentary election is an important event, and 39 percent considered electoral participation “useless.” Russia’s climate of mass political apathy has been fueled by a lack of political competitiveness or a public desire for major political change. Public opinion is one of “resigned acceptance” to the status quo—not because of genuine support of the authorities but because alternatives are perceived as less attractive and/or unrealistic.

Toward a New Authoritarian Equilibrium?

Despite the fact that the 2011 parliament remained loyal to the Kremlin, all elections are now risky moments for the regime. Tightening the screws, institutional re-engineering,
and more efficient top-down political control greatly assist in maintaining authoritarian equilibrium and legitimizing the status quo. Non-democratic elections also serve as a tool for the partial replacement of elites through careful selection and advancement of candidates by the Kremlin and its subordinates.

The Russian leadership’s upcoming victory in next month’s parliamentary elections will give it free reign going forward: at the moment, there are no domestic restraints other than increasing economic problems. With an eye toward the 2018 presidential election, the newly elected parliament could even turn into a major provider of constitutional change. A logical extension of Russia’s authoritarian trajectory would be the adoption of a new constitution stripped of declarations on individual rights and liberties, the primacy of Russia’s international obligations, and other such liberal statements (not to mention the removal of presidential term limits). After the expected restoration of authoritarian equilibrium this September, the Kremlin will be interested to further consolidate political and institutional arrangements that can help Russia’s leadership maintain its monopoly on power for some time to come.
It’s Not All Negative
RUSSIAN MEDIA’S FLEXIBLE COVERAGE OF PROTEST AS A REGIME SURVIVAL STRATEGY

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 449
November 2016

Tomila Lankina*
The London School of Economics and Political Science

Pundits continue to debate whether economic shocks, public discontent at home, and isolation abroad will shake President Vladimir Putin’s regime. Much of the commentary on Putin’s survival strategies has focused on repression and aggressive military posturing. This somewhat obscures another important strategy: being highly sensitive to the public mood, deftly reacting to public sentiment, and effecting rapid policy shifts to moderate public dissent.

Manipulating how mass media covers popular protest is central to this strategy, but it would be a mistake to assume that such coverage is uniformly negative. Instead, Russian media coverage of mass protest shifts dramatically between attempts to undermine public support for anti-regime activism and efforts to pander to the public mood driving such activism, depending on changes in public sentiment and developments on the ground. In making this case below, I draw on findings from new research into how Kremlin-controlled media portrayed the 2011-12 protests in Russia and the protests in Ukraine that preceded the Euromaidan revolution in late 2013.

Kremlin-Controlled Media and Russian Domestic Protests
A longstanding tradition in research on social movements distinguishes between two different ways protest can be “framed” or interpreted for media consumers: (1) the “disorder” frame; and (2) the “freedom to protest” frame. The former treats protest as an instance of undesirable chaos whereas the latter characterizes it as a legitimate and even desirable expression of public sentiment. Coverage can employ different mixes of both frames.

Which of these frames did Russian media employ for the protests that broke out in late 2011 against falsification in the December 2011 parliamentary elections? In Figure 1, news stories were coded as a scale, from full usage of the disorder frame to full invocation of the freedom to protest frame. Higher values indicate more use of the freedom

* Tomila Lankina is Associate Professor at The London School of Economics and Political Science.
to protest frame while lower values reflect greater employment of the disorder frame for a given day between October 2011 and December 2013. As seen below, there are major fluctuations in how the Kremlin-controlled media covered protest in Russia during this period.

**Figure 1. “Framing Scores” of News Articles (Russian domestic protest)**

Looking more closely at **Figure 1**, each little gray dot represents a framing score for an individual article published by the Russian media. Higher scores indicate that popular protests were framed as freedom to protest, while lower scores indicate that they were framed as social disorder. The curves represent average scores at respective time points, showing overall trends in how street protests were framed over the period. (These average scores are statistical estimates, which inevitably include a certain degree of error, but they fall within the range indicated by the dotted curves with 95 percent confidence.)

There are four spikes in the overall quantity of news stories about protest, each indicated by a vertical dotted line labeled S1-S4. The trend line connecting these spikes clearly shows a shift toward the freedom to protest frame between S1, the onset of mass protests in December 2011, and S2, the May 2012 Bolotnaya Square mass anti-regime protests, which featured skirmishes between protesters and police that triggered an unprecedented wave of repression against the political opposition. S2 also coincides with Putin’s inauguration for a third presidential term.

At this point, however, a sharp drop occurs toward the disorder frame as we approach the third spike in media coverage of protest (S3). During this period, media stories were overwhelmingly concerned with “exposing” and “preventing” alleged plots of another mass uprising, ostensibly supported by agents of former Georgian President Mikheil

* See the Appendix for methodology, sources, and link to the project website.
Saakashvili and his Western backers abroad. This can be referred to as “fabricating protest,” whereby the media deliberately planted misinformation into the public domain about the threats protests pose to public order. Following S3, there is a gradual upward shift in the direction of the freedom to protest frame roughly until the fourth spike in protest coverage is reached; this is S4, the October 2013 Biryulyovo anti-migrant riots in Moscow.

After this period, however, there is not a significant dip in the direction of the disorder frame. This is despite the fact that the Biryulyovo disturbances featured traits that would fit the disorder narrative well. These include vandalism, right-wing extremist slogans, and public expressions of xenophobia and racism. The work of Christopher Hutchings and Vera Tolz, who have analyzed nationalist discourses on Russian television for an earlier time period, helps shed light on these findings. They observe that beginning in 2012, the leading state-controlled channels intensified narratives stigmatizing non-Russian migrants and ethnic and religious minority groups, thereby pandering to exclusive forms of Russian nationalism. This observation is in line with arguments that the Kremlin adapted nationalist rhetoric following the regime’s realization of the unlikely alliance between nationalists and political liberals during the 2011-2012 mass protests.

Kremlin-Controlled Media—Protests in Ukraine

The tactic of stigmatizing anti-regime political protests while tacitly endorsing expressions of Russian nationalist sentiments is replicated in the Russian government-controlled media’s coverage of Ukraine’s Euromaidan protests. To analyze Russia’s responses to the Ukraine crisis, the study compares and contrasts coverage of the Euromaidan by Kremlin-controlled media with coverage by various non-Kremlin-controlled media, namely the news agencies Interfax and Rosbalt along with Zerkalo nedeli (Mirror Weekly, one of Ukraine’s leading independent news sources that appears in Russian).

Figure 2 summarizes the trends in the Russian state-controlled media’s portrayal of the Euromaidan-related events. Here, the average framing of Kremlin media is represented by a red line (based on the dots representing individual news articles), and the average framing of the independent media is captured by the black line. In order to make better sense of shifts in Russia’s media coverage of protests in Ukraine, Figure 2 also presents a timeline of key events during the first pivotal months of the crisis alongside the trend lines of fluctuations in Russian media’s protest framing.

A significant deviation of the Kremlin’s frame from the frames employed by non-Kremlin media toward the protests-as-disorder narrative (that is, a major separation of the red from the black lines) is observed only after the fall of the former President Viktor Yanukovych government and his flight from Kiev in February 2014. In fact, the framin
of protests by state-controlled sources and independent media tended to be in line with each other until mid-February 2014. Only at that point, did framing of protests in Russia’s state-controlled media become more negative and significantly different from that of the non-Kremlin controlled media. This trend lasted until May 2014.

**Figure 2. Framing of Protests in Ukraine by Different Media**

Why did Kremlin-controlled media framing deviate significantly from that of independent media only for this short period? The study gained leverage on this question by performing a series of simple key-word searches to identify trends in vocabulary alluding to the plight of ethnic Russians in Ukraine. **Figure 3** summarizes these findings. In this chart, following Yanukovych’s departure and coinciding with the annexation of Crimea, Russia’s state-controlled media began to employ legalistic jargon about “federalization,” “referendum,” and the status of the Russian language and of ethnic Russians (русские) frequently in ways differing from coverage by sources not under the Kremlin’s control.

However, the Kremlin promptly abandons these strategies by the end of April. This coincides with its disastrous failure to replicate the relatively peaceful Crimea annexation scenario in the Donbas. By many accounts, there was a significant minority of residents in Donetsk and Luhansk regions whose sentiments favored joining Russia. Yet, public opinion surveys revealed that the overwhelming majority there—let alone in the other territories that Russia briefly referred to as Novorossiya, namely...
Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Kherson, and Mykolayiv—showed a preference for an undivided Ukraine. Furthermore, in Russia too, an influx of migrants into regions bordering Ukraine and war casualties served to dampen the public euphoria surrounding Crimea’s annexation.

The Kremlin media’s abandonment of these key terms may also be explained by the fact that protests also began to appear within Russia, demanding the “federalization,” or outright secession, of Siberian and other regions within Russia itself. These demands represented the Russian political opposition’s thinly veiled references to the Kremlin’s hypocrisy inherent in fomenting separatist sentiment abroad while depriving Russia’s own regions of meaningful decision-making powers.

Figure 3. Frequency of five keywords until the end of 2014 (coverage of protests in Ukraine)

Conclusion

Kremlin-controlled media have adeptly altered the coverage of public discontent at home and abroad in ways meant to undermine dissent, or, alternatively, cater to public sentiment thereby increasing citizen support for the Putin regime. Rather than being witness to a grand strategy, tactical shifts implemented, abandoned, or altered rapidly as events unfolded. These trends in the framing of protests indicate that media analysis could be a useful tool for exploring shifts in Russia’s domestic and foreign policy. For policymakers seeking to unpack the black box of the Kremlin’s decision-making, media analysis may represent an important way of revealing shifting intentions and tactics. It may also help ascertain not just the sources of regime strength, but also its weaknesses and vulnerabilities.
Appendix—Methodology

The information presented and arguments made are based on in-depth analysis of media data using a methodological tool developed with my research colleagues at The London School of Economics and Political Science. I would like to thank in particular Kohei Watanabe for performing the media analysis part of the study; Katerina Tertytchnaya for her help with Russian protest data analysis; and Yulia Netesova for her assistance with analyzing Russian and Ukrainian media sources. All errors are solely those of the author.

This research relied on the Integrum database of Russian media to harvest news stories on protests by employing the search term “protest” (“протест”). The stories were obtained from six leading state-owned or state-controlled media sources Rossiyskaya gazeta, Komsomolskaya pravda, and Izvestiya, and the television channels Channel 1, Russia 1, and NTV. We obtained 28,531 news stories in total for the period between January 1, 2011, and December 31, 2013. They include TV transcripts, newspaper articles, and newswire reports. With the help of these stories, we developed a Russian-language dictionary of media framing of protest. The dictionary-generation process involved human coding of news by three native Russian-speakers to capture the tone of media coverage of street rallies. It also involved a machine analysis component—the computer program that we created can “learn” from human coders what scores to assign to words found in thousands of media stories on protest. For the analysis of non-Kremlin-controlled media under protests in Ukraine, we did a similar analysis of stories on protest in Russia. We downloaded TV transcripts, newspaper articles and newswire reports from the Integrum Russian news database by employing the search term “protest*” (“протест*”). A geographic classifier that we developed helped ensure that only stories of protests in Ukraine downloaded. The total number of news stories harvested for the period November 1, 2013 to December 31, 2014 is 22,568.

For more details, please see the project website: popularmobilization.net.
Russia’s 2016-2018 Election Cycle
POPULAR ENGAGEMENT AND PROTEST POTENTIAL

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 438
August 2016

Regina Smyth∗
Indiana University

In the wake of the For Fair Elections (FFE) protest movement in Russia in 2011-2012, the Kremlin initiated a new strategy of state-society relations that was aimed at diminishing the propensity for protest in the next election cycle. Since the mid-2000’s, the Kremlin’s strategy has been to close the political opportunity structure for opposition organizations and undermine elite brokers. The logic of the strategy was to undermine the alliances that could be built among existing opposition organizations and between non-protesters and protesters. This strategy included eliminating opposition organizations from formal political competition, coopting political elites in the systemic opposition, and channeling voters’ preferences into regime support.† By 2013, as the economic crisis loomed and the legacy of the FFE movement persisted, this strategy proved ineffective.

The regime stepped up efforts to degrade protest potential by altering the calculations of protest newcomers and observers. The goal was to close the political opportunity structure that would lead to increased mobilization among the unorganized opposition. The first step in this strategy was to fragment the existing opposition and undermine the value of consensus in shaping new patterns of coordination. The second strategy focused exclusively on elections as the Kremlin realized the power of protest voting in controlled elections. These efforts were focused on disengaging opposition voters, while at the same time shifting electoral manipulation from election day to earlier in the process. The final step marked an increase in the infrastructure and deployment of repression, including new laws and policing power that would swamp the cost-benefit calculation of quiescent citizens and ensure that they also do not participate.

∗ Regina Smyth is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Law at Indiana University.
† The systemic opposition consists of registered political parties that the regime allows to compete in elections and legislative processes because they will not challenge Kremlin policies or vie to control the political agenda. The systemic opposition includes the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Fair Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Yabloko and a host of smaller parties that are largely constructed by the Kremlin to create an illusion of choice and competition.
The Target of State Intervention

The Kremlin’s strategy to preclude protest in the 2016-2018 election cycle took aim at two key groups in society—casual protesters and non-protesters. Increases in political contestation are often preceded by a coalition between organized oppositions and protest newcomers and a shift in the opportunity structure, redefining potential coalition partners. These two factors were prominent in Russia in 2011 as millions of voters participated in a vote protest by voting for any party but United Russia (UR) or by spoiling their ballots and displaying evidence on digital media. They were also evident in the FFE street protests that linked a disparate group of opposition forces: protest newcomers, the organized opposition, nationalists, democrats, businessmen, and students who joined the call for political reform.

The FFE movement revealed that the Russian population is divided between regime supporters who are not available for protest action and regime opponents who are active or might be mobilized. Within the potential protester group, there are further divisions: non-participants, casual protesters, and core protesters. The relative size of these groups is difficult to know since they are often latent divisions that change quickly in response to different types of protest actions, opposition strategies, and state responses. In Russia, the Kremlin has manipulated elections and controlled information to obscure the configuration of social forces.

The protest core is the most committed group of activists. They are members of opposition organizations who are well known to authorities. They share a protest identity and are the first group onto the streets. The vanguard has already solved its collective action problem and will predictably take to the streets when they are called. This group has been the subject of politicized justice and state action for many years, and these efforts have increased since 2011. Good examples are the fabricated political charges leveled at Aleksei Navalny and his campaign team, new laws and regulations that limit bloggers’ access to their audiences, and the use of kompromat against opposition leaders or the release of the personal information of activists who participated in opposition primaries.

The second group of protesters consists of casual protesters. These are citizens who are mobilized by the protest itself: they will take action if they know that everyone else will participate with them. Vanguard actions provide some of this information by taking to the streets and articulating demands. Through social media, personal networks, and organizations, opposition groups can provoke protest by providing evidence that others will participate and spark coordination among the group. Coordination is based on participants’ agreement on their shared grievances, political goals, and the actions they should take to redress their concerns. In 2011, casual protesters participated in the vote protest and many also joined the observer movement and street actions.
The last social group is the largest. The latent opposition consists of citizens who are playing collective action strategies: weighing the costs and benefits of taking to the streets or voting for the opposition before acting—either because it is risky or they doubt the efficacy of protest or protest demands. For this group, simply observing protest will not prompt mobilization. They are mobilized through a shift in their cost-benefit calculation or a profound shift in their understanding of politics. In the 2011 “anybody but United Russia (UR)” vote protest, the cost of participation was low and the expected benefits were high. As a result, many in this group joined the vote protest. But most did not join the street actions where real and potential costs of participation were much higher and the benefits more ambiguous and dispersed.

While many in the first group of activists joined the protest vanguard and continued to take to the streets between 2012 and 2016, this change was not perceptible in national polls or in the institutionalization of the opposition. In short, this growth in opposition support was barely, and only intermittently, perceptible to the broader population. In contrast, there was a visible effect of movement from observers to active participants in elections. Navalny’s successful transfer of protest resources into the electoral arena resulted in 27 percent of the vote in the September 2013 election. This surprise outcome revealed that the latent opposition was still active and willing to participate in low-cost vote protests. Regional elections, although dominated by UR victories, revealed a great deal of opposition support or disengagement, creating pressures within the electoral authoritarian system that required Kremlin control of all electoral contests. In response, the Kremlin increased its efforts to shape the political opportunity structure facing the opposition to mitigate the threat of protest.

**The Kremlin Responds: A Closed Political Opportunity Structure**

The Kremlin’s attempt to decrease protest capacity in elections and on the streets limited opposition influence while shoring up its core support. It used institutional change and electoral manipulation to eliminate any unpredictable opposition from electoral competition, limiting the need to engage in vote fraud. The regime also increased its use of targeted repression: charging opposition leaders such as Navalny’s electoral team, removing critical resources through mechanisms such as the foreign agents law, and imposing a ban on endorsements from any person prohibited from running for office. This regulation targets Navalny and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who supported a wide range of candidates in single-member district races. The same strategies were used against coordinators and potential voters. New regulations decreased the capacity to observe elections, and police forces openly harassed activists collecting signatures for candidate registration. The regime gerrymandered districts to dilute urban-based opposition voters and timed elections to decrease participation and limit campaign and candidate effects on vote choice.
To further diminish opposition capacity to forge and maintain a broad coalition, the Kremlin altered its policy agenda and public appeals, fragmenting the political space and undermining opposition coalitions. The moral panic over LGBT citizens and the subsequent stress on conservative values divided opposition consensus. Similarly, Kremlin policies and aggressive framing of tensions with the West and war in Ukraine painted the opposition as pro-Western traitors. The Kremlin deployed a similar public relations strategy to devalue elections as a source of social or political change. These efforts took a number of forms. The visible cooptation of the systemic opposition parties is an important component of this strategy. In formulating ballots for the 2016 single-mandate races, the Kremlin appears to have brokered agreements similar to those in past gubernatorial races. In 40 districts, systemic opposition party leaders will run without competition from other parties’ candidates, increasing their likelihood of victory. This access to the perks of office seems sufficient to ensure compliance with the Kremlin’s agenda. Despite their increased presence in parliament after 2011, the political agenda and policy process remained firmly under Kremlin control.

A second important component of this strategy is the undermining of expectations about electoral processes worldwide. In this argument, all elections are flawed. Efforts to delegitimize U.S. elections through email leaks that highlight manipulation or coverage of rhetoric about rigged elections are good examples of this strategy. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Russians believe U.S. elections are inherently corrupt and that this corruption is comparable to Russian practices. The effort to delegitimize foreign elections is accompanied by a narrative about the free and fair nature of Russian electoral practices. Despite massive intervention in electoral competition between 2011 and 2016 and evidence of fraud in cases like Barvikha on the outskirts of Moscow and in the UR primaries, the Kremlin has announced that the 2016 race will be free and fair and that UR will regain its overwhelming majority in the State Duma.

The third element of the Kremlin’s post-2012 strategy has been to increase the threat of repression aimed at citizens engaged in collective action. In 2012, focus group respondents argued that they believed protest would spark authoritarian deepening. These fears proved true. In the past year, the Kremlin continued to build its reliance on repression, jailing digital media users for posting anti-regime material and building corruption charges against regional elites. It also continued to create the legal infrastructure for political prosecution through the adoption of the Yarovaya omnibus law that lowered the age for charges for crimes such as participation in protest or failure to report a crime. An ominous institutional change is the formation of a National Guard, composed of seasoned military and police troops, headed by President Vladimir Putin’s long-term ally General Viktor Zolotov. The National Guard seems aimed directly at protest activity with the right to deploy armored vehicles and water cannons against protesters. All of these changes increase the potential cost of protest, discouraging new activism.
The Balance before Elections

What does this analysis tell us about the likelihood of protest in September 2016? Evidence demonstrates that the Kremlin’s reliance on symbolic politics reinforced with aggressive policy options shored up its electoral support and decreased protest potential. Similarly, the Kremlin’s efforts to frame the electoral processes as fair and competitive had some success. Expectations of a free and fair vote have increased relative to 2011 and the percentage of voters who think that the distribution of seats is determined by the authorities declined from 51 percent in November 2011 to 42 percent in March 2016.

The disengagement strategy found similar success. In some Levada polls, likely voters have decreased more than 10 percent relative to 2011. This drop almost surely consists of opposition voters. Those who say they will not vote cite the lack of choice among trusted candidates or the belief that their votes will not count. Conversely, the support for UR among committed and likely voters remains at or above its 35 percent target goal—higher than among unlikely voters. There has also been a 9 percent decline in citizens who participate in electoral discussions relative to October 2011. Political discussion is a consistent predictor of political activism. Perhaps most importantly for protest potential, those who say that they will vote ascribe their motivations to habit and peer pressure while the influence of positive motivations for participation, civic duty, a desire to express political opinions, and the desire to participate in national life, have all declined significantly since 2011. At the same time, while society may be quiescent, it is not content. Surveys indicate that regional economic discontent is growing and the percent of citizens who believe the country is moving in the right direction is declining (close to 2012-2013 levels), expectations of fraud are increasing, and UR’s rating is declining.

Conclusion

Analysts note that when elections get close, citizens re-engage quickly and vote choice shifts, producing unexpected outcomes. The change in electoral rules that reintroduced single-mandate races renders the Kremlin vulnerable to this process in district level elections across the country, a potential new focal point for opposition activism if elections are stolen. To avoid this, the Kremlin is likely to rely on the tactics it has honed since the last election cycle to disengage potential protesters and shore up support through manipulation and positive incentives in these final weeks before the election.
How Kremlin Efforts to Control the Regions May Be Backfiring

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 467
March 2017

Ora John Reuter*
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

In the 1990s and early 2000s, much of Russian politics revolved around relations between the Kremlin and regional elites. As Putin recentralized federal authority over the course of the 2000s, these relations became less important. However, recent developments suggest that Russia watchers should keep their eye on regional politics. Certain trends in subnational appointments—in particular, the increasing number of governors who have few ties to their regions—may undermine the ability of the regime to mobilize votes. Moreover, recent political reforms, such as the reintroduction of gubernatorial elections and single-member-district deputies in the Duma, combined with the increasing use of arbitrary repression against regional officials, have the potential to undermine elite cohesion, which has long been one of the key pillars of regime stability in Putin’s Russia.

Subnational Appointments

Russia’s regional governors have been de facto appointed since 2005.† Since that time the Kremlin has mostly outsourced the task of mobilizing votes to regional leaders, and rewards those who perform well. Indeed, political science research shows—and Kremlin insiders confirm—that regional governors are evaluated, in large part, on the basis of how well they do at mobilizing votes for United Russia. Regional governors have been adept at mobilizing voters because they built powerful political machines over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s. Recognizing the electoral importance of regional patrons, the Kremlin was slow to replace powerful governors when it canceled elections in 2004. Most governors remained in place, and when governors were replaced, they were usually replaced with regional insiders.

* Ora John Reuter is Assistant Professor of Political Science at University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.
† Direct elections were reintroduced in 2012, but the president retains the right to fire governors and appoint interim replacements. Since 2012, the practice has been for the president to name an interim governor months before the election—even if that interim governor is the incumbent—and the interim governor then wins in a landslide. In this way, Russian governors are still effectively presidential appointees.
Nonetheless, as Figure 1 shows, the share of governors with pre-existing ties to their region, while still more than half, has been declining over time. Outsider governors are usually businessmen, federal bureaucrats, or, more rarely, siloviki. Moreover, appointments in 2016, though few in number, were marked by an even more drastic shift in favor of outsider governors. As Figure 2 indicates, governors with direct professional links to Putin have been a rarity, but four of the eight governors appointed in 2016 were direct clients of Putin and had no ties to the region.

The Kremlin’s preference for regime insiders over regional politicians is understandable. An official whose political qualifications consist solely of their ties to regime leaders is more likely to remain loyal in trying times. By contrast, those with autonomous resources, such as a pre-existing regional power base, will find it easier to craft a political future after a transition, and indeed, may even be able to remain in their position as governor. This reduces their incentive to remain loyal.

