Theodore P. Gerber

Beyond Putin? Nationalism and Xenophobia in Russian Public Opinion

The role of nationalism within the Russian public is an under-examined but potentially important aspect of the crisis surrounding Russia's annexation of Crimea and its continuing involvement in eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. As commentators have sought to comprehend President Vladimir Putin's motives, many have asserted or assumed that such actions enjoy tremendous Russian public support. Indeed, public opinion polls from Russia indicate that Putin's popularity soared in the wake of the Crimean annexation and that large majorities have supported the government's policies in Ukraine, sympathizing with the Kremlin's negative portrayals of U.S. motives and actions.[1] However, it is not clear whether this wave of public support is a fleeting "rally around the flag" phenomenon or the result of an organic, deeper tendency toward nationalism and xenophobia in the Russian public.

Both interpretations have their advocates, and the answer has important implications for U.S. policy toward Russia.[2] If much of the support for the regime's aggressive actions represents temporary fervor mobilized by an all-out propaganda campaign, then in the medium- to longer-term, at least some parts of the Russian public might harbor more critical attitudes toward Putin and his policies, as well as more sympathetic attitudes toward positions associated with United States and its allies. In that case, multipronged policies geared toward the patient cultivation of more positive images and narratives about the actions

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The Washington Quarterly • 37:3 pp. 113–134
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2014.978439

and motives of the United States and progressive, liberal alternatives to Putin within Russia might eventually prove fruitful. However, if support for Putin's Ukraine policies is instead symptomatic of a deeper tendency toward nationalism and xenophobia within Russian society, then the prospects are slim for challenging Putin's narrative about Western aggression and encouraging divisions that may ultimately help undermine Putin's legitimacy among his people; and policies must be crafted accordingly.

This article maps the contours of nationalist and xenophobic views within Russian public opinion based on surveys conducted during Russia's contested 2011–2012 election season. Although it may seem odd to examine data over two years old in order to gain insight into current public opinion, several reasons justify this approach. First, the extreme rhetoric and imagery that the Kremlin has used to whip up nationalist fervor make it unlikely that current surveys provide reliable data about the public's views. Second, because the question needing resolution is precisely whether the apparent wave of nationalist sentiment favoring Putin and his policies is a fleeting or a more deeply rooted phenomenon, it makes more sense to go back a bit in time to look for antecedents to the current mood, rather than take a snapshot of people's (perhaps ephemeral) views today.

The 2011–2012 election season is an ideal moment for assessing Russian public sentiments.

Finally, one must bear in mind that the 2011–2012 election season was a turning point in Russian political life: the outrage of many Russians over fraud during the December 2011 parliamentary ("Duma") elections provoked the largest political protest movement the country had seen since Putin first came to power at the end of 1999. Nationalist themes played a prominent role in Putin's presidential campaign and they formed a rhetorical backdrop for the ensuing backlash and crackdown on the protests after his March 2012 election. A similar set of issues was paramount in public discussions at the time, but without the overbearing propaganda campaign and the expansion of military actions, making the 2011–2012 election season an ideal moment for assessing the underlying structure of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments in the Russian public.

The survey reveals that nationalism and xenophobia are multidimensional ideational constructs, whose disparate components do not fit into a unified, coherent worldview.[3] No single predominant view characterizes Russian public opinion, which remains divided and uncertain about nationalist and xenophobic ideas, belying the image of a society united behind aggressive nationalist rhetoric and universal suspicion of outsiders. To be sure, various

aspects of nationalism and xenophobia have their supporters, but the diverse elements conventionally lumped together under these terms have different (and, in all cases, relatively weak) social bases. Moreover, they exhibit varying and inconsistent patterns of association with support for the ruling institutions and leaders or with attitudes regarding the United States and a host of domestic issues. The complexity of the empirical picture emerging from the data should provide grounds for skepticism that the apparent surge of support for Putin's aggressive policies in Ukraine flows from a wellspring of nationalist and/or xenophobic views in Russian society.

Russian Nationalism: from Above, Below, or Both?

Since the onset of the Putin era, Russian nationalism has seemed to play a prominent role in Russian politics.[4] Putin himself has invoked a range of nationalist images, themes, and tropes over the years in his efforts to define his goals, justify his policies, and maintain public support. Examples include the threat purportedly posed to Russia by foreign (mainly "Western") powers, the distinctive culture and norms of the Russian people (be they Orthodox faith, collectivism, or "traditional" family values), the historical greatness and achievements of Russians (particularly in defeating the Nazis in World War II), and the importance of a strong, centralized state in protecting Russians (both those within Russia and those living abroad, as in Crimea). Of course, the Russian government rationalized its recent incursion into Crimea as an effort to protect ethnic Russians residing there, an overtly nationalist argument.