But this practice has clear electoral drawbacks. Replacing popular local politicians with bureaucrats risks undercutting the Kremlin’s own mobilization strategy. Indeed, studies show that United Russia tends to perform better in regions where the governor is popular and where the governor has strong ties to the region. Experience in the region gives insiders a number of advantages over outsiders including better information, pre-existing client networks, public support and ties to local elites.

These trends coincide with the cancellation of direct elections in Russia’s major cities. By 2015, 66 percent of Russia’s large cities had replaced directly elected mayors with appointed city managers (technocrats with limited electoral experience). In addition, as legislative elections in Russia’s regions have become less competitive, fewer and fewer pro-regime legislators have experience running a real election campaign.

The net result of these trends is that officials in the regions are increasingly lacking in electoral experience. In the 1990s and 2000s, regional politicians cut their teeth on electoral campaigns that were sometimes quite competitive. Those who won the most votes—either through their own political machines, charisma, or electioneering skills—were elected. The Kremlin then co-opted those politicians and enlisted their electoral skills in its own voter mobilizing efforts. By canceling elections at various levels—or making them less competitive—the regime is creating an entire cohort of regional officials that have few voter mobilization skills.

Since 2014, the regime has been coasting on Putin’s astronomically high popularity ratings, but should those ratings ever dip, the regime may find it difficult to mobilize votes in the regions, a problem that surfaced during the 2011 State Duma elections. Indeed, turnout has already been on the decline in recent elections. For the past several years, the regime has sought to depoliticize electoral contests and puts little effort into mass mobilization. This is especially true in urban areas, where regime support is the
lowest and has been shrinking. Instead, the regime is increasingly relying on state-dependent voters, especially in rural areas. The regime still wins large legislative seat shares, but low turnout victories are not as impressive as those with high turnout. Low turnout undermines the legitimizing function of elections. Moreover, low turnout deprives the regime of crucial information about the distribution and content of social grievances.

**Elite Cohesion**

Two of the most common causes of autocratic breakdown are elite defections and mass uprisings. Given the headline-grabbing nature of the 2011-2012 series of protests, most research on Russia has focused on the former. Yet recent years have witnessed several dynamics that should lead observers to pay more attention to elite cohesion in Russia’s regions.

Elite cohesion has been one of the Putin regime’s strongest pillars. One technique political scientists use to measure elite cohesion is to look at how many opposition candidates are defectors from the ruling party. As Tables 1-3 show, the number of defections in Russian regional elections has been quite low. Nevertheless, the data do indicate that there was an uptick in defections in 2013 when Putin’s popularity reached its lowest point. Elites in electoral authoritarian regimes are prone to herd behavior. When the popularity of regime leaders declines, authoritarian regimes can experience sudden cascades of defections. The regime avoided this outcome in 2011-2013, but once the post-Ukraine consensus fades, Putin’s popularity will likely sag again. If it drops lower this time, analysts should look for defections by regional elites as a warning sign of regime collapse.

This is especially relevant because several recent developments could make it more difficult for the regime to maintain elite cohesion in the future. The reintroduction of single-member districts (SMDs) for State Duma elections has weakened Untied Russia’s control over its faction members. The reintroduction of the SMD component is also risky because it strengthens regional governors. In the 1990s, regional governors expanded their political power by packing the Duma with clients, mostly via SMD races. The 2016 elections saw a resurgence of this practice.

The reintroduction of gubernatorial elections could also undermine elite cohesion, especially during a potential crisis. The Kremlin has kept tight control over gubernatorial elections, and Putin retains the right to remove governors from office. This, quite obviously, limits the autonomy of regional governors. Nevertheless, today’s governors do have popular mandates, an autonomous resource that they lacked for much of the 2000s. If economic stagnation continues and/or Putin’s rating falls, it is not inconceivable that one or more governors might use their electoral legitimacy as a platform to oppose the Kremlin.
Finally, an increasing tendency to use repression against regional officials may undermine elite cohesion. The past several years have witnessed a precipitous increase in arrests of high-level regional officials, usually on corruption charges. While criminal cases against opposition politicians and former regime officials have been common for over a decade, recent years have seen a dramatic uptick in arrests of sitting, pro-Kremlin officials. Several of these arrests have been accompanied by dramatic public relations stunts, in which the official is arrested while at work or in compromising situations. In 2015 and 2016, four governors, six vice governors, and sixteen mayors of large cities were arrested while in office. And while it is difficult, if not impossible, to divine the causes of individual arrests, the pattern appears highly idiosyncratic.

The seeming randomness of these arrests has generated uncertainty among the regional elite. The implicit arrangement that has existed between Putin and regional elites for much of the last 15 years has been one of mutual gain and clear expectations. Regional officials were expected to be loyal and mobilize support for the Kremlin. In return, they received career advancement opportunities and political backing from the Kremlin. The random application of repression has the potential to upset such an arrangement; after all, elites have little reason to remain loyal if they cannot be sure that loyalty will be rewarded.

In some ways, the two trends identified above are countervailing. Increasing incentives for elite defections may be offset by the increasing number of regime loyalists who have been appointed. Indeed, one cannot exclude the possibility that this is by design. Nonetheless, we should not overstate the number of outsiders serving as governor. The fact that over 50 percent of governors are still regional insiders means that there are a large number of governors that are not Putin’s direct clients.

Federal autocracies are more likely to break down when regional elites defect, as recent experiences in Mexico, Nigeria, and Venezuela illustrate. In all these cases, electoral collapse at the federal level was preceded by defections and electoral failures in the regions. The data and discussion above indicate no signs of immediate unraveling in Russia, but beneath the surface, a number of challenges are brewing. Students of Russian politics should pay attention to these developments.
Figure 1: Share of Sitting Governors with Significant Work Experience in the Region Where They Serve*

*On December 31st of each year. A governor is deemed to have “significant” work experience in the region if a plurality of their post-university careers were spent in the region.

Figure 2: Share of Governors Appointed Each Year with Direct Professional Ties to Putin*
*Note that this figure does not indicate the yearly share of sitting governors with professional ties to Putin. Each bar indicates the share of governors appointed in a given year that have ties to Putin. A governor is coded as having professional ties if he or she worked with or under Putin, either before or after Putin became president. Any federal officials who were appointed by Putin are coded as having worked under Putin.

Table 1: Defections from United Russia in Gubernatorial and Mayoral Races, 2009-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of elections</th>
<th>Number of opposition candidates</th>
<th>Number of opposition candidates that were former UR members</th>
<th>Percent of all opposition candidates that were former UR members</th>
<th>Percent of elections with a defection</th>
<th>Number of defector(s) that won an election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Governors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Defections from United Russia in Russian Regional Legislatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Regional elections</th>
<th>Number of incumbent candidates who were UR</th>
<th>Number of defectors</th>
<th>Number of defectors elected</th>
<th>Share of incumbent candidate</th>
<th>Share of incumbent candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
How Kremlin Efforts to Control the Regions May Be Backfiring

Ora John Reuter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of “top three” opposition candidates</th>
<th>Number of elections</th>
<th>Number of candidates in “top three” of opposition party list that are former UR members</th>
<th>Percent of candidates in “top three” of opposition party list that are former UR members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>1082</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s Database of Russian Political Elites.

Table 3: United Russia Defectors Among Top Opposition Candidates in Regional Legislative Elections, 2009-2015

*Data is from the Russian Central Election Commission (www.cikrf.ru) and the author’s Database of Russian Political Elites.*
II. Russia’s Economy in a time of Trouble
Economic Crisis, Regional Finance, and Federal Response in Russia

Gulnaz Sharafutdinova

Economic problems associated with Russia’s stagnating economy, sanctions, and ruble devaluation have been accumulating. The growing indebtedness of regional budgets is one indicator that Russia’s economic wellbeing has been fading. Many regional governments have already raised utility prices and initiated spending cuts, slashing education, healthcare, and transportation budgets. Public reaction so far has been muted in a domestic environment characterized by public displays of patriotism and the rhetoric of national consolidation. Yet the sustainability of this apparent stability in the face of a deepening economic crisis is questionable. Regional governments are carefully monitoring the public mood and appear to be getting ready for potential public protests.

Warning Signs

The beginning of 2015 signaled trouble in Russia’s regions. The year began with the canceling of commuter trains (elektrichki) connecting regional capitals to surrounding areas, wreaking havoc in cities like Kursk, Bryansk, Smolensk, Kaluga, Oryol, Tver, and Tula. Inhabitants rely on these trains to get to work, go to hospitals and shops, and visit relatives. The cancellations were reversed after a sharp rebuke from President Vladimir Putin, but not before the incident became an important symbol of the looming financial problems many regions face. While Putin has been promoting the message “the worst is over” and “we’ve hit bottom,” economic problems have been growing, particularly in the regions.

According to Russia’s Ministry of Finance, by July 2015, overall regional indebtedness was about $36 billion. Only three federal subjects lack any debt: Sakhalin, the Nenetskii autonomous district, and the city of Sevastopol (in recently annexed Crimea). The largest regional debtholders (in nominal terms) are usually the stronger regions, such as Krasnodar, Tatarstan, and the Moscow region, which respectively owe 135 billion rubles, 105 billion, and 103 billion. The bigger worry is the growing number of regions

* Gulnaz Sharafutdinova is Senior Lecturer in the Russia Institute at King’s College London.
with debt levels higher than the size of their budgets. These regions include Chukotka, with a debt level at 125 percent of its budget, as well as Mordovia, Smolensk, and Kostroma. In Karelia, Udmurtia, Belgorod, Vologda, and a few other regions, the debt is between 80-96 percent. Seventy-five regions ended 2014 with budget deficits, a distinct foretaste of Russia’s regional financial imbalances.

Admittedly, these financial problems are not entirely new. Russian regions are not fiscally autonomous and their own tax base is quite limited. Since the Kremlin-driven fiscal centralization of the early 2000s, many regions have had to rely on federal transfers to balance their budgets and, in some cases, maintain federally-mandated levels of social services. Regional fiscal health has, however, deteriorated quite rapidly in the last few years. Russian regional experts (such as Natalia Zubarevich) have noted that these latest regional debts originate from financing social commitments made by the Russian government, specifically May 2012 government decrees that increased the salaries of public servants. To compound their problems, regional governments often resort to borrowing funds in order to meet their obligations, frequently on a short-term basis from commercial banks. The proportion of commercial debt, which is far more expensive to finance than debt incurred from federal loans, has therefore increased, leading some regions to spend 4-6 percent of their budget just to service their debt.

On top of this, Russia’s economic slowdown means that regional revenues are stagnating. Corporate profit and personal income taxes make up about 70 percent of regional revenues, but both sources have diminished as investment, industrial production, and pay levels have decreased (real wages are expected to drop by around 10 percent in 2015). Furthermore, the amount of federal transfers has decreased, especially when compared to the peak flow in 2009, affecting another major income source regions have normally relied upon during the 2000s. A 10 percent budget sequester in 2015 affected, among other things, the amount of intergovernmental transfers planned for the year. The Far East developmental program has lost about half its funding, as did the program for developing the Kaliningrad region, which was cut by over a quarter. In short, regional governments have been operating in recent years under conditions of falling revenues and relatively stable expenditure levels, a situation that necessitates an active federal intervention to balance regional finances.

Regional Defaults or Soft-Budget Constraints Back Again?

Throughout the 2000s, growing oil and gas windfalls promoted regional competition over the redistribution of federal resources. Regional governments relied on organizing expensive mega-projects—international sport events, historical celebrations, or important government meetings involving foreign officials—to lobby for federal grants and subsidies. As energy prices went down and the financial situation in Russia shifted, regional governments have had to change their strategy from expansion to survival, or, in cases where many had already committed to specific events, rely on government and
commercial loans to support projects. The increased social spending in the beginning of Putin’s third term added to the regional financial burden; it took place at a time when the federal center was starting to reduce its financial support, and the economy was starting to go down the path of stagnation.

The logical outcome in such circumstances is that highly indebted regions will eventually be unable to repay their loans on time and will thus need federal intervention. Novgorod was the first (and, so far, only) region to experience a technical default in February 2015, when it could not meet its payment obligations to VTB Bank. Several other regions could not meet their payments and were narrowly spared by loan extensions at below market rates.

Most analysts agree that regional defaults will be avoided because the Kremlin will bail out regions in critical situations. Such soft regional budget constraints are problematic, however. Growing obligations and shrinking revenues do not bode well for either the regions or the center, especially considering some regions continue to overspend and borrow (sometimes extensively), leading to unsustainable financial policies and an undermining of Russia’s macroeconomic stability. Even if the federal government takes “disciplinary” measures, such as seriously encouraging regional governments to balance their budgets and cut spending, regions know that they will be bailed out by the center in the end.

**Economic and Social Ramifications**

Many regional governments have initiated spending cuts. As experts note, the first programs to be affected are usually those in support of the economy and infrastructure (such as road construction and maintenance). But this initial stage has passed and regional governments have moved on to reduce social services (schools, hospitals, and public employment). In the healthcare sphere, 472 medical institutions across Russia are planned for “optimization” in 2015, which means hospitals and clinics will be reorganized, some closed entirely, a number of personnel will be cut, and some doctors and nurses will have to assume additional duties. These changes usually relate to smaller public hospitals and ambulatory services in villages, but even Moscow is now affected. This so-called optimization process of medical institutions in the capital city has involved the liquidation of many hospitals and is still ongoing, causing doctors and nurses to organize street protests, such as one held in late November. Education and communal services are two other spheres where the government is cutting spending.

Meanwhile, bills for utility services rose again in July 2015, on average by 10 percent. Even before these price hikes, the accumulated debt on utilities has risen to over 1 trillion rubles (about $20 billion) nationally. People are delaying payments. Residential and commercial non-payments for gas reached 220 billion rubles in 2014 and appear to have increased in 2015.
Spending cuts that took place in 2015 are expected to continue. The Ministry of Finance has called for the re-launching of “optimization” efforts in education, culture, and the public sector. Some regional governments have started cutting social benefits. A federal law adopted in March cancelled inflation adjustments for salaries and social payments. Some regional governments are further extending these measures and introducing more careful checks on eligibility for special social payments. For 2016, inflation adjustments on pensions have been limited to 4 percent and applied only to non-working pensioners.

The Public (Non)-Reaction

In May 2015, the Levada Center polled the public about their perceptions of priority directions for public spending in Russia. The poll revealed that a third of the population were not aware of spending cuts on healthcare. At the same time, 73 percent made clear their preference for free medical services, and 60 percent disagreed with re-directing part of government spending from healthcare toward alternative goals, such as developing Crimea, the Far East, or nuclear research. In short, public reaction or, more properly, non-reaction to government spending cuts in healthcare, social services, and benefits is shaped, on the one hand, by a lack of information and, on the other hand, a clear prioritization of foreign policy issues in public perceptions.

Experts of the Levada Center argue that debates over foreign policy in Russia have mostly displaced concerns with domestic issues. July 2015 polls on the most memorable events in 2015 cite developments in eastern Ukraine and Western sanctions. The cause of such an “outwardly-oriented” public mood rests to some extent on the Kremlin’s agenda setting, skillfully accomplished by state-controlled television. There is, however, arguably a more complex set of drivers rooted in Soviet-style public passivity and a lack of faith in any potential for constructive change on a range of domestic issues, combined with a sense of grandeur and accomplishment derived from social mobilization around issues that do not relate to everyday life. The Russian public is prone to feeling their contribution to some larger goal—whether that is countering the United States, fascism, or “Gayropa.”

In short, geopolitical ambitions and their realization—both real and symbolic—are less costly (in terms of individual action), more satisfactory, and more unifying to the Russian public, while concerns with salaries, pensions, and healthcare are being pushed to the side, at least for now. People are likely privately concerned with economic issues, yet they understand the “poor fit” of such concerns with the larger domestic environment characterized by public displays of patriotism and rhetoric of national consolidation.

It is not evident how long such passivity will continue, as the situation of preference falsification can continue for awhile, especially in the presence of additional psychological reasons (i.e., perceived external threats) that push toward support for the
present regime. Of course, the avalanche of economic problems cannot be sustained forever and growing poverty, inflation, and unemployment will eventually make people speak out. Any inconsiderate action of the government—such as suddenly canceling regional train services or instituting a new road tax—can potentially trigger massive reactions (as we see with recent truckers’ protests in Russia). It is not surprising that Putin reacted to the train incident with such intensity. It is also not surprising that local governments are preparing for all scenarios, carefully monitoring the public mood and keeping teams of rapid-reaction anti-riot police on standby.
High-Level Corruption in Russia

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 402
November 2015

Mark Kramer*
Harvard University

Vladimir Putin has now ruled Russia as president, prime minister, and president for sixteen years. The current political system in Russia, including the corruption that pervades it, bears Putin’s unmistakable imprint.

The current system is based in part on patrimonialism, a system in which the central state is the personal domain of the ruler (or a few rulers), who makes no distinction between public and private property and is seen by his followers as having authority to dispose of all property as he sees fit. In return for their obedience, the followers receive material and political benefits and prestige from the ruler. Patrimonialism has thrived in Russia for hundreds of years, but rarely has it been as entrenched as over the past sixteen years.

High-level corruption† in Russia has also been greatly exacerbated by the lack of meaningful political competition under Putin. Real politics existed in Russia in the 1990s, but it was largely extinguished after Putin rose to power. National elections throughout the Putin era have been largely pro forma, the parliament has been subordinated to the executive’s will, political parties (other than the Communists) are mostly non-substantive, national television is firmly back under state control (and offers little more than Putin-friendly fare), and political authority revolves around Putin. The size of the “real selectorate” or “influentials” (to use Bruce Bueno de Mesquita’s terms) is small—which means that the choice of rulers depends not on the full electorate (as it would in a Western democracy) but on a small group of elites who are beholden to Putin. Among those in this group are Igor Sechin, Vyacheslav Volodin, Yurii Kovalchuk, Sergei Sobyanin, Gennadii Timchenko, Sergei Naryshkin, Sergei Chermezov, Vladimir Kozhin, Sergei Ivanov, Dmitrii Medvedev, Aleksei Miller, Igor Shuvalov, Viktor Myachin, Andrei Fursenko, Sergei Fursenko, and Nikolai Shamalov. The inclusion of

---

* Mark Kramer is Director of Cold War Studies at Harvard University and a Senior Fellow of Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies.
† I define the term “corruption” here as the use of public office to achieve illicit private gain. High-level (or “grand”) corruption refers to corruption among the chief policymakers in a system—those who design and are empowered to modify political institutions. High-level corruption in Russia occurs in regions and in localities as well as in the center, but my main focus here is on high-level corruption in the central government.
these individuals (and others) in the real selectorate is dependent on their strict loyalty to Putin. Putin is the arbiter among competing interests in the group, and he has the ultimate say on who gets what.

High-level corruption takes numerous forms, including diversion of state funds for private use, appropriation of public property and assets for private gain, illicit use of state services for private purposes, failure to declare income (especially income from foreign assets and bank accounts), cronyism, and influence-peddling. Petty corruption is a notorious problem in Russia and often dominates public attention, but high-level corruption accounts for a much greater loss of public resources (estimates vary, but the evidence suggests around 90 percent or more). Diversion of state funds and appropriation of public assets have been especially salient under Putin. Even official spokesmen for the Putin administration have acknowledged that vast quantities of state funds are “lost” (presumably diverted) every year, though this is presented mostly as a phenomenon of carelessness rather than of entrenched high-level corruption. Sergei Stepashin, the head of the Federal Accounting Chamber, told Interfax in November 2012 that a trillion rubles a year is diverted from federal procurements, but estimates by accounting specialists outside the government range much higher—up to 5 trillion rubles a year.

High-level corruption in Russia starts at the very top. Evidence from multiple sources indicates that Putin has amassed a personal fortune of many billions of dollars, most of which is held in foreign bank accounts and front companies operated by highly trusted cronies. Extensive reports in Russia about Putin’s corruption, such as those issued by the late Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Milov, and Vladimir Ryzhkov, have focused predominantly on the lavish perquisites of office, but much more important are the funds and assets Putin has secretly acquired and hidden from public view. Foreign investigators and scholars have gathered evidence about this phenomenon and made it available, as in Karen Dawisha’s recent book _Putin’s Kleptocracy_, but in Russia itself journalists and analysts have often found it a dangerous topic to pursue. Sergei Kolesnikov provided important details about Putin’s ornate private mansion (dubbed _Dvorets Putina_, or Putin’s Palace, by the Russian media), but when the Russian version of WikiLeaks posted a photograph of the palace in early 2011, the website was temporarily blocked. Journalists and environmentalists who have investigated the location of the mansion have been detained by guards from the Kremlin’s Federal Protection Service, and the whole matter has been obfuscated by the intervention of Putin cronies who supposedly acquired the property. The leeway for journalists was further restricted in the fall of 2015 when the Russian government adopted a law forbidding the disclosure of any information about the private villas of high-ranking government officials.

Disclosures of high-level corruption within Putin’s entourage have also been risky for those in Russia who dig them out and publicize them. Alexei Navalny has done excellent work in coming up with detailed evidence about high-level corruption, but the
repeated detentions and prosecutions of him on spurious embezzlement and tax evasion charges have undoubtedly caused Russian journalists and political activists to think twice about pursuing this topic in the future. It is telling that Vladimir Markin, the press secretary for the Russian government’s powerful Investigative Committee, conspicuously emphasized in 2012 that Navalny’s role in exposing high-level corruption (including corruption on the part of Aleksandr Bastrykin, the head of the Investigative Committee) had caused the committee to look thoroughly into Navalny’s activities: “If a person uses all his power to bring attention to himself and, you might say, even teases the authorities – saying, ‘Look, I’m so good compared to everyone else.’ – then interest in his past and the process of exposing him goes faster.” Markin’s comment was clearly meant as a warning to others who might think about following in Navalny’s footsteps. That same message had been conveyed earlier by the tragic fate of Sergei Magnitsky, who was arrested, imprisoned, and killed after coming up with evidence of systematic high-level corruption. The security officials responsible for Magnitsky’s incarceration and murder were awarded bonuses and promotions.

Moreover, even when journalists and bloggers like Navalny do investigate the issue and come up with damning evidence, they are unable to present it on national television or in most other media outlets. They are relegated to outlets that reach relatively few Russians. Navalny’s large following on his blog has been a rare exception (and even with Navalny, public opinion polls revealed that the large majority of Russians know little or nothing about him and his work). Publications like the weekly *New Times*, edited by Yevgenia Albats, do heroic work but reach only a limited (albeit influential) audience. The ongoing anti-corruption campaign, which began under Medvedev’s presidency and has been continued by Putin (albeit with amendments), has been targeted against petty corruption but has also occasionally dealt with high-level corruption, especially starting in the latter half of 2012. However, moves against high-level corruption do not really signal a sincere desire at the top to get rid of the phenomenon. On the contrary, so long as Putin himself remains the chief beneficiary of high-level corruption (and is beyond accountability), the anti-corruption drive serves only instrumental purposes.

This does not mean that the anti-corruption campaign is purely a sham. Some of the measures adopted against petty corruption have been important and indeed commendable, and even occasional moves against higher figures can have significant consequences, such as the resignation in 2013 and 2014 of several members of parliament who did not want to relinquish their assets abroad. But this also means that Putin benefits from the campaign. Not only does it reinforce his role as central arbiter of a patrimonial system and keep all those around him off-guard (because they know they potentially could fall victim to the campaign if they fail to heed Putin’s wishes), but it also conveys the impression to the public that Putin cares deeply about corruption, which was one of the major issues (along with electoral fraud) fueling the mass protests in late 2011 and early 2012.
By pressing ahead with this highly publicized anti-corruption campaign and by speaking frequently about the matter, Putin can make the issue his own and ensure that it is not left exclusively to opposition figures like Navalny and others who seek to expose the phenomenon much more systematically. Even when ousters of senior officials happen chiefly for other reasons (such as the dismissal of Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov in November 2012, which may have had more to do with Serdyukov’s infidelity to his wife who happened to be the daughter of then-First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov—than to egregious corruption in defense procurement), allegations of corruption convey the impression to voters that Putin wants to deal with the matter head-on. High-level figures like Serdyukov are never sent to prison for any meaningful period (Serdyukov was charged in November 2013 with one minor count of “negligence” and was then amnestied by Putin in 2014, and his paramour at the Ministry of Defense, the highly influential property manager, Yevgenia Vasileva, was briefly detained under lenient house arrest and then paroled in August 2015). They usually end up with lucrative new posts in the “private” sector, but their dismissal is intended to convince voters that the president cares about the issue.

Russia’s ranking in the Transparency International (TI) rating system improved gradually from 2010 through 2013 (climbing from 154 to 143 to 133 to 127), but it deteriorated again in 2014, going back down to 136 out of 175. Several points should be made about this trend. First, even though the rating is not quite as negative now as it was in 2010, Russia’s performance on the TI index remains abysmal, placing it among the most corrupt countries on earth. Second, nearly all of the improvement stems from measures against petty corruption and provisions adopted to comply with the 2011 OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and measures recommended by GRECO (Group of States against Corruption). Combating petty corruption is very important, but (as discussed above) high-level corruption accounts for a much larger share of GDP than does petty corruption. Third, some of the improvement represents the idiosyncratic nature of the TI rating system. Even though the rating system has been less subjective and opaque in recent years than in the past, it is important to bear in mind that other indices, such as the annual corruption scores compiled by Freedom House, do not show any improvement in Russia’s performance on corruption during the 2010-2015 period. These other indices take account of the anti-corruption campaign and its impact on petty corruption, but they properly focus on the crucial importance of high-level corruption.

The anti-corruption campaign has been broadly popular in Russia, according to polls conducted by the Levada Center and other organizations, but, interestingly, it has not yet caused Russians to think that high-level corruption is diminishing. On the contrary, the vast majority of Russians (roughly 85 percent) believe that “stealing and corruption within the current political leadership” are either growing or not declining and are worse than when Putin first took office. Nearly 90 percent of Russians believe that corruption at the top has been “high” or “very high” under Putin, and only 3 percent (according to a Levada Center poll in July 2015) believe that corruption is declining.
Even though most Russians, when discussing the issue, are at least as concerned about petty corruption, they see high-level corruption as a pervasive (indeed almost normal) phenomenon. The Levada Center’s monthly and annual opinion surveys reveal that more than 80 percent of Russians believe that “top officials and members of the government” enrich themselves by failing to “declare all their income sources” and by “secretly maintaining bank accounts and property abroad.” Most Russians also believe that the bulk of anti-corruption measures (including a ban on foreign bank accounts for public officials) are weakened by huge loopholes (for example, assets can be temporarily transferred to close relatives, thus evading all scrutiny).

Nonetheless, public perceptions of high-level corruption have not had a damaging effect on Putin. Putin’s popularity ratings have remained extremely high since early 2014 (reaching nearly 90 percent in October 2015), despite all the revelations about corruption at the top and despite the growing economic crisis in Russia that is largely attributable to his own actions. Putin is the one who banned Western food shipments to Russia, yet the vast majority of Russians blame Western countries, not Putin, for the ban. Except in late 2011 and early 2012, revelations of high-level corruption seem to have had no connection to public perceptions of Putin and his regime. According to Levada Center polling, the percentage of Russians who believe their country is “moving in the right direction” has risen precipitously since the annexation of Crimea, going from less than 30 percent in 2013 to nearly 65 percent in 2015. The percentage of Russians who “fully trust” Putin has risen to 80 percent in 2015, compared to only 55 percent in 2013. Ultimately, efforts to curb high-level corruption in Russia will require an extraordinary degree of public “demand” for steps to eliminate the problem. The “supply” of measures against high-level corruption, especially against corruption at the very top, is bound to be minuscule in the absence of vigorous public demand akin to the protests of late 2011.

If Putin retains broad popular support and continues to be viewed favorably by the large majority of Russians (not least by presenting himself as a valiant fighter against corruption), it is hard to see how patrimonialism in Russia can be eroded during his tenure or how the egregious corruption at top levels can be diminished. But if public opinion starts to turn sharply against him and key elites begin to defect to the opposition in response to changing public sentiment, there may be a chance to erode or even dislodge the patrimonial system and replace it with a more open and accountable polity. At a time of deepening problems in the Russian economy and a prolonged decline in living standards, this scenario cannot be ruled out.

One thing that seems clear is that Putin will not volunteer to change the system himself. He is like the “stationary bandit” depicted by Mancur Olson, with limited time...
horizons. Putin is well aware that if he establishes effective mechanisms of high-level public accountability, he himself might become a victim of them. Indeed, many opposition figures in Russia cite this factor as a reason to expect that Putin will never relinquish supreme executive authority voluntarily, for fear that he might be held to account under a successor. Unlike Boris Yeltsin, who had someone (Putin) to whom he could transfer power and receive guarantees of immunity from prosecution, Putin has no such successor on the horizon. That circumstance does not bode well for an end to high-level corruption. Barring a swift and far-reaching turnaround in public sentiment, a system of high-level corruption extending from Putin downward seems likely to continue for a long time to come.

* Olson, a renowned economist, published essays in the 1990s that distinguished between “roving bandits” and “stationary bandits.” When anarchy prevails, roving bandits steal as much as they can and make no effort to benefit the rest of society, but, over time, roving bandits gradually come to want the broader socioeconomic system to function well so that they will have more to steal. Hence, they evolve into stationary bandits (i.e., autocrats) who levy taxes on the population and, in return, provide public goods, especially public security. For the basic argument, see Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 567-576.
Revising Russia’s Economic Model
THE SHIFT FROM DEVELOPMENT TO GEOPOLITICS

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 397
November 2015

Hilary Appel*
Claremont McKenna College

Vladimir Gel’man†
European University at St. Petersburg; University of Helsinki

In July 2015, Finland denied entry to several Russian parliamentary deputies, including the chair of the State Duma, who planned to participate in an OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Helsinki. These politicians were on the list of individuals under sanction by the European Union due to their role in the annexation of Crimea. In response, Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia’s Federal Security Council and former head of the FSB, proposed an asymmetric penalty for Finland. He suggested a ban on the export of Russian wood to Finland, arguing that it would cause serious economic harm. However, the impact on Finland would be negligible since wood from Russia accounts for only 10 percent of Finnish forestry imports and the supply is easily replaceable with wood from domestic or Baltic producers. By contrast, Russian forestry would suffer about a $584 million loss in revenues from such a ban (based on 2014 figures). Nonetheless, none of the representatives of the Russian forestry sector openly objected to Patrushev’s proposal; Minister of Economic Development Alexey Ulyukaev only vaguely responded that the issue is a “subject for discussions.” This proposal and the muted reaction from the forestry industry both reflect the fact that in present-day Russia geopolitical rhetoric and posturing increasingly dominate economic considerations. More broadly, in an atmosphere of widespread public discrediting of Russian liberals for pro-Western orientations, any defense of free trade or complaints of the sector’s losses are summarily dismissed.

This small episode illustrates the changing environment of economic decisionmaking in Russia. The top priorities of economic growth and development, which were promoted vigorously during President Vladimir Putin’s first two terms, have been supplanted by ambitious geopolitical goals and smaller foreign policy slights. Granted, allocating

---

* Hilary Appel is the Podlich Family Professor of Government and George R. Roberts Fellow at Claremont McKenna College.
† Vladimir Gel’man is Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the European University of St. Petersburg, and Finland Distinguished Professor at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki.
economic resources for geopolitical aims is hardly new or unique. But the dominance of a foreign policy agenda over economic considerations has recently taken on new, sometimes major and sometimes petty, self-defeating forms in Russia.

The early signs of the geopolitical turn in Russia’s economic policymaking first became apparent in September 2011, with the forced resignation of Alexei Kudrin. After eleven successful years as Russia’s minister of finance, Kudrin was fired from his post following his opposition to large increases in military expenditures. While some economically liberal decisionmakers have kept their jobs in Putin’s third term, Russia has also seen the rise of radical interventionists and statists, like the presidential advisor for Eurasian integration affairs, Sergey Glazyev.

Since the annexation of Crimea and ensuing conflict with the West over Ukraine, the downgrading of economic priorities vis-à-vis foreign policy considerations has become increasingly apparent. In the years and months leading up to the crisis, Russia’s politicized use of energy exports (including ceasing gas delivery to key markets via Ukraine) already risked serious economic repercussions as it encouraged European customers to diversify energy sources. But more examples of geopolitically motivated economic policymaking arose at the time of the crisis, including the long-term subsidized gas contracts offered to Ukraine in December 2013, along with a $15 billion loan package and an additional $15 billion investment in Ukrainian securities. Hoping to stave off a free trade agreement between Ukraine and the EU, the Russian government employed its energy and financial resources to achieve foreign policy ends, namely preventing the reorientation of Ukraine toward the West.

When Western countries imposed targeted sanctions on Russia, restricting travel and access to capital by political and economic elites and top Russian enterprises, the Kremlin responded with additional self-imposed countersanctions. These included an import ban on many foreign food products, which caused a steep rise of consumer prices and poor quality food substitutes at home. Other protectionist countermeasures included a new law on the preferential use of Russian software for state orders and in state-owned companies (adopted in 2015) and proposals to ban a range of medical equipment and contraceptives for state procurement. Attracting widespread media attention, the Russian government made a dramatic public spectacle of destroying banned food imports, even setting alight Dutch flower imports following a draft UN resolution put forth by the Netherlands and four other states to prosecute the parties responsible for shooting down flight MH17 over the Donbas in July 2014.

Russia engaged in similar politically motivated bans occasionally in the past, like the 2006 ban of wine imports from Moldova and Georgia, as well as temporary bans of meat from Poland and canned fish from Latvia. The current set of bans is not simply a continuity of past behavior, however. These previous trade conflicts were occasional,
issue-specific, and had a minor impact on Russia. The current actions, by contrast, are frequent, general, and have become mainstream policy.

Some proposals are grand and unrealistic, such as Minister of Agriculture Alexander Tkachev’s announcement that Russia will seek to achieve 100% substitution of food imports by 2025 and increase funding for Russian agricultural producers during the next five years to $35 billion (2 trillion rubles). A major shift in budgetary allocations from social spending to the military (discussed below) is another large example. On a smaller scale, foreign cinema became a target of this new tit-for-tat mentality, when Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii insisted on the introduction of special taxes on foreign films shown in Russian movie theaters in order to promote domestic, patriotic films. Medinskii explained that the introduction of a VAT on foreign movies would harm Hollywood. In essence, such proposals allowed a small group of actors to enjoy concentrated symbolic and material benefits at the expense of many industrial sectors and the society at large.

Putting geopolitics increasingly before economics has imposed concentrated costs on certain sectors, inconvenienced and depleted the purchasing power of a wide swath of Russian consumers, and put a substantial burden on the Russian economy. Against the background of a decline in global oil prices and economic contraction, this new approach to policymaking has contributed to great economic instability, eviscerated investor confidence, and generated $151 billion in capital flight in 2014 (two-and-a-half times the previous year’s figure).

Ideas and Interests in a Geopolitical Policy Turn

Why has geopolitics increasingly prevailed over economic considerations in Russian policymaking? In the spirit of neo-Kremlinology, one might argue that the geopolitical turn demonstrates the decisive victory of siloviki over their rivals, namely economic liberals, in the battle for Putin’s heart and mind. The roots of this victory, however, are not limited to Kremlin intrigues. They also stem from a new mindset and worldview. More specifically, they are based upon a conceptualization of global politics and economics as a zero-sum game, so that any gain for one side implies a loss for the other side. In a recent interview, Russia’s Federal Security Council Secretary, Nikolai Patrushev, claimed that the ultimate goal of U.S. economic policy is to take Europe and the Asia-Pacific region under American control, with “special attention devoted to undermining of the Russian economy and, especially, the financial system.” In effect, the world is divided into friends and enemies, and maximizing the losses of one’s enemies yields gains for oneself.

The problem is that the international economy and global business operate in a more complex fashion and cannot be reduced to a zero-sum game. Economic policymaking is complicated and requires serious policy expertise. The temptation to resort to this rather
simplistic approach to economic policymaking exists elsewhere certainly, but the current attractiveness of this approach in Russia has grown substantially. In the Russian case, perceptions of an existential threat to the country and its rulers, as well as a desire for revenge for post-Cold War foreign policy losses, fuel these temptations. In the same interview, Patrushev asserted conspiratorially that the United States aimed at a takeover of Russian natural resources and that international sanctions were designed to encourage the overthrow of Russia’s political regime via a color revolution. He argued that a decline in Russians’ quality of life resulting from the sanctions would lead to mass protests and political upheaval. Thus, Russia must respond by all possible means.

Given this zero-sum mentality, Russian authorities propose tit-for-tat responses to all real or imagined challenges from the West. It is not clear whether Russian leaders sincerely think food counter-sanctions or a ban on wood exports to Finland cause serious damage to European economies. However, the lack of resistance or protest from domestic losers (such as public sector workers or consumers) serves to legitimize this approach to economic decision-making. Given popular and industrial acquiescence, decision-makers are free to ignore the negative consequences of trade barriers, or the fact that the initiators of trade barriers may lose more than their counterparts. Counter-sanctions and trade barriers instead have increasingly become an idee fixe in Russian politics, affecting many sectors.

There are not only losers but also influential winners of this geopolitical turn in Russian economic foreign policy. Indeed the new Russian economic model is driven not only by foreign policy aims but also encouraged independently by a newly emerging coalition of special interest groups. First and foremost, the Russian military and defense industry have greatly benefited from a dramatic increase in funding. Despite Kudrin’s protests, military spending rose to 4.5 percent of Russian GDP from 2011 to 2014, markedly more than in the United States, China, and most European states. This rise, as predicted by Kudrin, has imposed a heavy burden on the Russian economy and the federal budget. Given the expected decline of budgetary revenues by $44 billion in 2015 alone, this emphasis has forced cuts in social and infrastructure spending. For 2016, the government announced the cutting of major public expenditures (excluding defense) by at least 10 percent.

This new model portends significant fiscal stress. In the wake of forthcoming parliamentary elections (rescheduled for September 2016, three months earlier than initially planned) and the 2018 presidential election, Russia’s rulers may perceive an acute, time-sensitive need to buy the loyalty of their fellow citizens, while Russia’s Reserve Fund may be substantially drained by then. Hence, cutting social expenditures is a risky game for the Kremlin despite a lack of visible social unrest. The extent to which

---

the Kremlin will adhere to its current priorities remains unclear, and the tensions between conflicting goals in Russian economic policy may increase.

The Politics of Subordinated Economic Policy

In sum, economic development during Putin’s third presidential term appears more a means than an end in and of itself. This contrasts with Russia’s approach in the early 2000s, not to mention with other countries that prioritize economic growth, like China and other BRIC countries. At present, the president’s reliance on economic experts is declining, and as a result the sometimes severe economic implications of government policies are not always appropriately gauged or prioritized. The episode of “Black Tuesday” of December 16, 2014, is one stark example, when the value of the Russian currency plummeted and the stock markets dramatically fell by about one quarter over several hours.

Despite the subordinated status of economic policymaking in Russia, at least one policy area remains of primary importance—namely, the accumulation of hard currency reserves. But the privileging of foreign exchange accumulation also has a geopolitical edge. According to a recent Bloomberg report, the only economic matter that Putin discussed with his economic experts before the decision on Crimea was the amount of currency reserves in Russian state coffers. The president allegedly wanted reassurance that Russia could withstand the ensuing costs, including possible international sanctions. In February 2014, the total amount of international reserves—at $499 billion—was evidently perceived as sufficient, greenlighting the Kremlin’s foreign policy agenda. By November 1, 2015, Russia had lost 25 percent of its international reserves, with only $375 billion remaining. Replenishing these reserves requires a commitment at the highest levels. During the second quarter of 2015, as global oil prices and Russia’s currency held steady, the Russian Central Bank announced plans to restore international reserves to the pre-Crimean level of $500 billion over the next five years.

Given the expectations of future risks for the Russian economy and further foreign policy-driven economic costs, it is understandable that the Russian leadership wants to restore a monetary cushion (or springboard). As of yet, these foreign policy expenses have been affordable to a certain degree, but the current willingness to absorb the economic costs of growing foreign policy ambitions make the future of Russia’s economy highly uncertain.
Lessons (Half) Learned

COMPARING THE 1998 AND 2014 RUBLE CRISSES

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 370
July 2015

Juliet Johnson*
McGill University

“Reforms begin when the money runs out.”
- Sberbank president German Gref, May 2015

In December 2014, Russia experienced the most significant drop in the ruble’s value since the financial crisis of August 1998—an event that proved devastating to then-president Boris Yeltsin’s government and its “oligarch” financiers. The December crisis encouraged pundits and scholars to make comparisons with 1998 and to wonder whether dire consequences might be in store for Vladimir Putin’s government as well. Yet despite certain similarities between the two crises, the Putin government has weathered the storm far better than did Yeltsin’s. This is because of three key lessons that Putin and his team learned from 1998 and successfully applied in subsequent years. An equally important lesson remains only half-learned, however, with significant future implications for the Putin regime and Russia’s economic development trajectory.

Similarities between the Ruble Crises

Markets were bullish on Russia throughout 1997, and the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) felt so confident in the sustainability of its earlier stabilization efforts that it redenominated the ruble in January 1998, knocking three zeros off the end. The ruble seemed similarly under control in early 2014, so much so that the CBR began limiting its currency-market interventions to move toward an inflation-targeting regime. Even the March 2014 Crimean takeover and ensuing Western sanctions had little effect on the ruble—that is, until oil prices began falling last summer.

In both cases, Russia’s status as a major energy exporter meant that a dramatic drop in world oil prices played a key role in fomenting crisis. Changes in the ruble’s value closely track changes in oil prices over time. Prices fell by over 50 percent in 1998 before the August crisis and by over 40 percent in late 2014 (falling to below $56/barrel from a summer price peak of $107). Ironically, in both cases events surrounding the state-owned oil company Rosneft were a crisis trigger. The government’s failed attempt to sell Rosneft in July 1998 brought its solvency into question. In December 2014, Rosneft’s

* Juliet Johnson is Professor of Political Science at McGill University.
Lessons (Half) Learned

Juliet Johnson

need to find $14 billion to pay foreign currency debts that could not be refinanced internationally due to sanctions spooked ruble markets.

These pressures contributed to sudden drops in the ruble’s value in August 1998 and December 2014, followed by re-stabilization a few months later. Both crises stoked inflation, encouraged capital flight, discouraged investment, and prompted the government to provide emergency funds to bail out leading banks and companies. Inflation hit 27.6 percent in 1998 and 85.7 percent in 1999; while not as severe, 2015 headline inflation is running near 17 percent, with food price inflation higher. Capital flight in 1998 was $25 billion—significant for the Russian economy at the time, far exceeding international reserve levels—with another $15 billion following in 1999. Capital flight in 2014 hit an all-time high of $151.5 billion and is projected to reach $110 billion in 2015. The crises affected Russian economic growth rates as well. GDP fell by 4.9 percent in 1998 and then rebounded by 6.9 percent in 1999, supported by a recovery in oil prices and a boost in exports from the ruble depreciation. Current predictions are that Russia’s GDP will fall by 3-5 percent in 2015 and return to growth in 2016, for largely the same reasons.

Yet the political consequences of the two crises for Russia could hardly be more different. In 1998, the crisis led to a full-scale government shakeup, including replacement of both the prime minister and central bank governor. Yeltsin’s already low popularity nose-dived after August and bottomed out in the single digits in late 1998; in 1999, the largest party in the Russian parliament, the Communists, began proceedings to impeach him. In contrast, the 2014 crisis seemingly had few political consequences for Putin or his government. No high-level officials were fired, social unrest has been minimal, and Putin’s popularity has actually risen, reaching an astonishing 89 percent in June 2015. In fact, Putin’s approval rating from late 2014 through early 2015 moved in opposition to the exchange rate—as the exchange rate fell, his popularity increased. The 1998 crisis represented the beginning of the end for the Yeltsin era, while the Putin government has remained in control and on message. The financial crises had such different political effects because the Putin government learned and applied three key lessons from 1998.

Lesson #1: You can never have too many reserves or too little debt

The Russian government spent about $27 billion to defend the ruble in the six months before the 1998 crisis, exhausting its international reserves. Russia never held more than $25 billion in reserves at any time during the 1990s, and holdings dipped below $11 billion after the 1998 crisis. The government was running a significant budget deficit and took on over $18 billion in new sovereign debt in the first half of 1998. The IMF provided an emergency loan to help stabilize the ruble, but the funds disappeared into the currency markets and failed to forestall the crisis. Without enough money to defend the ruble or pay its creditors, the Russian government defaulted and let the ruble fall.
The new Putin government learned from 1998 that it needed a reserve buffer to protect the country from currency and budget crises sparked by oil price fluctuations. When oil prices started to rise again, the government used the opportunity to build up the Central Bank’s reserves. Putin has been lucky to govern during a time of high oil prices, but he was also smart in using the windfall to stabilize the budget and amass reserves.

Russia paid off its outstanding foreign debt ahead of schedule and in 2004 created a sovereign wealth fund (the Stabilization Fund, later split into the Reserve Fund and the National Wealth Fund). From just over $12 billion on the eve of Yeltsin’s resignation, Russia’s international reserves rose to nearly $600 billion at their height in mid-2008. Reserves still stood at over $500 billion at the start of 2014, more than enough to give the government a healthy cushion to defend itself against shock, speculation, and sanctions. Indeed, before Russia’s takeover of Crimea, Putin was reported to have asked his aides if Russia had sufficient reserves to buffer it from potential Western sanctions; when assured that it did, he proceeded with his plans.

What did this mean for the 2014 crisis? The Russian government could spend over $90 billion by mid-November 2014 and then billions more in December and the first quarter of 2015 to smooth the ruble’s decline. Although reserves had fallen to $356 billion by May 2015, there was still enough left to cover Russia’s import costs and the foreign exchange requirements of sanctions-hit companies needing to pay foreign-currency debts. The high reserves and low government debt forestalled any hint of government default, in sharp contrast to 1998. After a moment of panic in December, most Russians came to see the crisis as manageable, which in turn tempered its political fallout.

**Lesson #2: Crisis management requires executive control and coordination**

Russia’s own leading banks and companies helped drive it into crisis in 1998. The Yeltsin government was dependent upon the so-called oligarchs, who owned the most profitable natural resource companies, controlled the media, and had banks that held major government accounts and domestic government debt. The CBR fought to support the ruble in 1998 in great part because of the extensive foreign-exchange debts and contracts of the oligarchs’ banks, obligations that could (and in the end did) ruin many of them when the exchange-rate corridor broke. At the same time, Yeltsin’s political opposition in the parliament prevented the government from adopting a more realistic budget that might have helped to fend off its own foreign creditors.

This same lack of control and coordination further undercut Yeltsin in the aftermath of the crisis. The CBR was forced to introduce formal capital controls in order to stabilize the currency, the media undermined confidence in the government’s ability to revive the economy, and the Duma twice rejected Yeltsin’s first post-crisis nominee for prime minister before later moving to consider Yeltsin’s impeachment. This all fed the
perception that the Yeltsin government and economic model had run their course, that Yeltsin’s team had no answers for Russia’s most pressing problems.

The new Putin government learned from Yeltsin’s experiences that it needed to control and coordinate the “commanding heights” of the economy, the media, and the political system. The 1998 crisis facilitated this endeavor by bankrupting and otherwise undermining many of the oligarchs, giving Putin the opportunity to force them into submission once he came to power. Over the following years, Putin brought big business and finance increasingly under state control, put his own allies in the CBR, reasserted state domination over the media, and tamed parliament.

These efforts paid off during the December 2014 crisis. When it became clear that large export companies needing to make foreign currency loan payments had stoked demand for U.S. dollars in Russia, the government had no need to resort to formal capital controls. Instead, Putin and his team informally instructed Russian export companies to sell foreign currency; orchestrated an arrangement to provide them with foreign-currency loans and guarantee enough ruble liquidity to cover domestic obligations; opened up the National Wealth Fund; and “requested” that companies coordinate foreign exchange sales with each other and the CBR in the future. This coordinated intervention, one that would have been impossible in 1998, stabilized the currency markets. Then, with the help of the media and parliament, in order to deal with the aftermath of the crisis the government put into play the third lesson from 1998.

Lesson #3: Blame foreigners

Although internal political and economic conditions made Russia ripe for crisis in August 1998, external factors played an important role. Russia’s 1998 crisis followed hot on the heels of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, as foreign portfolio investors hit by the downturn in Asia pulled their money out of the Russian stock and GKO (short-term government debt) markets. OPEC’s decision to increase production just as the 1997 shocks were reducing demand in Asian markets led to an oil glut and price collapse that dealt a further blow to the Russian economy. Both the exchange-rate corridor that allowed the ruble to become dangerously overvalued and the GKO market that turned into a government pyramid scheme had been introduced with Western encouragement and assistance. Yet after the 1998 crisis, Yeltsin took the lion’s share of the blame. In fact, much of the Russian media blamed Yeltsin for the external factors as well, arguing that his poor leadership had allowed foreign money and influence to weaken Russia.

External factors played a significant role in the December 2014 crisis as well. Falling world oil prices, wary foreign investors, and Western sanctions all contributed to the ruble’s collapse. Nonetheless, like Yeltsin before him, Putin could have received much of the blame. His decision to reclaim Crimea and destabilize eastern Ukraine had triggered sanctions, spooked investors, and encouraged capital flight in the first place; his counter-
embargo of EU agricultural products had boosted inflation; his military spending had begun to stretch the budget; and the CBR’s repeated declarations that it would fight inflation rather than support the ruble put downward pressure on currency markets. But not only did Putin avoid taking the blame, he successfully used his control over the media and the political system to frame the crisis as a direct result of conflict with a hostile West. Unlike Yeltsin, the Putin government portrayed itself as a bulwark against Western threats. Enemies had tried and failed to bring Russia to its knees, but Russia under Putin was too strong, too wily, and too resilient to break. Blaming foreigners for Russia’s perilous economic predicament so far seems to have made Russians more willing to excuse inflation and recession than they were in 1998.

One Lesson Half-Learned

The 1998 crisis provided another important lesson as well, one that remains only half-learned—that Russia needs to modernize and diversify its economy. Russian officials repeated this call with increasing urgency after the 2008 global financial crisis. But the Russian government has yet to learn that it cannot effectively modernize and diversify under its existing political system. The patronage system that sustains Putin’s “power vertical” demands the redistribution of state resource rents to regime supporters and rests on informally institutionalized corruption. Russia’s growth and investment rates had already slowed prior to 2014 as this system began to run out of economic steam, despite the government’s avowed focus on modernization and diversification. Moreover, although currency crises raise awareness that diversification is needed, they also make it harder to carry out by increasing the relative competitiveness of natural resource export sectors and discouraging risky and expensive investment in alternative sectors. Ongoing sanctions further stifle modernization efforts by restricting Russian access to Western technologies and financing.

The Putin government has attempted to square the circle by pursuing non-Western sources of finance and technology as well as by encouraging development and diversification through state investment in the military-industrial complex. However, these efforts are unlikely to be effective. Over the past few years, the government has been spending more and more money with fewer economic results to show for it. Russia’s patriotic militarization, pivot to Asia, troubled Eurasian Economic Union, call for import substitution, “de-offshorization” of the Russian elite, and overt challenges to the Western-dominated international financial system are all indications of an increasingly frustrated government attempting to retain power while escaping its current geopolitical and economic circumstances, with U.S. and EU sanctions pushing it further and faster along this reactionary path.

What will happen next? In the medium-term, sanctions and low oil prices will take a budgetary toll. The government cannot borrow on standard international markets. Its
reserves will provide a buffer, but only temporarily unless oil prices recover. The CBR will also have a challenging time restraining inflation. There will be difficult choices for Russia to make over the next few years. Sberbank’s German Gref may be correct that reforms begin when the money runs out, but as the history of financial crises in Russia illustrates, “reform” will not necessarily mean political or economic liberalization.
III. National Identity, Nationalism, and Patriotism
A New Wave of Russian Nationalism?
WHAT REALLY CHANGED IN PUBLIC OPINION AFTER CRIMEA

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 362
May 2015

Mikhail A. Alexseev
San Diego State University

Henry E. Hale
The George Washington University

How did the dramatic events of 2014, including the annexation of Crimea and the onset of violent armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, transform the opinion of Russians regarding their ethnic identity, nation, and state? Some have seen these events as sparking a dramatic upsurge in xenophobia and Russian nationalism, marking a new chapter in Russian identity politics. Others have questioned how much change has actually taken place. Evidence from two nationally representative surveys, one taken in May 2013 and the other in November 2014, indicates that what Russia experienced is much better characterized as a “rally 'round the leader” effect than as an upsurge in nationalism per se. In part, this is because Russian nationalism was already strong before the crisis in Ukraine emerged, so current events tapped into preexisting sentiment more than transformed it (with the exception of an evident increase in negative attitudes toward Ukrainians). What did change substantially, however, was the level of support for Vladimir Putin, which surged to nearly half again its May 2013 level. At the same time, concerns about economic and social problems deepened. Together, these findings indicate the main effect of the 2014 events on public opinion was to create a “rallying effect” around Putin personally but not to transform mass consciousness in a way that is likely to benefit the Kremlin in the long or even medium run.

The NEORUSS 2013 and 2014 Surveys

The surveys we analyze here were carried out by Russia’s established and respected ROMIR polling agency as part of the University of Oslo’s “New Russian Nationalism (NEORUSS)” project, funded by the Research Council of Norway (2013) and the Fritt Ord Foundation (2014) and commissioned by principal investigators Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud. The May 8-27, 2013 survey included a nationally representative sample of 1,000 respondents interviewed face-to-face long before the Ukraine crisis. The November 5-18, 2014 survey replicated most of the questions from 2013 and also asked new questions to assess the effects of the crisis in Ukraine and subsequent armed
conflict. This new survey was carried out according to the same methodology and included 1,200 respondents. On some issues, we were also able to get a sense of longer-term trends by referring to data from a 2005 Russia-wide survey of 680 respondents on ethnic relations by the Moscow-based Levada Center that was organized by Mikhail Alexseev.

No True Surge in Nationalism

The NEORUSS surveys find little evidence of a surge in nationalist sentiments among Russians between May 2013 and November 2014. Levels of ethnic and civic pride, desires to defend dominant ethnic group privileges, and perceptions of national distinctiveness all changed only marginally. In fact, most of these sentiments have remained about the same for nearly a decade.

- Ethnic pride stayed constant. Most respondents—55 percent in 2005, 53 percent in 2013, and 56 percent in 2014—said they were “very proud” of their ethnic identity and about 35-40 percent in each survey said they were “mostly proud.” These small differences are well within the margin of sampling errors.

- Civic pride increased, but only a little. The number of respondents who were “very proud” to be citizens of Russia rose from 44 percent in 2013 to 52 percent in 2014, but this came mainly at the expense of the category of people who were already “somewhat proud.” The difference between the number of respondents who reported being proud of their Russian citizenship remained about the same relative to those who reported being not proud. Given the scale of events that took place in 2014, these findings hardly point to a massive nationalist rallying effect.

- The dominant ethnic group’s sense of entitlement to privileges remained stable. About three-quarters of respondents in 2013 and 2014 believed that top government jobs should go first and foremost to ethnic Russians (ruskie)—with about 39 and 40 percent, respectively, supporting this idea fully. Roughly half of the respondents in both years fully agreed that ethnic Russians must play the leading role in the Russian state, with another one third or so backing this notion partially. Stability in a sense of entitlement over time is also reflected in support for the slogan “Russia for [ethnic] Russians” (Rossiia dlia russikh): 63-66 percent expressed complete or partial support for the slogan in 2005, 2013, and 2014.

* To compare these results over time, the “missing data” (i.e., “don’t know” and “refuse to answer”) are excluded here and thereafter, unless otherwise stated. For ethnic pride, the missing data constituted 3.5 percent of respondents in 2005, 2 percent in 2013, and 2.4 percent in 2014.
• The sense of Russia’s national distinctiveness changed little. In both 2013 and 2014, a plurality of respondents (about 35 percent) considered Russia to be a unique civilization, neither Western nor Eastern.

• Even attitudes on how Russia should relate to the West were not radically transformed, although the survey does register a moderate hostile shift. If in 2013, 60 percent of those venturing an answer thought Russia should treat the West as a “partner” and 13 percent as a “friend,” in 2014 the figures went down only to 51 percent and 8 percent, respectively—together still a clear majority of the Russian population (even when non-responses are included). Even in 2014, the share of Russians thinking the West should be treated as an “enemy” was just 13 percent (up from 5 percent in 2013), while 27 percent thought it should be considered a “rival” (up from 22 percent).

Other important nationalist views changed in more pronounced ways, but pointed in different directions. On the one hand, xenophobic exclusionist sentiments somewhat hardened while acceptance of ethnic Ukrainians as “fraternal people” significantly declined (this is an old imperial and Soviet notion reinvigorated in the Kremlin’s framing of Russia’s putative motivations for Crimea’s annexation). On the other hand, general acceptance of ethnic diversity in Russia increased and support for further territorial expansion of Russia weakened.

• Public support for deporting all migrants from Russia—legal and illegal and their children—rose from 44 percent in 2005 to 51 percent in 2014, which is unlikely due to sampling error alone. That said, these figures reflect both full and partial support for the demand, and the number of those who fully supported this radical exclusionist measure remained practically unchanged at about 23 percent since 2005. Most of the change in at least partial support appears to have taken place prior to the 2014 events, increasing only by about 4 percent—within the surveys’ margin of error—from 2013 to 2014.

• The number of respondents strongly opposing their family members marrying ethnic Ukrainian migrants spiked from 28 to 42 percent between 2013 and 2014—an outlier in the general trend for somewhat greater acceptance of migrant non-Russian ethnics as marriage partners. In this sense, Russian respondents appeared to be “defraternizing” with Ukrainians (Figure 1) but not other groups. The fact that opposition to marrying ethnic non-Russian migrants on average changed little from 2005 to 2013 further suggests this “defraternizing” was an artifact of changing Russia-Ukraine relations since 2013.

• In 2014, more respondents stated that ethnic diversity strengthened rather than weakened Russia, which was not the case in 2013. The 2005 data suggests that most of this shift took place from mid-2013 to late 2014. The number of
respondents who felt the term *russkie* (Russians by ethnicity or culture) referred exclusively to ethnic Russians dropped from 42 percent in 2013 to 30 percent in 2014.

At the same time, Russians remained more wary of including other ethnic group members into their state through territorial expansion. From 2013 to 2014, the number of respondents who preferred expanding Russia’s territory—either to bring Ukraine and Belarus into a Slavic union or to incorporate all territories of the former Soviet Union—dropped from 47 to 38 percent. In 2013, the majority of Russians (56 percent) supported some form of territorial enlargement, while in 2014 a plurality (of about 45 percent) supported the status quo (Figure 2).

**Rallying Round the Leader: A True Surge**

The biggest beneficiary of true public opinion change in Russia from 2013 to 2014 was the country’s leader, Vladimir Putin. Readiness to vote for Putin, positive valuations of Putin’s system of rule, and Putin’s nationalist credentials all increased strikingly. The NEORUSS surveys show that “rally ’round Putin” effects have been robust—lasting more than eight months after Crimea’s annexation and several months after Russians started experiencing economic problems associated with declining oil prices and Western economic sanctions.

The share of all respondents declaring they would vote for Putin if the presidential election were held on the day of the survey leapt from 40 percent in 2013 to an impressive 68 percent in 2014 (Figure 3). Support for Putin not only surged at the expense of almost all other potential candidates—including the notoriously hypernationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky—but also reduced the number of respondents who said they would not vote at all.

Views of Russia’s political system turned from predominantly negative to predominantly positive. When respondents were asked to rate “the political system that exists in our country today” on a scale from 1 (“very bad”) to 10 (“very good”), the average score shot up from 3.3 in 2013 to 6.0 in 2014.

Confidence in Putin as a leader who could deal with national identity issues also surged. Only 14 percent of respondents in 2013 named Putin as the most competent defender or promoter of Russia’s national identity from among a set of likely presidential candidates—just barely ahead of such other leaders as Zhirinovsky, who was picked by 9 percent. In 2014, 34 percent of respondents now selected Putin and only 4 percent indicated Zhirinovsky. Meanwhile, the number of those who said it was hard to answer that question dropped from 27 to 18 percent. Similarly, the number of respondents who felt Putin was the most
competent among Russia’s prominent politicians to deal with migration from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and China jumped from 15 to 32 percent.

Economic Rain Clouds Looming Over the Parade

As the euphoria over Crimea slides further into the past—particularly given Putin’s reliance on Russia’s hitherto robust economic growth as an important source of legitimacy—the NEORUSS survey data provide grounds to suspect the rallying effects may erode. Most notably, Russians’ assessments of their country’s economy and their families’ well-being significantly worsened between May 2013 and November 2014, and many Russians at least partially link this decline to Crimea’s annexation.

- In May 2013, a majority (54 percent) believed the country’s economy had remained stable over the course of the previous year, 19 percent thought it had improved, and 21 percent felt it had deteriorated. Eighteen months later, a stunning 55 percent reported the economy had gotten worse in the previous year, with just 9 percent seeing improvement and 30 percent no change.

- Respondents’ reporting of their own families’ economic position over the past year reflects the same pattern. In 2013, 19 percent saw improvement, 60 percent sensed no change, and 18 percent perceived decline. By 2014, a full 45 percent were bemoaning a worsening in their personal economic situation, with only 8 percent citing improvement and 42 percent sensing no change over the previous year.

- The NEORUSS survey also sought to assess whether Russians felt Crimea’s acquisition was having negative effects. Since one might wonder whether respondents would give frank answers to an interviewer, the survey not only asked people directly but also used an indirect method (an “item count” technique that allows researchers to estimate the share of people holding a view without any individual having actually to state it openly). Boiling down both these findings, the survey indicates that between 38 and 55 percent of respondents believed Crimea’s acquisition would “cost Russia too dearly,” hardly boding well for the Kremlin. At the very least, these findings highlight conflicting sentiments resulting from the clash of surging pride in the country’s leadership on the one hand and ambiguous economic assessments on the other.
Implication

The NEORUSS surveys indicate it would be a mistake to describe what happened in Russian public opinion in 2014 as a surge in Russian nationalism, ethnic or otherwise. Instead, it should be considered primarily a “rally 'round the leader” effect. This has significant implications for both observers and policymakers. For one thing, it means Putin’s bold moves in 2014 did not create a new wave of nationalism that might be expected to recede back to “normal” levels later. Instead, Putin tapped into a preexisting Russian nationalism that was already quite strong, mobilizing it for support where previously it was not helping him much. He also clearly reaped “leadership points,” support deriving more from the perception that he is a dynamic and decisive leader than from any specific action—something that has long underpinned his popularity but had seemed to be fading in recent years. Questions those interested in Russian politics should be asking moving forward, then, include: (1) Will Putin continue to be seen favorably by Russian nationalists or will this issue start working against him; and (2) Will other factors eventually override or undermine the rallying effect we observe?

On question (1), the NEORUSS surveys suggest it will be difficult for Putin to sustain nationalist support because nationalists themselves are divided. While many still back expanding Russia to the borders of the former USSR (people we may call “imperialists”), others (whom we might call “xenophobes”) not only oppose this but want to deport migrants from post-Soviet states who are already in Russia. The 2014 events appear to have somewhat moderated xenophobia and also reduced territorial expansionism, but the shares of both xenophobes and imperialists remain significant and if they return to pre-2014 levels, Putin will face challenges trying to reconcile them. The growing hostility toward Ukrainians as a people detected in the survey may also complicate Russia’s relations with an important neighbor state in the future. Given an additional finding that the Russian public has generally bought into the Kremlin-led media characterization of Ukraine as a weak and illegitimate state, however, Putin may be able to overcome those problems with new massive public relations campaigns.

On question (2), the economic worries detected in the survey indicate people may one day tell their leadership something like: “OK, we are happy with Crimea’s return, but that is now in the past and we still want economic improvement.” The Kremlin might respond by attempting to offer Russians more territory instead of economic development, hoping this will again divert their political attention from material worries. But with support for expanding Russia’s territory declining since 2013, it is far from certain such a policy could work as the Kremlin might hope. Of course, Russia’s leadership also possesses many other ways to shape public opinion, including a vice-like grip on the political coverage of Russia’s highly influential television channels. But bad economic realities (and battlefield deaths if they reach a large scale) will be harder to hide or spin than will events in other countries, even neighboring ones. And the NEORUSS surveys overall suggest that the Kremlin has been successful mainly in
generating a rather narrow rallying effect, not in transforming public opinion in a fundamental way that works in favor of the current leadership in the long run. Thus, while public opinion was more of an enabler than a constraint when it came to Crimea, it is unclear that this can be replicated with new territorial moves.

**Figure 1. Share of respondents who strongly opposed their family members marrying migrants belonging to ethnic groups other than their own**

![Bar chart showing the share of respondents who strongly opposed their family members marrying migrants belonging to ethnic groups other than their own, with data for 2013 and 2014.]

NOTE: Responses of “don’t know” and “refuse to answer” are excluded from the denominator of the calculations here. The number of “don’t knows” and refusals differed within only a couple percentage points by ethnic group in both years. The number of those who said ethnicity did not matter for marriage was constant and therefore also left out of the denominator; respondents who picked that option were not asked their views for each specific group. In total, these data missing from the denominator made up about 28 percent of the sample in 2013 and about 20 percent in 2014.
Figure 2. Preferences for the territorial boundaries of the Russian Federation

Figure 3. “If presidential elections were held today, for whom would you vote?” (percentage of entire adult population)
What Is the Meaning of “National” in the Russian Debate about the National Interest?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 414
January 2016

Viatcheslav Morozov*
University of Tartu

Reflecting on the Russian debate about the “national interest,” prominent political analyst Gleb Pavlovsky has said:

Today, there are no centers that would work to delineate Russian national interests, nor politically rigorous terminology that could be used for that purpose. Everything being written on this topic is fiction, often politically irresponsible. We hear fairytales about supremacy, telling the other countries that they are no more than targets for our Iskander missiles.

Pavlovsky is an apt observer, and his text pointed to a serious issue. However, I believe that his diagnosis is not entirely correct. The problem lies deeper than the lack of a proper definition of the national interest, or of institutions that would allow Russian society to arrive at such a definition in the course of open democratic debate.

The very idea of “the national” takes a peculiar form in Russia. The nation’s intellectual and political elites obstinately look away from grassroots concerns and demands, and focus instead on a set of “eternal Russian questions”: Is Russia a European country? Are Russians ready for Western-style democracy; if not, will they ever be? Is Russia a normal country? If not, should this be a reason for pride or for shame?

The national interest is thus debated not by looking within the country but without, and mostly to the West. This is a universal tendency shared by both the government and the opposition, by both nationalists and liberals. Furthermore, this phenomenon needs to be considered as rooted in a much wider pattern of dependent development. The only chance to break Russia’s vicious circle of pro-Western modernization followed by nationalist reaction is to put the people first and refocus the political agenda on domestic issues.

* Viatcheslav Morozov is Professor of EU-Russia Studies at the University of Tartu (Estonia).
Perseverance as National Idea

Pavlovsky highlights the prevalence of status and recognition over substance in senior officials’ remarks about the Russian national interest. Indeed, Russia’s leaders, including President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, keep insisting that Russia’s national interests must be protected and respected by others, even before any conversation on concrete issues, such as the future of European security, can begin. As Putin said at a July 2015 Security Council meeting, convened to discuss Russia’s national interests under sanctions, “we do not trade in our national sovereignty.” Standing up to Western pressure is the Kremlin’s unconditional top priority, while economic policy has to be adjusted to the imperatives of confrontation.

The same pattern has been easy to discern in the wider debate around Ukraine and, later, Syria. The dominant anti-Western voices resolutely demand not to “give in,” and even to press forward “to the end.” Yet what lies at “the end” is a mystery. There is hardly ever a hint of what Russia as a nation stands to gain from its uncompromising position, except for, once again, being treated with respect by outsiders, particularly the West.

Aggressive anti-Westernism was one of the major contributing factors to the decision to annex Crimea in response to what Russia saw as an Orange Revolution-type coup in Kyiv orchestrated by Washington. This step consolidated the entire nation (with the exception of the liberal minority) and in this sense can be interpreted as an achievement in advancing the national interest, or at least a certain understanding thereof. However, the violation of territorial integrity of a neighboring state resulted in Russia’s isolation, with costs incurred by the entire population.

Russia’s entanglement in eastern Ukraine ended in a stalemate. Unable to offer any sustainable solution to the problem (which the Kremlin helped create), Russia found no better solution than to distract public attention by starting another war. As in Ukraine, Russia’s interests in Syria were defined predominantly as a question of relative standing vis-à-vis the West. The declared aim of defeating ISIS was not expounded in concrete terms, and the exorbitant cost of the intervention was not duly taken into account.

Soaring inflation and other negative economic and social consequences are unlikely to make Russians regret the “return” of Crimea and the intervention in Syria, but they are likely to generate new rifts within society. These steps can thus be classified as achievements only within a very narrow definition of the national interest in a zero-sum game against the West, where international status matters much more than the quality of life.

Scholarly literature has established that status and recognition are powerful driving forces in world politics. States are often ready to put their survival at risk to safeguard
their “ontological security”—their self-identity and their “due role” in international society. Still, this purely external orientation on what constitutes valid policy goals is remarkable.

**Traditionalists without Tradition?**

The recent conservative turn in Russian politics might be interpreted as an indication that Russia has finally found its own positive agenda. After Putin’s return to the Kremlin in 2012, the Russian state defined key social priorities, including support for traditional family values, respect for religion, and promotion of Russian language and culture. Along with fostering a national cult of “the victory over Nazism,” such policies are meant to strengthen Russians’ “spiritual bonds” which, according to Putin, will make the nation more cohesive.

Achieving these seemingly positive goals, however, necessitates a set of policies that are almost exclusively negative and repressive. Support for traditional family values translates into prohibitions (in some cases, just proposals) against “homosexual propaganda,” the banning of adoptions by foreigners and same-sex families, restrictions on abortion, and increased fees for divorces. Respect for religion means introducing criminal punishment for those “offending religious feelings.” Reverence for the sacrifice of those who fought in World War II becomes a weapon against those who engage in illegal “falsifications of history.” Promotion of Russian language and culture means more than just restricting Hollywood films; it involves repression against any contemporary artistic trends that irritate the undemanding mass consumer.

In the end, the Kremlin’s entire conservative turn comes down to nothing more than an offensive against “the fifth column.” This label lumps together all “freaks”—the Pussy Riot punk band, NGOs, intellectuals, scholars supported by foreign funding. They are all stamped as Western collaborators, whose main goal is to undermine Russian traditional values. At the same time, the values that are being championed tend to recede in the background, while center stage gets occupied by the epic fight against forces of evil; for pro-government forces, of whatever stripe, the national interest is reduced to anti-Westernism.

**The Arrogance of Liberal Cosmopolitanism**

In the debate about policy priorities, a lack of focus on “the national” is even more obvious at the opposite end of the political spectrum. Russian liberal intellectuals take pride in their cosmopolitan outlook; many even scorn the very idea of a Russian national interest. For liberals, the West unconditionally sets the standards of what is normal in today’s world; Russia’s national task, insofar as this concept is valid, is to “Go West” (which happens to be the title of an article by Mikhail Khodorkovsky about Russia’s misplaced national interests).
We tend to view cosmopolitanism as a noble position that strives to overcome the narrowmindedness of nationalist thinking and places the interests of humanity above other concerns. Universal human interests are by no means a self-evident given, however. Any universal model, be it market economy or democracy, can only exist in a variety of local forms that reflect reality on the ground. Russia, as a semi-peripheral country with social and economic structures different from those in a typical market democracy, has to be governed and reformed in a different way. A painful lesson of post-Soviet reform was that replacing resource-oriented central planning with open markets is a way toward corrupt and authoritarian state capitalism, not market democracy.

Hence, the values that the liberal opposition tries to promote must be grounded in the local context. Protecting gay rights or the freedom of speech in a country like Russia are noble and valuable pursuits. To be politically valid, however, these demands must be linked with other grassroots concerns, not just justified by reference to abstract universal norms, which the majority of Russians perceive as being imposed by the West. The Russian opposition must be able to demonstrate to ordinary Russians how disrespect for individual rights or a lack of political freedom leads to poor heating in their homes, exorbitant kindergarten fees, or the closure of local hospitals.

The leaders of the Russian opposition sometimes make these efforts, but in a rather incoherent way. The Russian creative class as a whole is moving in the opposite direction. Shocked by overwhelming popular support for the increasingly authoritarian leader, and especially for what they see as the illegal annexation of Crimea, the intelligentsia has reacted in a way familiar since the mid-nineteenth century, by distancing itself from the common people. This alienation has manifested itself in several ways: the use of disparaging labels to refer to supporters of the regime, unending discussions about emigrating, or, most widespread, a refusal to take any open political stance outside a narrow circle of friends.

Another equally characteristic way in which intellectuals dissociate themselves from the people is, paradoxically, by supporting the regime. Following poet Alexander Pushkin, many educated Russians today would begrudgingly agree that the government is the “sole European” in the country and authoritarian rule the only way to avoid “the Russian revolt—pointless and merciless.” While such a position is understandable from a psychological perspective, it leaves unfulfilled the intellectuals’ main mission—critical appraisal of the most pressing issues facing the nation both domestically and internationally.

**Time for a People’s Intelligentsia**

There are political forces in Russia that are trying to establish a domestically-based national agenda. Certainly radical nationalists put the (Russian) people first. Some might
be capable of overcoming their primitive anti-Westernism to come up with genuinely national slogans. However, their extremely narrow concept of “the people” generally leads to xenophobia and social exclusion.

On a more moderate flank, Alexei Navalny has repeatedly attempted to play along with the nationalists, for instance by combining democratic and anti-immigrant rhetoric. The rest of the opposition tends to react with suspicion, if not with contempt. While flirting with racist ideologies is dangerous, there is no way around the fact that the presence of migrants is high on the list of concerns for the average Russian. Similarly, while Putin’s opponents tried to capitalize on the unexpectedly large wave of anger against the government’s campaign to destroy “illegally” imported food, the opposition failed to connect it to other popular concerns, in particular financial anxiety in the face of Russia’s deepening economic recession.

The democratic opposition must encourage a constructive discussion about these and other issues, and it must be part of a global debate involving Western intellectuals. Ignoring voices from below, even if they do not always like what they hear, is a disservice not just to Russian democracy but to the liberal cause as such. If people feel that their legitimate demands are discarded because they conflict with abstract normative frameworks, they are more likely to reject this framework than abandon their concerns.

Isolated attempts to bring up national issues that are snubbed by the majority of the educated class cannot make up for serious discussion about future reforms. While nearly everyone agrees that reforms are inevitable, there is very little understanding of how to approach the condition Russia finds itself in, as opposed to treating it as just another case of “democratic transition.” Given the profound impact of decades of rent-seeking and corruption across the entire society, the excessively cosmopolitan orientation of Russian intellectuals could cost dearly in the future, especially if radicals hijack democratic politics.

On a broader note, even though the Russian political debate has lost its domestic orientation to an unusual degree, the problem is hardly unique. It was one that Antonio Gramsci identified in his writings on Italian history as one of the consequences of the country’s peripheral position in capitalist Europe. Gramsci emphasized the cosmopolitan outlook of Italian intellectuals, and also their lack of attention to issues of nation-building and unification. There are striking parallels between Italy as analyzed by Gramsci and other stepchildren of European civilization, such as Russia, Turkey, and South America.

Russia thus suffers from a fundamental political problem of popular representation. Making sure the plebs get a chance to become a populus, a political subject in control of their own destiny, is the task that defines democratic politics. As Gramsci demonstrated,
this can never be trusted to any institutional design, however progressive the latter might be. Giving voice to the people requires constant creative work on the part of the intellectuals—a class that in the end is defined by this very function. To be worthy of their name, the Russian intelligentsia will have to leave their ivory tower and speak in the people’s voice.
Misinterpreting Nationalism

WHY RUSSKII IS NOT A SIGN OF ETHNONATIONALISM

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 416
January 2016

Marlene Laruelle*
George Washington University

Many observers of Russian political life have noted a shift in President Vladimir Putin’s language toward greater “ethnonationalism.” While this trend has been present for a few years, it became especially prominent after the start of the Ukraine conflict. In his March 2014 speech justifying the annexation of Crimea, Putin stated that Crimea was a russkii (Russian) land, Sevastopol a russkii city, and Kiev “the mother of russkie cities.” Conventionally, russkii is interpreted as defining Russians linguistically and ethnically, while the adjective rossiiskii is used to refer to the Russian state and citizenship. A number of scholars have built on this observation to argue that Putin has shifted from statist to ethnic nationalist and that Russia’s growing ethnicization endangers Russia’s traditional multinational character.

This, however, is too narrow a view. The use of the term russkii does not imply a growing ethnicization of Russian state identity. It may be the case that Russian society is developing a more acute sense of ethnic awareness (even if ethnic nationalism, as demonstrated by levels of xenophobia, ethnic tension, and ethnic crime, has been in decline since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict). Yet, the term russkii does not encapsulate this evolution. Here I propose some alternative connotations to better capture the complexity of Russia’s current political project: russkii as a way to reinforce the historical unity of Eastern Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians)—and therefore hamper Ukraine from leaving Russia’s nest—and russkii as a way to assert Russia’s messianic destiny.

A History of Terminological Competition

Terms have their own history, and meanings evolve in time and space. Chronicles date the Christianization of Russia in Kiev to the baptism of Prince Vladimir in the tenth century. This state was referred to as Kievskia Rus’. The term Rus’ and its derivative adjective russkii were used for centuries to refer to the state, culture, and language that

* Marlene Laruelle is Research Professor of International Affairs, Associate Director of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), and Director of the Central Asia Program at the George Washington University.
was born from this principality. The competing term of *Ros* was used by Byzantines since the ninth century. It was present in Russia in the fifteenth century as *Rosia*, and in the eighteenth century as *Rossia*. In the early nineteenth century, the two roots were used in parallel. Confusion was the norm; depending on the context, the subjects of the Russian state could be *rossiiskii*, *russkii*, or *obshcherusskii*; ethnic Russians could be *rossiiske*, *russkie*, *velikorossiiske*, or *velikorusskie*.

What is interesting is that after the term *russkii* fell into partial disuse because of the rise of its *rossiiskii* competitor, it was revived in the second half of the nineteenth century in a specific geopolitical context. As French scholar Virginie Symaniec demonstrates, the revival of the use of *russkii* had distinct political objectives, i.e., the “reunification of Russian lands” after the period of Polish-Lithuanian domination. The root *Russ* sought to define what might also be called “Eastern Slavic,” a generic term that includes the three modern nations of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. This aim is visible in the terminological dissociation between the “Russification” (*rusifikatsiia*) of non-native populations of the empire (e.g., Siberian, Turkic, and Caucasian peoples), and the “re-Russification” (*obrusenie*) of the *russkie* who had been Polish-Lithuanian for several centuries.

**Russkii: A Bridge to Ukraine, Not a Claim of Russia’s Mono-ethnicity**

I did not take this historical detour to claim that Vladimir Putin, who is more passionate about martial arts than historical works, is aware of the multiple convolutions of the terms *russkii* and *rossiiskii*, or that he uses them with consciousness of their history. What this detour shows is that *russkii* has two meanings. Today it defines all those who do not consider themselves to belong to a national minority group in Russia and identify as “ethnic” Russians, but it also designates the unity of Eastern Slavs, which is the much older meaning of the term.

I argue that Putin’s use of the term in his 2014 speeches concerns this second meaning: the revival of the imperial meaning of *russkii*, in order to reconnect Eastern Slavs. Ukraine is part of this *russkii* realm based on the legacy of the Kievan Rus’, which was lost to Poland and Lithuania for several centuries, then reintegrated into Russia, and is now in the process of being lost again.

This explains why Putin can both insist increasingly on *russkii* while continuing to claim the principle of Russia’s multinational character. Contrary to what many observers thought they noticed, his definition of *russkii* is not the opposite of *rossiiskii*. On this, Putin differs from many Russian nationalist circles that want to promote *russkii* as a response to what they see as the failure of *rossiiskii*. Their fear of Russia losing its own identity predominantly targets migrants from Central Asia and Russia’s North Caucasians (Russia’s Siberian peoples, Tatars, Bashkirs, and Finno-Ugric populations are
not perceived as a threat). However, Putin is not an ethnonationalist and does not use *russkii* in the same ideological way that ethnonationalists do.

Insisting on Kiev, Crimea, and Sevastopol as *russkii* does not underline an ethnic nationalism that would discriminate against non-ethnic Russian citizens of Russia. Rather it is the continuation of an old historical theme, which stipulates that Eastern Slavs in their three modern national units come from the same cradle, Kievan Rus’. Historically speaking, Kiev is indeed a *russkii* land, whereby *russkii* is understood in the original sense of Eastern Slavs, not the modern Russian state. The notion of the “reunification of Russian lands” (*sobranie russkikh zemlei*) is thus not evidence of ethnic irredentism but a ghost from the imperial past. Putin’s message is directly aimed at reviving this imperial *longue durée* in the hope that Ukraine will not leave Russia’s sphere of influence and become “absorbed” into the European world.

**Russian Messianism: *Russkii* as Russia’s Voice in the World**

The “imperial” use of the term *russkii* is also connected to another meaning, which again should not be understood as ethnocentric. *Russkii* is the classic adjective used to describe all messianic ideological trends that developed in Russia, especially during the Silver Age (the vivid philosophical revival of the 1890s-1920s). In the works of Vladimir Soloviev and Nikolai Berdyaev, Russia’s unique and distinct message to the world is formulated as a *russkii*, not *rossiiskii*, one, even though neither of them can be considered an ethnonationalist. Nikolai Fedorov’s variety of space theology, *cosmism* (*kosmizm*), is also termed *russkii*. These are all rooted in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s conception of a fraternal unity of mankind where Russia serves as a pioneer, expressed under the notion of “Russian universality” (*russkoe vsemirnoe*).

This traditional Russian messianism has been updated and absorbed under the more modern label of the “Russian World” (*russkii mir*). Long before it became part of the Russian state narrative, the term was crafted by a team of intellectuals close to Gleb Pavlovsky’s Russian Institute (*russkii institut*) and its journal, *Russkii zhurnal*, which inspired many subsequent online media projects and served as incubator for a large number of young publicists, thinkers, and journalists. The designers of the Russian World concept were all passionate about Russian philosophy and, at the same time, were specialists in marketing and branding. This merging of genres proved to be a potent mix. In the marketing sense, the Russian World is a brand for establishing Russia’s voice in the chorus of nations, but it is also a vessel for a more philosophical or religious messianism, whereby Russia’s message to the world has a universal value of salvation.

Pavlovsky’s Institute, its journal, and the Russian World concept all use the term *russkii*, not *rossiiskii*. But these individuals too are far from being ethnonationalists who seek an ethnically pure, minority-free Russia. In their definition *russkii* is not understood to have
an ethnocentric character. The problem, for them, is that the term rossiiskii is overly reminiscent of the Yeltsin political project and its limits. A rossiiskaia Russia embodies a failed liberal ideology and leaves the diffuse impression of cloning Russia the way the West wanted it to be. In contrast, the Russian Institute’s russkaia Russia is a call both to participate in the globalized world and to offer a particular Russian voice.

Conclusion

Some of the key notions of Russian stateness are complex and require careful consideration of historical context and terminological use. The term russkii is a multifaceted one. It can sometimes advance an ethnonationalist agenda, but it is not Kremlin authorities that use it in that sense. For them, russkii is a reminder of the shared past of all those who descend from Kievan Rus’. Seen from the Kremlin’s perspective, this shared past should determine a shared future: Putin regularly states that “Russians and Ukrainians are one people.” The term russkii therefore encapsulates not a drift toward ethnonationalism but difficulties in letting the imperial past go, in particular by accepting that Ukraine’s “russkii-ness” might not be embodied in a pro-Russia geopolitical position. The term also promotes Russia’s messianic destiny: previously Christian or Communist, today the flagship of conservative values and the “Russian World.” This revival of the imperial meaning of russkii may be used in parallel with rossiiskii to define the state’s multinational character. The semantic uses of russkii and rossiiskii are not mutually exclusive but overlap and diverge depending on the context in which they are used.
Everyday Patriotism and Putin’s Foreign Policy

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 432
July 2016

J. Paul Goode
University of Bath

Discussions of popular support for the Kremlin’s foreign policy often invoke common international relations concepts, like the “rally around the flag” effect, or suggest that the abundance of patriotic coverage in domestic media galvanizes support for Russia’s foreign policy. Yet patriotism is a slippery concept, and it is far from clear that patriotic sentiment translates directly into support for a government’s foreign policy. Despite the Kremlin’s steadily increasing investment in patriotic education over the last fifteen years, Russian citizens’ understanding of patriotism is varied, occasionally contradictory, and often apolitical. Examining Russians’ sense of “everyday patriotism” provides insight into the sources and limits of support for the Kremlin’s foreign policy.

The research for this project involved 65 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with Russian citizens in Tyumen (2014) and Perm (2015), followed by a series of focus groups with state employees, pensioners, and students in Perm. Respondents were asked about their daily routines, about what it means to be a patriot in Russia, their understandings of motherland (rodina), how patriotism differs from nationalism, their thoughts on nostalgia for the Soviet era and the 1990s, and the kinds of duties associated with being a patriot.

Official and Everyday Patriotism

Starting in 2001, the Russian government began investing in patriotic education with the goal of preparing citizens “to fulfill one’s civic duties in times of peace and war.” The program placed particular emphasis on military-patriotic education, focusing on celebrations of military achievements, victories, and acts of heroism. The program further included the promotion of patriotic themes in the mass media and initiated dozens of events to solicit academic, societal, and legal expertise. Amid rising foreign challenges, patriotic education for all citizens now occupies a prominent place in the

*J. Paul Goode* is Senior Lecturer in Russian Politics at the University of Bath (UK). Fieldwork for this project was funded by a Fulbright Research Grant. All errors and omissions are the author’s own. The author is grateful to Ekaterina Semushkina (Tyumen) and Valeria Umanets (Perm) for their invaluable research assistance, as well as to Professor Oleg V. Lysenko and his team at Perm State Pedagogical University for providing facilities and moderation for focus groups.
government’s priorities. Accordingly, the draft program for 2016-2020 proposes a budget increase of more than 300% to 1.9 billion rubles (see Figure 1). The primary executors of the state program are the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Emergency Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Press/Rospechat’ (see Table 1).

The 2016 draft program defines patriotism in terms of a collection of social principles and practices:

[Patriotism is] the foundational orientation of citizens’ social behavior, expressing a higher purpose in life and individuals’ activities, showing duty and responsibility before society, forming an understanding of the priority of societal interests above individuals and self-sacrifice, [and] disregarding danger to one’s life and health in the defense of the Fatherland’s interests.

By contrast, most Russians define patriotism simply as “love of the motherland.” Though there is much disagreement over what this means in practice, most see patriotism as apolitical and intensely personal. For instance, the one event unequivocally associated with patriotism—the state-sponsored celebration of Victory Day (May 9)—carries such resonance in large part because the Soviet Union’s massive losses in the Second World War left their mark on virtually every family. Underscoring the primary nature of the familial tie, interview and focus group participants cited the “Immortal Regiment” in Victory Day parades (in which participants carry pictures of relatives who fought in war), as conveying real emotional power for both observers and participants. By contrast, opinions divided over the government’s exploitation of wartime symbols like the orange-black St. George’s ribbons in other contexts.

Respondents defined patriotism in largely local and cultural terms: doing one’s job, looking after one’s neighbors and relatives, not leaving one’s home town (or Russia), preserving Russian language and cultural traditions, or teaching and learning Russian history. In practice, patriotism is distinct from “being a patriot,” which carries a political connotation. If patriotism concerns normative ideals or noble sentiments, being a patriot concerns loyalty and reliability. In other words, patriotism is personal, normative, and abstract, while being a patriot is public politics. Indeed, respondents visibly grew self-conscious and even shaken when asked what it means to be a patriot in Russia today. In virtually every instance, they responded by inquiring whether I sought their personal views or how “everyone else” understood it.

**Patriotic Practices and Russian Foreign Policy**

In this project, I examined the ways that Russians practice patriotism in their daily lives. Sometimes these practices involve techniques for interpreting or evaluating. For instance, when pressed to explain the meaning of patriotism in Russia today, a common
technique is to compare present times with the Soviet era, or to compare Russia with the West. Other times, everyday practices involve actions or activities, like consuming Russian-made products.

Among the various practices associated with patriotism, two sets of practices emerged in relation to Russia’s foreign policy. The first set of practices involved respondents’ evaluation of policy (comparing and nostalgizing). The second set concerned individual action or agency (opposing, defending, and consuming).

Comparing
Regardless of respondents’ political orientations, comparisons with the West serve to demonstrate Russia’s normality: that it commits the same kinds of errors in historical development, nostalgizes about the past in the same way, and strives toward the same kinds of universal goals and values. Some respondents even expressed concern that Russians are not sufficiently patriotic compared to Americans or Ukrainians. In the second round of interviews, however, respondents (particularly pensioners and state employees) began to emphasize cultural differences between a collectivist Russia and an individualist West as normal.

Nostalgizing
Nostalgia in today’s Russia primarily focuses on the late Soviet era prior to 1986 and, more specifically, the experience of Soviet youth expressed in terms of style, fashion, or kitsch. For older generations with experience of Soviet life, nostalgia finds expression through memories of community and collective achievement such as participation in the Pioneers, work brigades, or the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Respondents often considered nostalgizing for the Soviet past to be without political substance, though in focus groups it played a role in evaluations of the state’s social policy.

The situation is somewhat different for Russia’s youth. In interviews and focus groups with university students, nostalgia for Soviet times enables a variety of rose-tinted narratives in which Russians had a functioning state, guaranteed employment, superior education, social capital, safety and respect, and high living standards at low cost. For all generations, nostalgizing also relates to concepts of normality—this time, defining normality in terms of these narratives of the Soviet past. Contrary to the more ambivalent practice of comparing, nostalgizing reinforces notions of Russia as possessing its own path, separate from the West.

Opposing
For those skeptical of the government, being a patriot today means making an enemy of the United States, NATO, and the West, in general. As expressed by one respondent, “The general understanding of patriotism is in terms of transition to a worldview in which enemies are all around. We should be doing something good and noble but they
obstruct us.” Opposing need not take military form, and it is construed as defensive rather than aggressive. For most, opposing the West is a proper response to Western sanctions (by supporting import substitution) and to Western intervention in Ukraine (by supporting refugees or the Donbas). It is justified by the misdeeds of Western allies (most recently Turkey), malicious representations of Russia in Western propaganda, and generally by a perceived history of condescension and exploitation in the West’s relations with Russia. Respondents further justify the act of opposing as a patriotic practice in terms of essential (and potentially irreconcilable) cultural differences between collectivist Russia and the individualist West.

It is worth noting that opposing as a practice slips quickly from foreign to domestic enemies. Some of those who support the regime portray opponents as a “fifth column” or “agents of influence.” Yet almost all respondents characterized politics as opposed to patriotism: if patriotism is individual and authentic love for the motherland, politicians try twist and distort that love for their own purposes. For many, belt tightening in the age of sanctions-induced import substitution means that bureaucrats and politicians have no right to go abroad or to possess foreign assets.

**Defending**

As a patriotic practice, defending is both common and varied. In interviews, defending was associated with a range of objects: motherland, government interests, domestic markets, ecology, historical memory, and so forth. In this sense, defending is more of an abstract principle that depends upon the perception of threat. Of course, some respondents perceived a direct internal threat, extending the notion to defending the motherland from enemy agents. One respondent observed, “I don’t know any foreign agents, but I’m certain they exist. They don’t talk about them [in the media] for nothing.” More typically, respondents associated patriotism with a constitutional obligation to defend the country (indeed, one of the very few times that the Constitution was mentioned in conversations about patriotism), regardless of whether they served in the military.

**Consuming**

While respondents virtually ignored consuming as a patriotic practice in 2014, it became much more commonly mentioned by the end of 2015. With this practice, one likely sees the influence of a pervasive public discourse concerning sanctions, import substitution, and economic crisis. Respondents talked about buying local or Russian products in general, though many struggled to come up with concrete examples.

---

* Respondent 190459.
† Almost all respondents assumed that the embargo on European agricultural imports were part of Western sanctions rather than the Kremlin’s response to them.
‡ Respondent 110523.
The Mechanisms of Patriotic Simplification

Patriotism is complex, but most people intuitively expect it to be simple. In focus groups, discussions repeatedly reached a point at which participants perceived the concept as overly encumbered beyond common sense understandings. At that point, they demanded that their group be more selective in choosing what to call patriotic. In a similar vein, foreign policy is complicated and contradictory, but beyond a certain point, patriotic citizens push back on complex understandings with a variety of cognitive strategies.

Some citizens simplify foreign policy by way of personification: they portray ubiquitous government figures like Putin, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as loving the motherland and their actions as reducible in terms of that love. State employees were most inclined toward personification, though this often spilled directly into blaming foreign powers (usually the West or the US). In a telling exchange, one focus group participant exclaimed, “The majority of the country supports [Putin]. When we say Крым наш [Crimea is ours], when we give America what it deserves....It’s inspiring.” The familial connection to patriotism also found expression through opposition to homosexuality as a Western disease threatening family values in Russia.

For others, simplification occurs by way of blame attribution: complexity in foreign policy is an unfortunate consequence of the shortsightedness or misdeeds of other states. As a result, Russia is constrained in its ability to do the right thing in global affairs. In a group discussion, pensioners appeared most strongly inclined to engage in blame attribution, expressing greatest concern about American soft power and its perceived intent to разоблачить’ (divide or break up) Russian society. They also expressed chagrin over the killing of Russian pilots by Turkey and exasperation at the latter’s apparent inability to learn the lessons of history. At the same time, they expressed a desire to be rid of the information war, going so far as to call for the elimination of all political mass media.

Simplification may also occur via externalization, or when an intuitive sense of patriotism and morality is projected onto the state’s role in world affairs. Most often, this involves nostalgia for the Soviet era and comparisons with childhood images of world politics. As one respondent quipped, “As a patriot, I don’t know Russia’s national anthem. But I know the USSR’s anthem that I learned in school.” Students were inclined toward externalization, measuring the current state of affairs in accordance with Soviet domestic and foreign achievements. However, students also tended to link nostalgia for the Soviet past with present day forms of consumption. In focus group discussion, this led to a lively debate about domestic goods and products as symbols of pride, apparently discarding borscht as Ukrainian in favor of pelmeni. Students also singled out

* Respondent 164357.
humanitarian assistance (to eastern Ukraine and elsewhere) as evidence of today’s Russia reconnecting with its Soviet-era role in international affairs. At the same time, they were far more aware of the state’s constitutional structure and the formal nature of its institutions, and they viewed a politically active citizenry as positive for Russia.

**Conclusion: From Patriotic Practices to Policy Accountability**

It is worth noting the kinds of patriotism-related practices and points of reference that did not emerge as relevant to foreign policy. Religion and orthodoxy were almost never mentioned. Despite official and media popularization of the Tsarist-era concept of Novorossiya, very few respondents invoked the Tsarist era as relevant to patriotic practice. Also worthy of note is that ethnic nationalism—though common in discussions of patriotism—rarely figured into evaluations of foreign policy or the Kremlin’s policy toward Ukraine. Finally, corruption was not mentioned in the context of foreign policy, though respondents took a dim view of the elite’s perceived tendency to travel abroad and send their children elsewhere to live and study. That these various practices did not arise in interviews and focus groups presents a fascinating contrast with portrayals of Russian foreign policy by Western experts and media, who often equate support for Putin with more or less uniform support for the Kremlin’s policies and policy justifications.

In general, the three mechanisms of patriotic simplification discussed above draw from the evaluative practices of comparing and nostalgicizing, but they have different implications for how social groups respond: defending translates readily into personification for state employees, opposing into blame attribution for pensioners, and consuming into externalization for students (see Table 2).

Each mechanism further varies in terms of accountability in foreign policy. The combination of defending and personification essentially gives Russia’s leaders carte blanche; it is perhaps unsurprising that these practices are most characteristic of state employees. Opposing and blame attribution combine into support for foreign policy among pensioners, but with a greater degree of skepticism and distrust of the media. Finally, consuming and externalization entail the application of high normative standards of behavior in world affairs and their connection to domestic economic consumption. That this last combination is most characteristic of today’s students means that Russia’s foreign policy faces perhaps greatest scrutiny by the rising generation. Not surprisingly, the generation most targeted by the state’s Patriotic Education program is also most familiar with the formal structure and operation of state institutions. Yet this generation also expresses its patriotism most often in terms of consumption and, one expects, is likely to be sensitive to the effects of prolonged economic decline on domestic consumption. Hence, what becomes of today’s students after they finish their university degrees ought to be of keen interest to the Kremlin.
Figure 1. Budget for the State Program for Patriotic Education, 2001-2020 (millions of rubles)

Table 1. Spending for State Patriotic Education Program, 2001-2020 (millions of rubles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>27.55</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>204.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Emergency Situations</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Culture/Roskul’tura &amp; Rosarkhiv</td>
<td>32.45</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>140.35</td>
<td>519.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education &amp; Rosmolodezh’</td>
<td>46.11</td>
<td>129.25</td>
<td>140.1</td>
<td>699.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Press/Rospechat’</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>138.5</td>
<td>123.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The Dynamics of Patriotic Simplification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patriotic practices</th>
<th>Patriotic simplification</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Policy accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defending</td>
<td>Personification</td>
<td>State employees</td>
<td>Least</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposing</td>
<td>Blame attribution</td>
<td>Pensioners</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consuming</td>
<td>Externalization</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Most</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Soon after assuming the presidency in 2012, Vladimir Putin launched a series of political and economic reforms intended to strengthen the hand of the central government over Russia’s regions, consolidate presidential executive control over parliament, and restore the state’s solvency. While these various moves earned a great deal of scholarly and journalistic attention, the simultaneous initiative to consolidate society behind a patriotic ideal was less noticed.

In fact, the Kremlin has invested heavily in patriotic education as a unifying idea, beginning with the program “Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation for 2001-2005,” followed by subsequent revisions. These replicate aspects of Soviet-era military patriotism, emphasize service, defense of the motherland, and sacrifice for the state.

When examined from the perspective of ordinary Russian citizens, however, popular understandings of patriotism bear at most a superficial resemblance to state doctrine. Russians understand “being a patriot” in terms of loyalty to the government, but they understand “patriotism” as intensely personal and even opposed to politics. This observation suggests that preference falsification (when people misrepresent their privately held views in public settings) is potentially widespread, and that it occurs specifically in the gap between “patriotism” as Russians’ private understanding and “being a patriot” as a socially appropriate and expected expression of loyalty.

The regime’s attempts to cultivate popular legitimacy through patriotic appeals has the potential to exacerbate the gap between public and private, particularly since the Kremlin’s brand of patriotism virtually eliminates ideological space for individualist, pro-regime movements and parties. In the long run, the intensification of patriotic appeals may become a source of friction between regime and citizenry, undercutting the legitimacy of the leadership.
State-Sponsored Patriotism

Starting in the mid-2000s, the state invested in military-patriotic entertainment, particularly film and broadcast media, and sponsored academic conferences on patriotic themes. In primary and secondary education, Soviet history was rehabilitated with particular emphasis on World War II (called the Great Patriotic War in Russia), the modernizing achievements of the Soviet state under Brezhnev, and the USSR’s role and status as a world power. The government also promoted the creation of patriotic organizations at the local and regional levels.

The bulk of funding for the state patriotic programs was allocated for the power ministries in its initial incarnations—particularly for the Justice Ministry for elaborating its legislative strategy—but over time came to focus on the Education and Culture Ministries (see Figure 1). Through its various programs, the patriotic programs attracted various sectors of business and society to participate and become invested in the promotion of patriotism. On the regional level, governors also competed for the center’s resources in promoting their own patriotic events and competitions.

The one-two punch of the Sochi Olympics and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 proved a critical juncture in the development of patriotism as state doctrine. For many Russians, the 1980 Moscow Olympics remain a source of pride, alongside other iconic moments such as Yuri Gagarin’s flight into space. The Sochi Olympics reclaimed that memory, stylistically establishing today’s regime on equal footing with the USSR while making a statement comparable to China’s in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Russian citizens marveled at the national team’s record-breaking harvest of medals (though this was later brought into question by revelations of a state-sponsored performance-enhancing drug scheme).

The Sochi Olympics were soon overshadowed by Russia’s annexation of Crimea on March 18, 2014. In domestic politics, this achieved record levels of support for the government, disruption of the nationalist opposition, and the chilling of dissent. At the same time, Russia became increasingly isolated in international politics. Russia’s allies failed to support the annexation. The imposition of Western sanctions on Russia’s elite was met by Putin’s “counter-sanctions” in the form of a boycott of European agricultural imports and the official adoption of import substitution.

By 2016, patriotism became the only game in town. As Russia’s economy faltered and relations worsened with the West, the Kremlin doubled down on patriotism as a unifying force that would see it through troubled times. The budget for patriotic programs increased nearly three-fold (see Figure 1 and Table 1). In a widely reported meeting with small business leaders on February 3, 2016, Putin declared:
“We do not and cannot have any other unifying idea but patriotism… [Our national idea] is not ideologized, it is not connected with the activities of any political party or social strata. …we have to talk about it constantly, at all levels.”

Political innovators continue to find new ways to adapt patriotic themes to movements and organizations. In one extreme case, pro-business environmentalists recently called for “ecological patriotism to form the basis for a new national idea” and suggested the Kremlin apply import substitution to groups like the World Wildlife Foundation and Greenpeace.

Table: “Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation” State Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-2020 (final)</td>
<td><a href="http://government.ru/media/files/8qqYUwwzHUxzVkH1jsKAErrx2dE4q0ws.pdf">http://government.ru/media/files/8qqYUwwzHUxzVkH1jsKAErrx2dE4q0ws.pdf</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the 2016-2020 (draft) program, patriotism is defined as:

“The foundational orientation of citizens’ social behavior, expressing a higher purpose in life and individuals’ activities, showing duty and responsibility before society, forming an understanding of the priority of societal interests above individuals, including self-sacrifice, [and] disregarding danger to one’s life and health in the defense of the Fatherland’s interests.”

According to the 2016-2020 (final) program, the essential goals are:

“Creating conditions for raising citizens’ accountability for the fate of the country, raising the level of societal consolidation for resolving tasks related to the provision of national security and stable development of the Russian Federation, strengthening citizens’ sense of co-participation (soprichastnost’) in the great history and culture of Russia, [and] educating citizens who love their motherland and family [and] have an active position in life.”
Russian Patriotism without Patriots?  J. Paul Goode

Patriotism in Citizens’ Daily Lives

Patriotism is now an unavoidable feature of Russian politics, but what does it mean for ordinary citizens in their daily lives? To understand this, I conducted in-depth interviews with 65 respondents in two Russian cities, Perm and Tyumen, in 2014-2015, and commissioned a series of focus groups on the same subject in Perm. If the interviews were useful for investigating the everyday actions and routines (or practices) associated with patriotism, the focus groups illustrated how social dynamics affect the meanings attached to patriotic practices.

In one-on-one interviews, respondents generally expressed an understanding of patriotism that differs significantly from the version advanced by the state. For most Russians, patriotism is intensely personal and idealistic. Among the various meanings and practices associated with patriotism, it most commonly involves a close attachment to the “little motherland” (usually one’s home town or region), raising one’s children properly, doing one’s job, not causing trouble for others, living clean, improving one’s surroundings, consuming Russian products, and choosing not to leave Russia even if one has the means and opportunity.

Two crucial observations emerge from the interviews. First, when patriotism is “authentic,” it is connected with love (for the motherland) or emotion. It is opposed to politics and profit, which concern interest and ambition rather than love and sacrifice. This means that patriotic activities enforced or exploited by politicians and business are perceived as artificial, cynical, and even harmful. The one exception to this is the May 9 celebration of Victory Day, though even here, the holiday’s significance largely stems from familial memories of sacrifice and loss. Otherwise, the activation of patriotism “from above” by the state or media, patriotic performances, or patriotic opposition to political enemies is derisively referred to as “hoorah patriotism.”

Second, almost all interview respondents assumed their own understanding of patriotism differed from that of their fellow citizens at the same time that they assumed most people were “true” patriots—ironically, “true” in the sense of conforming to the state’s version of patriotism that many viewed as inauthentic. In fact, when asked what it means to be a patriot in Russia today, respondents often grew visibly uncomfortable and sought to clarify whether I was interested in their own opinion or how it is “for everyone.” The interviews revealed an important distinction between “patriotism” and “being a patriot”: “patriotism” is an individual and authentic ideal, while “being a patriot” concerns loyalty and conformity. “Patriotism” is apolitical and therefore ambivalent about the current regime, while “patriots” unambiguously support the Kremlin. And crucially, individuals assume they are alone in their understanding of patriotism, while they perceive the majority of Russians to be patriots in ways portrayed by the government and media (for summary, see Table 2).
When placed in focus groups, the social impact of “being a patriot” became especially clear in the relationship between politics, patriotism, and authenticity (see Table 3). The kinds of activities considered authentically patriotic include performances, especially those in which fellow citizens are likely to participate—particularly the Victory Day-linked “Immortal Regiment March” phenomenon of recent years. While attempts to activate patriotic sentiment “from above” or to direct patriotic opposition were considered inauthentic, it was not so much the fact that they were imposed as they were focused on the wrong targets. In this sense, “activated patriotism” was still viewed as legitimate and expected in focus groups even if it was misguided. In addition, a cardinal break between interviews and focus groups was observed in terms of regime orientation. Patriotism was expressed in terms of outright support for the government, while ambivalence was described as artificial (and even lazy). Likewise, perceptions of the distribution of majority and minority attitudes reversed in comparison to the interviews.

The Degrading of Relations between Citizens and the State

Taken together, the interviews and focus groups suggest that Russian citizens have distinctive understandings of patriotism that differ significantly from the state’s version as articulated in state patriotic programs. Yet in a social environment, those private differences are subordinated to the public necessities of “being a patriot” or signaling one’s loyalty. Political scientists call this phenomenon “preference falsification” and have demonstrated how such a gap between individually-held and publicly-expressed beliefs tends to maintain the status quo until a change in conditions makes it possible for individuals to openly express their preferences for change, often in a dramatic cascade. One significant consequence of preference falsification in this context is that the state’s information about actual preferences in society degrades over time. To put it bluntly, Russians will confirm that they are patriots as long as they are asked by the state. Hence, despite the clearly individualist aspects of patriotism felt by interview respondents, there is no room for individualism in the state’s version of patriotism. Indeed, there are no pro-regime individualist alternatives available in the mainstream of Russian politics (see Table 4).

Another consequence of preference falsification is likely to be a widening of the gap between individual and public preferences. As the government’s investment in patriotism increases almost unabated, the bureaucratization of patriotism in Russia will attract additional players in business and politics that further dilute its content. Moreover, the increased competition along with diminished state budget resources means that increasingly strict performance indicators are likely to be enforced. Indeed, one already sees a clear shift over time in the goals of state programs: if in 2001 it involved broad notions of changing political culture, the 2016 program designates quantitative targets for the creation of patriotic organizations and popular attendance of mass events. As the bureaucratic politics of “being a patriot” increasingly becomes a
public political enterprise, it can only move further from citizens’ understandings of authentic patriotism at the same time that citizens continue openly to express routine support.

Conclusion

The Kremlin’s pursuit of legitimacy by cultivating patriotism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it benefits from the social dynamics that relate patriotism to loyalty and produce public expressions of regime support despite individual or private dissent. As long as individual Russians assume that most other Russians are patriots, there are few incentives to press for individualist political alternatives or even to challenge regime narratives. In this sense, Russia’s nation of patriots is as an “imagined community” that is continually flagged and reinforced through state institutions and media. On the other hand, the government’s massive investment in patriotism risks a long-term crisis of legitimacy. Individuals may continue to openly accept the regime while holding their grievances close to the vest. As witnessed multiple times in the course of regime upheavals in Eastern Europe and the former USSR since 1989, legitimacy crumbles when those grievances erupt into the open. For many Russians, the government’s version of patriotism barely resembles their own and many perceive it as distressingly close to nationalism. Those concerns may increase over time, particularly as they remain hidden from view. As long as the government’s policy is to maintain and advance public expressions of patriotism while alienating the opposition—and especially the individualist, pro-regime sentiments already present in society—it potentially increases the scale of grievances as well as the scale of future potential crises.

Figure 1. Budget for State Program for Patriotic Education, 2001-2020 (millions of rubles)
Table 1. Budget for State Patriotic Programs, 2001-2020 (millions of rubles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power Ministries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>27.55</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>173.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Emergency Situations</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Justice &amp; FSIN</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSB</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSKN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>14.83</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>200.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-Economic Ministries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Culture/Roskul’tura &amp; Rosarkhiv</td>
<td>32.45</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>140.35</td>
<td>441.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Economic Development/Rosreestr</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education/Rosobrazovanie &amp; Rosmolodezh’</td>
<td>46.11</td>
<td>129.25</td>
<td>140.1</td>
<td>850.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Industry and Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Regions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goskomsporf/Rossport/Ministry of Sport</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Transport</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roskosmos</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosleskhoz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosnedra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosrybolovstvo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>83.31</td>
<td>224.35</td>
<td>355.15</td>
<td>1376.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communications &amp; Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Press/Rospechat’</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>138.5</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VGTRK</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossviaz’</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>138.5</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosvoentsentr</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>22.95</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAN</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>10.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAMNN [medical sciences]</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAO [education]</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>7.59</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>130.78</td>
<td>378.05</td>
<td>596.75</td>
<td>1666.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Patriotism and Authenticity in Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Authentic</th>
<th>Inauthentic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical patriotic</td>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Activating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practices</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td>Performing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consuming</td>
<td>Opposing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime orientation</td>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived share of</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Patriotism and Authenticity in Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Authentic</th>
<th>Inauthentic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical patriotic</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Activating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practices</td>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Opposing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consuming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime orientation</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived share of</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4. Russia’s Ideological Landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anti-regime</th>
<th>Pro-regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collectivist</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>Patriot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>[None]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “Return of Stalin”
UNDERSTANDING THE SURGE OF HISTORICAL POLITICS IN RUSSIA

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 429
May 2016

Ivan Kurilla*
European University at St. Petersburg

At the beginning of this year, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov published an article in Russia in Global Affairs explaining the recent radical changes in Russia’s foreign policy. Instead of dealing with the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, however, Lavrov devoted his article to Russia’s thousand-year history. His boss, President Vladimir Putin, has similarly engaged in historical discussion, often as a way to link state decisions to Russia’s glorious and sacred past.

Russia’s “historical language of politics” kicked into high gear during the Ukraine conflict. In 2014, the Kremlin introduced various historical narratives as a way to mobilize support. Many of its ideas proliferated and took on a logic of their own, even to the point of becoming uncontrollable trends. This political dabbling in history has made the lives of professional academic historians complicated, even hazardous.

In a sign that the government may be attempting to tone down the current bout of historical politics, a dormant government bill seeking to safeguard the memorializing of those who experienced political repression was recently signed into law. The primary intent of the legislation appears to be tamping down on the latest historical trend—the return of Joseph Stalin to Russia’s pantheon of heroes.

Pushing the Right Buttons

Accompanying changes in Russia’s mode of governance from 2012-2014, state propaganda began to disseminate a wide range of historical narratives to justify Kremlin decisionmaking and to secure public support. Within a short period of time, the government introduced a series of historical novelities into public discourse. In addition to a law against rehabilitating Nazism, the state evoked the memory of medieval Prince Vladimir (the baptizer of Rus’), commemorated the beginning of World War I, and staged a massive jubilee for the 70th anniversary of the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II. In 2015, such appeals to history were overshadowed by the return of Joseph Stalin to the

*Ivan Kurilla is Professor of History and International Relations at the European University at St. Petersburg.
public space through the establishment of monuments and the renaming of streets. These efforts attracted significant national attention, though they were not sparked (or overtly welcome) by the Kremlin.

Objective historical research was first imperiled in April 2014 when the Duma approved an amendment to the Criminal Code characterizing the “Rehabilitation of Nazism” as a felony. This made it dangerous for academics to question any aspect of the official version of World War II. Over the previous decade, the Russian government had already used World War II (the “Great Patriotic War”) to unify state and society. The collective memory of suffering and victory in that war forms an important part of Russian national identity. Almost all Russian families share memories of that time in which more than 27 million citizens perished. The war’s unifying power explains why the government has tried hard to keep historical interpretations of this period under their control. The law against rehabilitating Nazism appeared to mark the endpoint of the development of a canon for studying and retelling the events of the war.

As the Euromaidan drew to a close and unrest in Ukraine’s east grew, the memory of World War II took on new political significance. Russian propaganda began to heavily use analogies from the war to describe the situation in Ukraine. The Kremlin labeled Ukraine’s nationalist political factions and the new Kyiv leadership as “Nazis.” The Ukrainian military that was attempting to restore control over insurgents became known as karateli (“punishers”), after the German commandos of 1941-43 who pursued guerilla fighters by destroying villages and killing civilians. Pro-Russian rebels were referred to as opolchentsi (“militia”), after the Russian civilian volunteers who defended Moscow in 1941. The Kremlin’s messaging used the strongest political language possible and more broadly than ever.

However, the Kremlin overused World War II in its propaganda and it began to lose value as a domestic policy instrument. The “instrumentalization” of history began to dilute the precious symbols of Russia’s wartime memories. As the most tense phase of the Ukraine conflict died down, the Kremlin had to change its propagandistic language. It turned to earlier historical events to find new supporting frames for its policies.

Unexpectedly, one such era was World War I. In August 2014, Putin delivered a speech dedicating a monument to the heroes of World War I. In it, he went beyond invoking heroism and memory. Putin spoke about Russia’s “stolen victory” by those who had “called for the defeat of the Fatherland,” been “eager for power,” and “betray[ed] the national interest.” Putin characteristically did not call the Bolsheviks by their name, probably in order not to anger current-day Communists who are generally loyal to his policies. Instead, Putin’s target was the liberal opposition camp. He thus laid the framework for using even World War I as a context for marginalizing opposition to Kremlin policies.
One Perspective?

In 2013, Putin instructed Russian historians to write a unified textbook of Russian history. Among the reasons for this was the wide variance in regional historiographies both from each other and from the national narrative. A year later the government instructed historians at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences to write new, separate histories of Novorossiya and Crimea. This added additional challenges to the already considerable task of producing a unified account of Russian history. Intriguingly, in April 2016, Institute director Yuri Petrov mentioned that the Institute was continuing its work on the history of Crimea but was silent about Novorossiya.

Even before historians offered their new text, Putin, in the fall of 2014, began unlocking more historical moments. He reached back over a millennium to locate another argument for the acquisition of Crimea. In a meeting with young historians, he said:

“Crimea for Russians...has a certain sacred significance. After all, in Crimea, in Chersonesus, Prince Vladimir was baptized, and then he baptized Rus’. The very first baptismal font of Russia is there.”

After these words were spoken, medieval Prince Vladimir became a new object in the nation’s historical discourse. The traditional view linking the baptism of Rus’ to Kyiv faded. Soon it became known that a monument to Prince Vladimir would be erected in Moscow, one bigger than the one in Kyiv. By the middle of 2015, a public debate about where to place the statue dominated headlines. All the suggested locations were symbolically charged: Lubyanka Square, across from the former KGB headquarters; Bolotnaya Square, the center of the 2011 winter protests; or Borovitskaya Square, just across from the Kremlin gate used by the presidential motorcade. Russian journalist Oleg Kashin suggested that the proponents of the monument meant to dedicate it to “another Vladimir” (not the prince but the president). The whole discussion attracted so much controversy that the idea was abandoned by the end of the summer on the grounds that it was impossible to find a place in Moscow for such an enormous statue.

Stalin Reemerges

Since his “Sacred Chersonesus” speech in late 2014, Putin has not introduced anything really novel into the field of historical politics. Even during last year’s Victory Day celebrations, which included a massive grassroots “Immortal Regiment” march, nothing new was officially said about the war or the past in general. *

However, mid-level bureaucrats and parliamentary deputies (mostly Communists) have taken an interest in crafting “official” histories. In particular, they have introduced a range

---

* Participation in the “Immortal Regiment” in the May 9 celebrations this year was huge, which ignited a heated debate among the Russian intelligentsia; the reasons, however, merit separate discussion.
of initiatives seeking to restore Stalin’s name to Russia’s pantheon of heroes. In February 2015, parliamentary chairman Sergey Naryshkin attended a ceremony in Yalta (Crimea) devoted to the anniversary of the meeting of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin. The event featured the unveiling of a monument to the “Big Three” by famous sculptor Zurab Tsereteli that included a larger-than-life sculpture of Stalin. This was the first official Russian memorial of Stalin since the beginning of Nikita Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization in 1961.

After the statue’s inauguration, images of Stalin began to appear in different parts of the country and in various contexts. Alexander Prokhanov’s patriotic Izborsky Club brought an “icon” of Stalin to a ceremony at the Engels Air Force Base in Saratov in June 2015. The Lipetsk Communist Party erected a statue of Stalin in their city in April. Similar plans were announced in multiple cities and towns, from Ussuriysk in the Far East to Orel in central Russia and Dagestanskie Ogni in the Caucasus, where a Stalin Avenue already exists. In July, a bust of Stalin was placed in the Tver region in an exhibition at the Kalinin Front memorial museum, a move supported by Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky.

Another controversial figure reared his head when the Communist Party suggested a referendum last summer to return to Lubyanka Square the infamous monument of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka (the KGB’s precursor). The motion was approved by the City Council (which is not at all Communist-controlled).

The rapid return of Stalin demonstrates a perception, at least among Communist ideologues and mid-level bureaucrats, that the historical narratives officially promoted by the state are obsolete and not in line with actual state policy.

There remains no clear official Kremlin position on the Stalin issue. Putin has repeatedly denounced Stalin and refused ideas that immortalize his name. All the state-sponsored history textbooks, including the “historical standard” laid down for the unified textbook, contain references to “Stalin’s dictatorship,” “cult of personality,” “mass repressions,” and “great power ambitions.” It is hard to imagine Putin reversing this position after 15 years of reinforcing it.

There are several possible explanations for Stalin’s reemergence. One may be as “trial balloons” that the Kremlin can use to gauge the public’s readiness to reassess national history in radical fashion—for instance using the 1930s as a key reference point rather than the 1970s.

Second, it may serve as a rhetorical ploy to scare Russian liberals and the West. The Kremlin can then shut down Stalin’s return in a move to assert itself as the voice of moderation and reason. For example, the debate about the Dzerzhinsky monument in Lubyanka Square might suddenly be resolved by the Kremlin, perhaps by deciding to place Prince Vladimir there instead.
Third, the use of history may be a way to justify the radical change in Russian foreign policy in 2014. This change required a clear explanation at all levels of the state apparatus. The Kremlin needed to provide something intelligible, and rampant Nazis in Ukraine and new revelations about Prince Vladimir were not working. The nearest historical period when Russia increased its territory was the Stalin era. In this light, it makes sense to see the return of Stalin as a result of Russian policymakers’ search for political language to explain the annexation of Crimea and, potentially, justify future ones.

With some degree of historical irony, however, the most compelling narrative may be that which Putin himself has publicly least supported: Stalin’s restoration of the Russian empire, in the form of the Soviet Union and in opposition to the external world. Sensing this narrative’s appeal, many elites may have taken it further than the state was ready to go. This produced an avalanche effect that threatened to escape the Kremlin’s control—probably the first time this has happened during Putin’s administration.

Perhaps as a way to re-claim its grip on historical politics, the Russian government re-introduced a bill in August 2015 on the “Perpetuation of the Memory of the Victims of Political Repressions.” This bill was prepared several years ago but was abandoned. Its reappearance and its signing into law in March 2016 may be taken as a sign that Russia’s leadership became unhappy with Stalin’s ever more prominent return to public life and wanted to tone down such initiatives.

Conclusion

Historical politics in Russia has entered a turbulent stage in the past few years. Two principal and emotional points of history have again been placed on the national stage: the Great Patriotic War (a unifying memory) and the era of Joseph Stalin (a point of contention). There is still no real clarity among Russians about these or other pivotal times in Russian history.

For Russians, history has substituted for the language of politics. It is rare to hear descriptions of political ideologies and events using accepted terminology. Words such as “democracy,” “liberal,” “elections,” and “annexation” have meanings that are abstract or in opposition to how they are understood in the West. To communicate one’s political outlook or understand that of others, it is simpler to examine attitudes toward Stalin, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, or the 1990s decline.

The next opportunity to assess Russia’s historical politics will be next year, 2017, the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. In a country overwhelmed by historical politics, the way this commemoration is handled by the authorities and perceived by the people will be revealing.
IV. Polarizing and Reconciling: Identifying Russia’s foes and friends
Emotions, Cognition, and the Societal Dynamics of East-West Polarization

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 355
September 2014

Gulnaz Sharafutdinova
King’s College London

“Historical epochs are like volcanoes. Everything that has accumulated through the years under a thin surface of everyday events suddenly breaks open, like lava, and comes to the surface.”
- Vladimir Ermolenko*

The dramatic snowballing of events—Russia’s annexation of Crimea, ongoing war in eastern Ukraine, the downing of Malaysian Airliner MH17, sanctions—have remade the global political scene. Polarization, confrontation, and media-fuelled hysteria exist on all sides. Levels of anti-American sentiment in Russia and anti-Russian sentiment in the West have skyrocketed, propelled by media portrayals and outright propaganda, which has been especially evident on Russian television.

The emotional makeup of Russian society is especially complex and ambivalent. On the one hand, the number of Russians living in constant fear of a new world war, according to the Moscow-based Levada Center, reached 27 percent this past July, while 52 percent are generally concerned about it.† On the other hand, VTsIOM, another polling agency, reported that the sense of social well-being in Russia in August hit a record high in terms of life satisfaction, material well-being, and social optimism, with numbers reaching 79, 76, and 77 percent, respectively.‡ Russian President Vladimir Putin’s ratings have also remained unprecedentedly high at 82-86 percent over the last few months. It appears as if the events that have startled the world, producing anxiety and fear of Russia in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, have worked to boost Russians’ sense of well-being, self-confidence, patriotism, and faith in their president.

Political scientists have so far been reluctant to embrace emotion as a way of understanding political processes. The issue has been left for more casual journalistic coverage, as exhibited recently, with the media providing psychological accounts to help

* “A Letter to a friend from Russia,” http://gefter.ru/archive/12118
† http://www.levada.ru/15-08-2014/strakhi-rossivian
‡ This is also confirmed by the experts of the Levada Center. See: http://www.levada.ru/19-08-2014/ekspertiza-rossiyane-na-podeme
explain the Ukraine crisis. Such omission is regrettable, even if understandable, as I discuss below. The study of emotional underpinnings and drivers of political processes is important from analytical, policy-making, and political perspectives. Analytically, taking emotions into account allows for making sense of the rationality of particular actions that otherwise might appear irrational and difficult to comprehend. The actions of Putin with regard to Crimea specifically have often been interpreted as irrational and not bearing any relation to Russia’s long-term interests. If one focuses on the economic and political burdens associated with integrating Crimea into Russia, this is a plausible viewpoint. But this is so only if one understands interests as a set of preferences delinked from meaning, identity, history, and memory. Once interests are seen as embedded in meaning, Putin’s actions become more sensible as they placed the Crimea issue right at the core of Russia’s struggles with its national identity, post-imperial legacies, and the emotional trauma Russian society experienced after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Crimea could arguably be seen as a newly-found public fetish representing the recovery (if only partial) of the lost pride and prestige associated with the Soviet Union.

Many observers focus on the role of propaganda campaigns in reshaping Russian society, blaming Putin and his political regime for carefully constructing such campaigns during the 2000s and cultivating anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism throughout the last decade. The political crisis in Ukraine led to the unleashing of an especially virulent propaganda campaign in Russia invoking the hated images of fascism and “Banderites” supposedly working in cahoots with the United States, which, in turn, seeks to take over the world. Even after the May 2014 presidential election in Ukraine, which demonstrated that radical nationalist candidates had less than two percent support among the population, the narrative about the U.S.-supported bloody, fascist, junta regime in Kyiv persisted.

Even a single session of watching Russian television channels these days provides an unforgettable impression of the sensationalized messages pounded over and over into the eyes and ears of Russian audiences, messages aimed at emotional mobilization on geopolitical grounds. However, sociologists and psychologists assert that propaganda does not work on people who are not susceptible to it. People do not believe what they do not want to believe and process information selectively, with the aim of affirming their pre-existing beliefs. Most recent studies show that even when their beliefs are shown to be false, people are likely to change them only under immediate threat. Unsurprisingly, more
and more observers have recently turned their attention to the state of Russian society and the reasons for its susceptibility to such open brainwashing.

So why do the majority of Russians believe the misinformation projected on Russian television channels? What do various strands of relevant literature and data tell us?

Propaganda, Emotion, and Cognition

First, let us attend to the issue of how exactly propaganda works. There is a large body of literature in the cognitive sciences that focuses on the interconnection between emotions and cognition. Researchers have shown unambiguously that anxiety affects interpretation: more anxious individuals tend to interpret ambiguous information in congruence with their fears and perceived threats (although context and contextual information are also very important for resolving ambiguity). Furthermore, a wide range of emotions—anger, sadness, anxiety, and more positive emotions—affect judgment; even how people estimate the likelihood of various outcomes appears to be partially a function of their mood. The central message that emerges from this literature concerns the inter-linkage between emotions and information-processing/interpretation/judgment. Emotions represent an important element in the construction of social cognition (or the societal-level understanding of present problems). Their understanding is therefore important for getting at the societal-level reasoning and rationality.

Propaganda on Russian television has clearly targeted the emotional state of society, specifically aiming at increasing the level of public anxiety and reviving historically-rooted national fears and hatreds associated with fascism and World War II. Furthermore, it is evident that propaganda messages have manipulated the national wounds associated with the loss of international stature and the perceived “greatness” of the Soviet Union, positing the return of Crimea as a morally superior, responsible, and justified action on Russia’s part. The new rule-making claimed and asserted by Russia on this international boundary issue was interpreted by the public as a “return” of the country to the category of “great powers” that is free to construct rules rather than be bound to follow existing ones. The resulting ambivalence in public opinion data—showing widespread fears of a new world war along with a newly found sense of well-being and self-confidence—are not surprising in this picture. They only show that propaganda has had an effect in determining public perceptions and that it was a multi-faceted instrument hitting at a number of soft spots on the public’s “emotional” body.

---

* http://www.colta.ru/articles/society/3939
What these “soft spots” are can be gleaned through public opinion polls and through cultural studies that apprehend the deeper emotional, perhaps even subconscious, layers of Russian society that are not amenable to opinion poll analysis.

Attitudes, Opinions, and Emotional Resonance

Opinion polls are better at capturing the cognitive side: what people think about certain issues (including what they think about “how they feel”). By its very design—relying on information-processing based on language—opinion polls are not able to get at the subconscious level and uncontrolled emotional responses. Still, they have much to contribute to understanding the mindset of Russian society and comprehending the processes and public reactions unfolding in recent months. One opinion that stands out in its consistency is a popular view about Russia’s place in the world. Sixty-six percent of Russians in 2000 and 65 percent in 2010 thought that Russia as a country deserves a place of greater respect.* Consistent with this view, popular expectations grew that the president should focus on making Russia a great power that deserves respect in the world.† Fifty-seven percent saw that as a priority for the president, standing second only to the issue of “social justice” (which 77 percent saw as a priority) and ahead of “law and order” (which stood at 51.5 percent). The annexation of Crimea was interpreted by many as a huge step toward returning that greatness. The number of respondents that noticed increasing respect toward Russia increased from 25 percent in 2012 to 44 percent in 2014.‡

In terms of perceptions of external threats and enemies, the majority of Russians (51 percent) thought in 2010 that an external threat to Russia existed (with that proportion reaching 61 percent in 2014).§ Furthermore, the West was considered the number one external threat; almost a third of Russians—32 percent—thought that foreign/external threats to Russia were coming from the West (while 29 percent thought the external threat was associated with the Islamic world).** It is also clear that the external threat associated with the West is mostly linked to the United States; consistently in 2003, 2007, and 2010, anywhere between 73 and 76 percent of Russians thought that the United States was an aggressor that tries to control all countries in the world.††

Quite revealing as well are the polls showing mass confusion in popular assessments of the results of the end of the Cold War. In 2007, almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 36 percent of respondents could not give a clear answer to the question about what

---

† http://www.levada.ru/15-02-2012/ezhik-v-tumane
‡ http://www.ng.ru/politics/2014-08-08/3_opros.html
†† http://www.levada.ru/archive/strana-i-mir/dlya-vas-ssha-seichas-eto
the end of the confrontation with the West meant for Russia. Thirty-one percent thought that Russia had lost in its confrontation with the West, while 33 percent thought that Russia had gained, along with others, from ending the confrontation with the West.† Despite these divided opinions, 78 percent of respondents thought that Russia should promote mutually beneficial links with the West, while only 11 percent thought Russia should distance itself from the West.† This last point is a good illustration of the difficulties involved in using opinion polls to get at public emotions (unless studying these emotions has been placed at the very center of research). Designed to get respondents’ reactions on an array of questions, opinion polls do not allow for testing the intensity of responses to emotionally charged issues or for distinguishing between issues that are more or less emotionally charged without further and more in-depth probing. The explosive character of the emotional responses associated with the Ukraine crisis indicates that these emotions have been in the process of gestation and accumulation for some time but are only now finding a moment for open and public expression. Cultural studies appear to possess better means at getting at the emotions that society has been harboring beneath the surface for a particular period of time.

How could a study show what lies underneath the social surface? One method advanced in cultural studies is through art and literature. “[A]rt is the incision in the real which allows something unexpected to emerge or erupt, and let[s] us glimpse or guess at what lies beneath the surface of things.”‡ Art and literature do not speak for themselves entirely and depend on what viewers and the readers bring to the text, what they hear, and what they see. It is the public resonance of a piece of art, movie, or work of literature along with the public’s identification with the sentiments promoted by these pieces that reveal they have touched on something important, something that might have been hidden beneath the surface, a powerful emotional charge that was discharged upon confronting that piece of art.

In short, this is a method of getting at societal traumas, fears, and aspirations by studying the creative pieces that have caused powerful public resonance and could therefore be explored as a gateway into the collective unconscious.

Russian director Alexei Balabanov’s film Brat (Brother) 2 (2000), for example, is one such creative piece that can serve as a powerful conduit into the Russian psyche. A sequel to the original Brat (1997), a film tracking its main character Danila (played by Sergei Bodrov, Jr.) as he returns from military service and faces life during the thuggish 1990s in St. Petersburg, Brat 2 takes Danila to Chicago as he seeks to avenge a friend and restore justice. A gangster flick, Brat 2 became a cult film, featuring aggressive anti-Westernism,

---

* http://www.levada.ru/archive/strana-i-mir/v-rezultate-izmeneniya-vneshnepoliticheskogo-kursa-strany-v-kontse-80-kh-godov-
† http://www.levada.ru/archive/strana-i-mir/kak-vy-schitaete-rossii-seichas-sleduet
‡ Couze Venn, “Identity, diasporas and subjective change: The role of affect, the relation to the other, and the aesthetic,” Subjectivity 26, 1 (2009), 10.
xenophobia, and sexism, and it turned its main character, a hitman, into a cult personality. Yana Khashamova, who uses *Brat* and *Brat 2* (along with other Russian films) to explore Russia’s collective imagination about the West, argues that the Russian public underwent shifting sentiments and contradictory reactions towards the West as it faced the challenges of adjusting its national identity to a new global environment. Early fantasies of the West turned illusory during the painful 1990s and were replaced by aggressive anti-Western sentiments, anti-Americanism, and admiration for Russia’s moral superiority, as is evident in *Brat 2.* The massive admiration and following for Danila reflects just how closely the sentiments promoted by the film coincided with the public’s mood and aspirations, especially those of Russian youth.

Arguably, Putin’s actions vis-a-vis Ukraine and the West have been underpinned by the same sentiment, likening Putin to Danila, and have subsequently been admired by millions of Russians. Putin’s surging approval rating in opinion polls seems to indicate that the Russian public has seen its fantasies resurface as reality in recent initiatives of the Russian president. The pull of the Kremlin’s propaganda messages are arguably that much more enticing given such pre-existing fantasies. The awakening from these fantasies is doomed to be painful and traumatic, once again, and can only be delayed by the continuing and, arguably, heightening confrontation with the West.

---

In Russia, conspiracy theories involving clandestine and sinister external actors are widespread. Many of these theories are geopolitical in nature, involving antagonism toward Russia because of its vast territory and natural resources. Other theories are underpinned by Russia’s differing Orthodox civilization. To a large extent, these theories replace the concept of “international class struggle,” which was once a Soviet mainstay justifying the inevitable confrontation between the Soviet Union and the West. Alarming, many of these new theories have permeated Russia’s education space, where they are intended not only to shape knowledge but to secure the political loyalty of Russia’s youth.

In this memo, I analyze this phenomenon by examining textbooks on “geopolitics” used in Russian universities. Using the Russian State Library online catalogue, I identified 86 such textbooks written by 61 authors, then reduced the list to works by 44 of them. I analyzed the books’ educational context, assessed the prevalence of conspiracy theories within them, and categorized the most prominent. I found that approximately half the authors of these textbooks resort to conspiracy theorizing.

Most geopolitical textbooks that include conspiracy theories portray the United States as the primary conspirator against Russia and, accordingly, as a threat to Russia’s existence, independence, and territorial integrity. Other conspirators cited include China, Germany, and Japan, as well as certain “alliances” of states in international organizations and the Muslim world. Beyond risks to Russia’s territorial integrity, some theories outline support for ethnic and/or religious separatist movements in and around Russia. Since the mid-2000s, many textbooks have also denounced a supposed “fifth column” inside Russia.

---


Geopolitics in Russian Higher Education

Geopolitics and geopolitical theories were present in Soviet society and education. However, geopolitical concepts were considered “bourgeois” or “reactionary” and heavily criticized. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, geopolitical studies quickly gained acceptance. In 1993, academic works employing the term “geopolitics” started to appear, and the subject was also included within Russia’s federal higher education standards for the social sciences and humanities.

Over the next decade, the concept spread into many fields. Students specializing in political science, international relations, and area studies were offered courses dedicated to geopolitics, while students of other programs had obligatory courses in history and political science that touched on issues relating to Russia’s geopolitical interests.

In the latest round of educational standards (from 2009), geopolitics and geopolitical topics formally ceased to be obligatory for most fields of university study (except political science), but many professors teach them nonetheless. As before, most students discuss geopolitical topics via political science and history courses regardless of their course of study, while students with majors like international relations and political science take specific courses devoted to geopolitics. Geopolitics is also included in the curricula of many military academies, where dwelling on conspiracy theories is quite common. Many universities, including Moscow State University, house departments with the words “geopolitics” or “geopolitical” in their names.

University textbooks specifically devoted to geopolitics began to appear in 1997. According to data from the Russian State Library’s electronic catalog, approximately two or three textbooks on the subject were published every year over the next decade. Since 2009, that figure has risen to an average of between six and nine per year, with the overall number approaching one hundred. Some of these textbooks are easily accessible online, and at least some of them are available in every major city and university library across Russia.

Conspiracy Theorizing in Russian Geopolitical Textbooks

When it comes to conspiracy theorizing, there are two dominant trends in Russian geopolitical studies. While a number of textbooks strongly rely on conspiracy theories, others firmly dismiss them, treating such notions with disdain. Some more moderate trends can also be observed: some authors vaguely and obliquely hint at conspiracies while other authors seem to favor certain conspiracies but refute others.

Geopolitical textbooks that contain conspiracy theories are not necessarily more influential than other textbooks, but they include very popular texts, including those by Alexander

1 See, for example, E. Pozdniakov (ed.), Geopolitika: teoriya i praktika (Moscow: Institute of World Economy and International Relations, 1993).
Dugin,* Nikolai Nartov,† and Marina Vassilenko‡ That said, textbooks that do not focus on conspiracies, especially those by Kamaluddin Gajiev§ and Vladimir Kolossov and Nikolai Mironenko,** appear to be no less popular among university instructors.

We should take into account that some conspiracy-minded authors are not fastidious or independent in their judgments—some merely cite other authors’ ideas without attempting to provide any critical analysis. I would say at least 11 authors simply plagiarize the work of others. In fact, plagiarism could be one of the most significant ways conspiracy theories are disseminated across Russian academia (plagiarism is widespread across all fields of Russian academia). Many papers—often plagiarized to begin with—are readily available online for others to re-plagarize. The temptation to plagiarize is great for unscrupulous academics. Publishing a textbook is an important step in a teacher’s career. Teachers also have demanding workloads, and many authors in the provinces have poor access to diverse research literature.

**Specific Conspiracy Theories**

In total, I identified 94 cases of conspiracy theorizing in the set of textbooks I reviewed. Seven specific countries were mentioned that allegedly conspire against Russia: the United States, China, Germany, Japan, Finland, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea (although only one author mentioned the last three). Other malicious actors include international groupings like the Group of Seven, the Trilateral Commission, and the Club of Rome. Informal alliances are also mentioned, such as the West, Atlanticists, and the Muslim world. In some cases, textbooks did not explicitly name conspirators but typically implied that the United States was the leading culprit, either operating alone or with its Western allies. Although anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are popular in Russia, no textbook advocated them or even referred to them (the authorities would likely block such texts from publication).

In more than three-fourths of the cases, textbooks that utilize conspiracy theories explicitly or implicitly name the United States as the chief conspirator. The most popular anti-American theories hold that the United States poses an existential threat to Russia and blame it for the collapse of the USSR, for trying to make post-Soviet Russia disintegrate, and/or for trying to gain control over Russia’s natural resources and economy. One method this “chief conspirator” uses is support for internal separatism in places like the North Caucasus, other Muslim-dominated Russian provinces, and Kaliningrad. Some theories say that the United States is supporting an anti-Russian “fifth column” —liberal,

---

* See, for example, Aleksandr Dugin, Geopolitika Rossii (Moscow: Gaudeamus, 2012). It should be noted that other works by Dugin, more frequently cited in curricula, are not officially approved textbooks for university students.
† See, for example, Nikolai Nartov, Geopolitika (Moscow: Unity, 1999).
‡ See, for example, Marina Vassilenko, Geopolitika sovremennogo mira (Moscow: Gardariki, 2006).
§ See, for example, Kamaluddin Gajiev, Geopolitika (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1997).
** Vladimir Kolossov and Nikolai Mironenko, Geopolitika I politicheskaya geografiya (Moscow: Aspekt press, 2001).
pro-Western politicians and experts who lobby in favor of U.S. interests against Russia.* Other theories refer to U.S. efforts to organize color revolutions in the post-Soviet space by promoting civic activist networks (which are often portrayed as autonomous and decentralized while at the same time obedient to their U.S. coordinating centers†). Additional methods include promoting “managed instability” in various regions, conducting information warfare against Russia, promoting Western values in order to “corrupt” Russian citizens, encouraging drug trafficking into Russia from Afghanistan, and encircling Russia with Western allies.

In two cases, authors cite fake U.S. documents that were widely circulated by Russian nationalist newspapers in the 1990s.‡ The first of these, the “Dulles Plan,” purportedly aimed to undermine the moral values of the USSR by secretly promoting various vices with the help of Russia’s fifth column (allegedly, this plan continues to this day). The second document was a fabricated report from a 1995 meeting of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff where Bill Clinton allegedly reported on the success of U.S. efforts to destroy the USSR, while declaring the destruction of Russia to be the primary task of the United States over the next decade.§

Other theories hold that non-U.S. conspirators intend to annex various Russian territories, such as Kaliningrad (Germany), the disputed Kuril Islands (Japan**), and lands in Siberia and the Far East (China and North Korea). In pursuit of their aims, these conspirators employ different methods: China and North Korea prefer demographic expansion,†† while Germany and Japan resort primarily to increasing economic and cultural influence in the target regions (while also supporting Russia’s fifth column). Some conspirators allegedly support separatist movements based on ethnic and religious solidarity, such as Finnish support for the Finno-Ugric peoples and Saudi support for radical Islamist movements inside Russia.

Finally, some textbooks mention international organizations and informal unions as suspicious plotters (usually controlled by the United States and its allies). One textbook

---

* In a textbook by Dugin that is officially approved by Moscow State University, a number of anti-Russianists were explicitly mentioned in the section titled “Atlanticist Network of Influence in Putin’s Russia,” among them: Sergei Ivanov, Sergei Lavrov, Vladislav Surkov, Sergei Karaganov, Viacheslav Nikonov, and Anatoly Torkunov, as well as known systemic liberals and oppositionists. See Dugin, 380-383.
† Anatoly Marinchenko, Geopolitika (Moscow: INFRA-M, 2010), 252-253.
‡ Igor Kefeli, Filosofia geopolitiki (St. Petersburg: Petropolis, 2007), 197.
§ Marinchenko, 121.
** In at least one textbook, a number of experts were labeled as paid pro-Japanese lobbyists. See V. Markin and E. Aliokhin, Geopolitika: uchebnoye posobiye (Penza: Penza State University Publishing House, 2006), 100. However, the text containing these accusations seems to have been borrowed, without proper citation, from Oleg Arin’s earlier work, Rossiya: ni shagu vperiod (Moscow: EXMO), http://olegarin.com/olegarin/rns_p22.html
†† See, for example, Natalya Komleva, Osnovy geopolitiki (Yekaterinburg: Ural State University Publishing House, 2008), 262. In trying to justify the idea of “demographic expansion,” the author mentions dazzling statistical figures on illegal immigration to Russia (10 million Chinese and 3 million North Koreans) that lack references.
"revealed" a sinister biopolitical plan, advocated by a seemingly neutral international organization, the Club of Rome, that recommended reducing the Russian population to 50 million by 2010. It was implied that this recommendation reflected the intentions of certain Western enemies, which the textbook failed to name. The author of another textbook wrote that the Trilateral Commission still controls presidential elections worldwide and that candidates for top positions are pre-approved by the U.S. National Security Agency.†

**Conclusion**

Russian educational authorities tend to consider geopolitics (and Russian geopolitical interests) as a genuine academic subject that most university students ought to learn. At the same time, the studying and teaching of geopolitics often tends to link up to conspiracy theories about external enemies, among which the United States is “conspirator no. 1.” Of late, geopolitical conspiracies have become a mainstream trend in official political rhetoric, with a range of theories promoted by influential anti-Westernists as an element of post-Soviet Russia’s “new” ideology that needs to be taught to Russian youth.

The number of geopolitical textbooks that mention conspiracy theories is matched in quantity and influence by textbooks that reject such theorizing. Many authors claim that their lack of scientific method and reason positions these theories in the non-academic realm. Textbooks from both these categories can be found in libraries throughout Russia (or as illicit copies on the Internet). Both types of texts are widely used by teachers and students, with ongoing issues of plagiarism creating an ever-deeper muddle of theory mixed with fact.

The result can go both ways: in the hands of Russian students and teachers, geopolitical textbooks could seriously contribute to reinforcing conspiracy-minded worldviews or they can challenge and weaken them. Unfortunately, if the current ideological trends in Russian politics persist, we can expect that this balance will tilt, inasmuch as anti-Western conspiracy-minded textbooks will see increased “official” support (and funding) while textbooks that reject conspiracy theories will encounter obstacles on the path to publication and distribution.

---

* Nartov, 144.
Political and Social Attitudes of Russia’s Muslims:
CALIPHATE, KADYROVISM, OR KASHA?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 468
April 2017

Theodore P. Gerber*
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jane Zavisca†
University of Arizona

Russia has the largest Muslim population of any European country. Although precise numbers are lacking, estimates usually range from 16-20 million. To what extent do Russia’s Muslims represent a community with distinct political attitudes from non-Muslim Russians? We answer this question using data from a 2015 survey that included a purposeful oversample of residents in four heavily Muslim provinces in the North Caucasus and Volga regions. In doing so, we provide empirical data to address which of three competing metaphors for Russia’s Muslims’ opinions is most accurate: Caliphate, Kadyrovism, or something coarse, inchoate, and possibly lumpy, which we liken to a “bowl of kasha.” We find that Muslims do stand out from non-Muslims on a variety of political issues and that these views are better described by the logic of Kadyrovism than caliphate or kasha. At the same time, we demonstrate that the views of Russia’s Muslims vary by geographic region in important, yet potentially counter-intuitive, ways.

Three Contrasting Metaphors for the Views of Russia’s Muslims

“Caliphate.” Russia’s Muslim population are often seen as a potential source of instability, given perennial concerns about the threat of extremist movements, particularly in the North Caucasus, and the efforts of global jihadist organizations to inspire radical Islam in Russia. Some Western observers have raised alarms regarding the dangers of “Russia’s Islamic Threat” (the title of a 2007 book by Gordon Hahn), pointing to the emergence of religiously-motivated radical groups like Doku Umarov’s “Caucasus Emirate,” repeated acts of terror within Russia by affiliates of such groups, persistent violence between Russian federal troops and local extremists in the North Caucasus, the emergence of Chechens and Dagestanis as prominent actors in global jihadist organizations such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, and the June 2015 declaration by Islamic State leader

* Theodore P. Gerber is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
† Jane Zavisca is Associate Dean for Research and Associate Professor of Sociology in the College of Social and Behavioral Science at the University of Arizona.
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of a North Caucasus province as part of his caliphate. The Russian government has dramatized the threat posed by radical Islam, as it has sought to suppress extreme Islamist groups with brute force, ramping up such efforts in the years preceding the 2014 Sochi Olympics. These considerations all form a conceptual image of Russia’s Muslims as sympathetic to the ideas of radical jihad and, correspondingly, hostile to the Russian government. We call this the “caliphate” metaphor for Russian Muslim public opinion.

“Kadyrovism.” The Putin administration has taken less recognized but potentially more important measures to enlist the loyalty of Russia’s Muslims. It has worked with official Muslim clerics—often using patronage—to secure their endorsements of Russian domestic and foreign policies. Moscow has touted the consistencies between the government’s conservative social agenda and traditional Muslim values, highlighted the supposedly distinctive features of Russian Islamic traditions as potential models for the rest of the Muslim world, and built the magnificent Moscow Cathedral Mosque (the opening of which in September 2015 was presided over by President Vladimir Putin himself). These policies continue a historical practice of cooptation of Muslim elites by Russian authorities that goes back centuries. An example of the success of these efforts is the fiercely expressed loyalty to Putin, support for his policies, and social conservatism espoused by Chechnya’s leader Ramzan Kadyrov. Kadyrov’s popularity is a potential double-edge sword for the Russian government, because he also espouses local autonomy from federal control and regularly threatens (and practices) lethal violence against his and Putin’s perceived enemies. But so far, Kadyrov has rewarded Putin’s patronage with hyper-loyalty and a successful campaign to suppress violent secessionism and Islamic radicalism in Chechnya. If the Russian government’s efforts to co-opt Muslims are by-and-large successful, “Kadyrovism,” a combination of hyper-loyalty to Putin, support for his policies, insistence on local sovereignty, and social conservatism, is an appropriate designation for the main tendency of public opinion in Russia’s Muslim community.

“Kasha.” It is possible that the long history of Muslim integration into Russian society and political culture and the suppression of distinctive religious-based identities during the Soviet period may have produced a Muslim population that is indistinguishable from ethnic Russians in terms of its political and social orientations. Russian society lacks consensus on the vast majority of political and social issues facing it, and this may be the case among Russia’s Muslims as well. Adopting an expression used by Gerber and Mendelson in a 2009 article comparing the views of young men in Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia to those of young men living in other Russian regions, this perspective portrays Russian Muslim public opinion as akin to a “bowl of kasha.”
Data and Analysis

Which of these contradictory metaphors most accurately depicts the main tendency of public opinion among Russia’s Muslims? Thus far, no empirical data have been available to answer the question. Expert observers, journalists, and scholars have studied shifts in Russian government counter-extremism policies, the rise and fall of various Islamic radical groups and leaders, and trends in the levels of violence in the North Caucasus. For example, they have documented a substantial decline in political violence in the region during the last two years, which probably reflects a combination of the stepped-up crackdown by federal authorities and the departure of many radicals to join ISIL. Other research has interviewed Muslims in Dagestan and elsewhere to try to gauge the responses of Muslims to Russian government actions and the arguments of extremist leaders. But no study has provided empirical information regarding the general public opinions of Russia’s Muslims on the basis of survey data.

Here we analyze data from the Russian portion of the Comparative Housing Experiences and Social Stability (CHESS) survey, which the Levada Center carried out on our behalf in spring 2015.* Although partly focused on topics related to housing, the survey included a wide range of questions pertaining to trust in Russia’s leaders and institutions, political and social norms promoted by the Putin regime, and foreign policy issues. In addition to a nationally representative sample of 2,001 18-49 year-old respondents drawn using standard multistage techniques, the survey also included an oversample of 400 respondents in that age group from four regions with large concentrations of Muslims: two in the Volga region (Bashkortostan and Tatarstan) and two in the North Caucasus (Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria). These oversamples achieved our goal of yielding an unusually large number of Muslim respondents in our combined sample: overall, 407 of our 2,401 respondents declared themselves to be Muslims. Of these, 241 are from North Caucasus republics (including, in addition to the two oversampled republics, Karachaevo-Cherkessia), 105 live in the two Volga republics, and 61 live in other regions. This large subsample provides unprecedented statistical power for analyzing whether Russia’s Muslims exhibit distinctive public opinion.

Given the particular history of the North Caucasus region and its prominence in the formation of both the “caliphate” and “Kadyrovism” images, we expected Muslim public opinion to vary by region. Accordingly, in all our analyses we distinguish North Caucasus Muslims from Muslims residing elsewhere (though most of the latter live in the two Volga republics). In order to assess whether either or both groups of Muslims hold distinctive views, we used regression techniques to compare each group to non-Muslim Russians with respect to three sets of opinions: 1) trust in leaders and institutions, 2) attitudes toward social and political norms, and 3) views of foreign policy.

Our statistical models control for gender, age, education, and urban vs. rural residence, because these characteristics may be correlated with our three-category “Muslim” status variable and may also influence public opinions, thus potentially conflating differences due to group composition and differences due to group membership as such. For simplicity, we express all our measures of public opinions as simple dichotomous variables. To facilitate interpretation, we present our findings in terms of “average marginal effects.” That is, we report the difference that being a North Caucasus or other Muslim typically makes (relative to being a non-Muslim) in the expected probability that someone would agree (or disagree) with a particular statement, controlling for other factors.

Trust in Institutions

A battery of questions asked respondents how much they trust Putin, the police, the Duma, courts, banks, and local government, offering the following response categories: completely trust, somewhat trust, somewhat distrust, and completely distrust. We analyzed variation in the probability of completely trusting and of distrusting (either completely or somewhat) each leader or institution. The key findings indicate that Russia’s Muslims differ from non-Muslims in their trust in leaders and institutions, but in opposite ways, depending on whether they reside in the North Caucasus or elsewhere (see Table 1). North Caucasus Muslims are more likely to completely trust Putin, but also more likely to distrust institutions (primarily the police, courts, and banks). In stark contrast, other Muslims are less trusting of Putin, but also less likely to distrust all other institutions. Neither group of Muslims is either more or less likely than non-Muslims to distrust Putin.

Table 1. Differences between Muslims and Non-Muslim Russians in Trust in Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North Caucasus Muslims</th>
<th>Other Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely trust Putin</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust Putin</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust police</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust Duma</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust courts</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust banks</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust local government</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Boldfaced numbers are statistically significant, others are not. Table 1 shows average marginal effects from statistical models controlling for age, gender, education, and urban residence. The numbers represent average differences in probability relative to non-Muslim Russians when comparing individuals who are the same with respect to these other characteristics.

**Domestic Policy**

The CHESS survey asked respondents for their views on a number of key social and political issues that relate to core norms promoted by the Putin administration. Here too, we found significant differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, with many of those differences varying in direction by the region where Muslims live (see Table 2). Both groups of Muslims are somewhat more likely than non-Muslims to agree that free and fair elections are important for Russia to flourish. But this question does not get to the heart of core Putin administration norms, as the regime has itself maintained that elections are vital. On the other hand, the administration has viewed the role of political opposition and freedom of assembly with great skepticism, portraying them as tools whereby external enemies of Russia undermine its sovereignty. Muslims outside of the North Caucasus are less likely than non-Muslims to agree with the regime; instead, they are more likely to consider both a strong opposition and freedom of assembly as very important for Russia to flourish. They are also less likely to support more government control over the Internet (which the Putin administration has pursued) and more likely to say that protests are good for the country.

That is, Muslims outside of the North Caucasus are more skeptical than non-Muslims of these core norms promoted by the Putin regime. But North Caucasus Muslims are not distinguishable from non-Muslims with respect to these specific issues. North Caucasus Muslims do evince especially strong support for other staple Putin policies on which other Muslims do not differ from non-Muslims: they are much more likely to oppose foreign funding of domestic NGOs that either monitor elections or work on environmental issues, and also to express antipathy toward homosexuals. Thus, support for Putinist political and social norms is stronger among North Caucasus Muslims and weaker among other Muslims. North Caucasus Muslims are also less likely to hold xenophobic views of immigrants, which is consistent with the Putin administration’s encouragement of labor immigration. Finally, both groups of Muslims voice greater support for religious tolerance and a more positive view of relations between Muslims and ethnic Russians than do non-Muslims. These two findings offer strong evidence against the "Caliphate" image portrayed by alarmist observers. If extremist ideas were popular among either of the larger Muslim populations we would see a tendency for them to reject a neighbor with a different religion and more negatively characterize relations between Muslims and Russians.
Table 2. Differences between Muslims and non-Muslim Russians in Views on Sociopolitical Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North Caucasus Muslims</th>
<th>Other Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free and fair elections are very important for Russia to flourish</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong opposition is very important for Russia to flourish</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of assembly is very important for Russia to flourish</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want more government control over the Internet</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protests are good for the country</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose foreign funding of NGOs that monitor Russia's elections</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose foreign funding of NGOs that protect Russia's environment</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want homosexual as neighbor</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want foreign immigrant as neighbor</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want someone of another religion as neighbor</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians and Muslims get along badly in your locality/region</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Note to Table 1.

Foreign Policy

The global nature of radical Islam and tensions between Russia and the West draw particular attention to the issue of whether Russia’s Muslims are especially likely to support or oppose the Putin regime’s foreign policies. The CHESS survey asked respondents their views of the Ukraine conflict and also how they perceive the relationship of six different countries to Russia. We again find significant differences in opposite directions pertaining to North Caucasus and to other Muslims (see Table 3). Relative to non-Muslims, North Caucasus Muslims are more likely to endorse the Kremlin’s position, while other Muslims are less likely to do so. This is evident in responses to: whether Russia should materially support the separatists in Ukraine, whether the United States is the main party to blame for the Ukraine conflict, whether China and Iran are Russia’s allies, and whether Ukraine, Germany, the United States, and Georgia are Russia’s enemies (as the Russian leadership has argued, though it has expressed some ambivalence in regard to Germany).
Table 3. Differences between Muslims and non-Muslim Russians in Views of Foreign Policy Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North Caucasus Muslims</th>
<th>Other Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia should materially support separatists in Ukraine</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The US is the main party to blame for the war in Ukraine</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China is an ally or partner of Russia</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China is an enemy of Russia</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran is an ally or partner of Russia</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran is an enemy of Russia</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine is an ally or partner of Russia</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine is an enemy of Russia</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany is an ally or partner of Russia</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany is an enemy of Russia</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US is an ally or partner of Russia</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US is an enemy of Russia</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia is a partner or ally of Russia</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia is an enemy of Russia</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Note to Table 1.

Conclusions

Our empirical results show that with respect to trust in leaders and institutions, views of sociopolitical issues that are at the core of Putin’s agenda, and attitudes toward Russia’s foreign policies, the political views of Russia’s Muslims are distinct from the views of non-Muslims in Russia. Moreover, there is a clear-cut geographic division within Russia’s Muslim community:

- Muslims residing in the North Caucasus regions of Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia tend to be: more supportive of Putin but more distrustful of other government and social institutions, stronger advocates of Putinist social and political norms, and more likely to endorse the Kremlin’s recent foreign policies.

- In contrast, Muslims who reside elsewhere—most of whom are in the Volga region republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan—tend to fall on the other side of all three issue sets: they are less enthusiastic about Putin but also more trusting of other government and social institutions, more skeptical of Putinist social and political norms, and less supportive of Russian foreign policy.
Muslims in both regions exhibit higher levels of religious tolerance and voice more positive assessments of relationships between ethnic Russians and Muslims than do non-Muslim Russians, which is evidence against the validity of the alarmist “Caliphate” view.

In broader terms, the data indicate that “Kadyrovism”—hyper-support for the Kremlin, particularly its foreign policies and social conservatism, coupled with suspicion of other government institutions (which may be linked to insistence on local sovereignty)—may be a stronger force than Islamic radicalism in the North Caucasus. Muslims elsewhere in Russia are more skeptical toward official Russian government positions on some issues. If there is any tendency toward the emergence of a distinctly critical perspective within Russia’s Muslim population, it is more likely among Muslims residing outside of the North Caucasus. However, it appears to be born of more general discontent with Putin and his policies.

Overall, the differences between both Muslim sub-populations and non-Muslims are modest in magnitude. Nevertheless, they are worthy of close attention in the coming period. The data indicate the importance of monitoring differences in the public opinion dynamics within Russia’s Muslim community due to the apparent divergence in the views between North Caucasus and Volga Muslims. Failure to account for the regional differences among Muslims could easily lead researchers to mistakenly conclude that the Muslim population closely resembles the non-Muslim population, as per the “kasha” image, because most of the differences cut in opposite ways across geographic lines.

The findings suggest that policymakers should view claims of a burgeoning “Islamic threat” in Russia with suspicion. This is not to suggest that Islamic extremists do not pose a threat: even a small number of dedicated radicals can cause tremendous damage through terrorist acts. However, to exaggerate the popularity of extremist ideas in the larger population is to encourage harsh crackdowns that are likely to spur further radicalization in the long run. It also leads observers to overlook the considerable efforts of the Putin administration to secure the loyalty of Muslims, which appear to be especially effective in the North Caucasus. Few accounts of the social bases of support for the Putin regime have identified the Muslim community as a possible pillar of Putinism. The overwhelming attention to the threat of radicalization and jihad may have blinded observers to the effectiveness of the regime’s long term cooptation strategies. At the same time, the greater skepticism toward the Putin administration observable among Muslims mainly in the Volga republics points to a potential source of growing opposition within Russia not linked to Islamic radicalism.
Funding Acknowledgment

The CHESS survey was supported in part by the U.S. Army Research Laboratory and the U.S. Army Research Office via the Minerva Research Initiative program under grant number W911NF1310303. The views reported here do not represent those of the U.S. Army or the U.S. government.
Tatarstan and Chechnya, two federal republics with strong Islamic elements in their regional identities, have nimbly positioned themselves within the “Russian world,” an ideological concept that has increased in prominence since the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict. Both republics have sought to raise their visibility within the Russian Federation and promote themselves as regional success stories, but their policies differ in many respects. Tatarstan promotes itself as a region where Islam and Orthodox Christianity harmoniously coexist, while the republic’s leadership avoids overt political or ideological agendas in pursuit of federal resources for regional development. Chechnya, on the other hand, has been a republic of extremes: President Ramzan Kadyrov has fostered a resurgent fundamentalist Islam and vigorously defended his region’s autonomy, all the while playing the role of stalwart defender of the Putin regime and—paradoxically—of the “Russian world” as its ideological core.

The Russian World and Non-Russian Identities

Despite the fact that Putin himself only occasionally comments on the “Russian world,” the ideational underpinning of his third-term discourse is a combination of technocratic, civilizational, and Orthodox approaches, which can be characterized as inherently conservative. Added to this blend is a “biopolitical” component: in a speech on the first anniversary of the “reunification” of Crimea and Russia, Putin denied the territorial importance of annexation (“we have enough lands”) while emphasizing its unity to Russia by blood, a family-type relationship and a “source of Russian spirituality.”

Such a civilizational view of Russian identity, grounded in mutually reinforcing ideas of common language and culture, combined with traditional Orthodox values, poses a challenge to the non-Russian Slavic cultures within the newly constructed “Russian world.” The concept encourages integration into the dominant cultural and political framework of Russian civilization, but it also encourages Russian republics with strong

* Alexandra Yatsyk is Head of the Center for Cultural Studies of Post-Socialism and Associate Professor of Sociology at Kazan Federal University.
non-Slavic, non-Orthodox cultural identities to build their own “blood-based” connections with countries and institutions that have common identity characteristics.

**Different Republics, Different Outlooks**

As the leaders of two prominent Muslim regions in Russia, the presidents of Tatarstan and Chechnya, Rustam Minnikhanov and Ramzan Kadyrov, are often linked together in the Russian public eye. It is wrong, however, to consider the two republics as sharing a common approach to the “Russian world.”

Tatarstan’s approach is embodied in its strategy of “Euro-Islam,” a concept fully articulated by local historian Rafael Khakimov. Euro-Islam is characterized by a harmony with secular policies, including promoting education and a liberal economy. It also emphasizes Tatarstan’s exceptionalism, both in its interpretation of Islam and in the building of a special type of relationship with Moscow. Local advocates of Euro-Islam link the religious underpinnings of Tatar identity to European civilization and values, detaching “Tatar Islam” from the practices of the North Caucasus, a region historically more isolated from non-Muslim peoples.

In Chechnya, a stricter version of Islam dominates. Kadyrov wears Islamic beads and cap, and he favors *sharia* laws (and polygamy) even when they contradict Russian legislation. He keeps in close contact with the Saudi elite, sharing experiences in the security realm and acting as an intermediary between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Kadyrov is also known for his explicit anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-LGBT utterances that are almost identical to those made by Russian conservatives. This may make his vehement rhetorical support for the “Russian world” appear less paradoxical.

Shifting from rhetoric to practice, Tatarstan uses its identity resources and good relations with the federal government to its advantage. The Euro-Islam branding has had the practical benefit of putting Tatarstan on the national—and international—map. The “northern capital of the Islamic world” has hosted the KAZANSUMMIT, an international summit of Islamic business and finances, and the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group. In the meantime, Tatarstan has also hosted a series of international sporting mega-events, including the 2013 Universiade, 2015 FINA World Swimming Cup, and 2018 FIFA World Cup matches, for which funds from Moscow were secured for modernizing regional communication infrastructure and tourist facilities.

Chechnya, on the other hand, may be verbally loyal to the Kremlin but has allowed the center less and less interference into what Kadyrov deems Chechnya’s “local affairs.” The more Kadyrov says about his loyalty to Putin and his conservative agenda, the more autonomy he requires from Moscow. Arguably, Kadyrov both supports Russia’s sovereignty on the global stage while de facto strengthening Chechnya’s own autonomy. He helps Putin promote a conservative agenda while remaining a potential scapegoat that...
could at any time be accused of deviating from Russia’s dominant normative standards.

The “Intermediary” and the “Foot-Soldier”

The first president of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev, promoted his region for years as a multicultural, peaceful meeting point of Islam and Orthodoxy. Moscow (re)assigned the function of potential cultural intermediary to Shaimiev’s successor, Rustam Minnikhanov, in 2014, when it faced the challenge of convincing Crimean Tatars to peacefully accept the annexation of Crimea. In this case, Tatarstan’s role as a cultural intermediary was assigned to it by the Kremlin, and the only advantage that authorities in Kazan could hope to get from it is raising their profile and importance as a useful region in the eyes of Moscow.

As a result of Minnikhanov’s shuttle diplomacy, the World Congress of Tatars based in Kazan and the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People signed a four-year cooperation agreement—so far largely remaining on paper—soon after Crimea’s annexation. Two elements were crucial in constructing this nexus: an emphasis on brotherly (blood-based) bonds between the two groups of Tatars in spite of their territorial distance, and the positive experience of Tatarstan’s development as part of Russia, with all the ensuing pragmatic benefits.

Of course, elements of this relationship were contextual and politically motivated. The Kazan Tatars are culturally and socially dissimilar from their Crimean co-ethnics. The latter, according to Ildar Safargaleev, advisor to the Spiritual Board of Muslims in Moscow, are closer in mindset to Chechens, due to their common traumatic experience of deportation. Yet it was not the head of Chechnya who the Kremlin tasked with building bridges to the Crimean Tatars. The Kremlin wanted a consensual—and non-political—dialogue. Kadyrov, with his self-assigned role as militant “defender of Russian borders” and “personal foot-soldier of Putin” was obviously an inappropriate ambassador.

Yet Kadyrov used the crisis in Russia’s relations with Ukraine in his own way, taking advantage of Putin’s appeal for patriotism and the vulnerabilities of key elements of Russia’s policies toward Ukraine. Kadyrov’s “patriotic” narrative was grounded on a tacit request by Putin for support and even protection. Kadyrov’s loyalists formed paramilitary brigades of professionally trained soldiers, dramatically raising his profile as the only head of a Russian region allowed by Moscow to command a de facto army. In May 2014, Kadyrov was also personally involved in releasing a captive Russian journalist in Ukraine. In his Instagram account, Kadyrov demonstrated his attachment to and sympathies with the fighters in eastern Ukraine. Kadyrov used the war as a political tool, exchanging Chechen allegiance and fidelity for more benefits (greater autonomy) from Moscow. A telling illustration of Kadyrov’s political weight was his announcement permitting Chechen police to open fire on Russian federal security personnel unless they coordinated their operations in Chechnya with him.
Conclusion

Despite the apparent similarity of two Muslim regions that overtly demonstrate loyalty to the Kremlin, their strategies toward the “Russian world” are different. Via “Euro-Islam,” Tatarstan emphasizes its ability to function as a mediator and bridge between Islam and Orthodoxy, while pursuing integration in Russia (and globally) through economics rather than politics, developing projects in energy, transportation, sports, and finance. Chechnya, on the other hand, tilts toward various demonstrations of “personal” fidelity of a “foot-soldier” to his sovereign, less for funding than to receive political carte blanche locally.

The “Islamic world,” like the “Russian world,” is a space of and for peoples, and thus is irreducible to specific states. The political ingredient of the Islamic world, for both Tatarstan and Chechnya, consists in harmonizing Russian citizenship with belongingness to the global Islamic community. It is likely that this strategy, even in its different incarnations, will define the content and the contours of the Tatarstani and Chechen identity-making in the future.