In fact, nationalism is a common thread running through the two most significant stories coming out of Russia in the six months prior to the Ukraine crisis. The Biryulevo riots of October 2013, where mobs of ethnic Russians rampaged against immigrants in a Moscow neighborhood, were, in the eyes of many observers, an alarming sign of surging xenophobia within the Russian population.[5] Similarly, the Sochi Olympics featured strong nationalist themes glorifying Russian history and cultural achievements in the opening and closing ceremonies, which the Kremlin clearly used to signal the return of Russia as an economic and geopolitical force.

Is "Russian nationalism" a cohesive, coherent, and unified set of beliefs, or is it better understood as an amalgam of disparate elements that connect loosely, if at all? Are some demographic or socioeconomic groups more nationalist than others? Finally, what relationship do nationalist beliefs have with other social and political orientations, such as views toward immigrants; support for Putin and the ruling party; and attitudes about the United States, the general state of the country, and the opposition protest movement?

There is a rich literature examining the contours of Russian nationalist thought, past and present, based on the writings of nationalist thinkers and leaders' statements.[6] However, this type of analysis cannot tell us how these narratives are perceived and shared by the larger public. Survey data are a promising tool for both understanding how the broader Russian populace views these ideas and assessing their role in public opinion on key issues of the day. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for surveys to capture the full complexity of attitudes. But they do offer the potential to map out a coarse yet empirically based outline of public opinion on these issues, identifying the social characteristics and political perspectives related to different stances.

The Survey

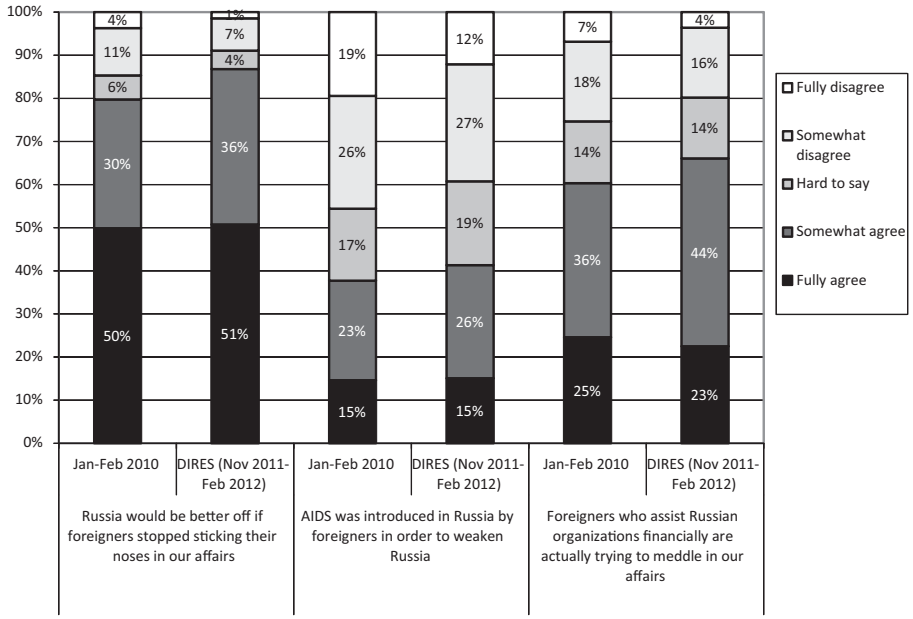
Data are from Democracy International Russian election surveys (DIRES), which were commissioned by Democracy International, a Washington-based consulting firm, and implemented by the Levada Analytic Center, the leading academic survey research firm Russia. There were four waves of data collection, all using a standard multi-stage cluster sampling approach to produce probability samples of respondents aged 18 and over: 1,202 respondents were surveyed prior to the Duma election (November 17–30, 2011); another 1,201 were interviewed afterwards (December 9–22); 1,401 respondents were surveyed prior to the presidential election (February 17–29, 2012); and 1,401 following the election (March 16–April 2).[7] Given the focus here on attitudes toward Russian nationalist ideas and xenophobia toward ethnic and religious minorities, I limit most analyses to respondents who described themselves as ethnic Russians, which reduces the maximum sample size from 5,025 to 4,482.

Nationalism

The survey included a battery of six questions intended to capture different aspects of nationalism, which cluster together into two groups of three related questions. The first group (seen in Figure 1) asks about foreign influence in Russia, using the following statements as prompts: Russia would be better off if foreigners stopped sticking their noses in Russian affairs; AIDS was introduced in Russia by foreigners in order to weaken Russia; and foreigners who assist Russian organizations financially are actually trying to meddle in Russian affairs.

The second group of questions (Figure 2) measured views of Russian distinctiveness using these three assertions: young people in Russia basically want the same things as young people in Western Europe; Russia should strive to become a European country rather than pursue its own path; and Russia should apologize for the Soviet occupation of the Baltics from 1940–1991. To track change over time, I compare these DIRES responses to the same questions in a

Figure 1. Views of foreign threat, 2010 vs. 2011/2012 (Results are reported for respondents 20–59. Change over time statistically significant)

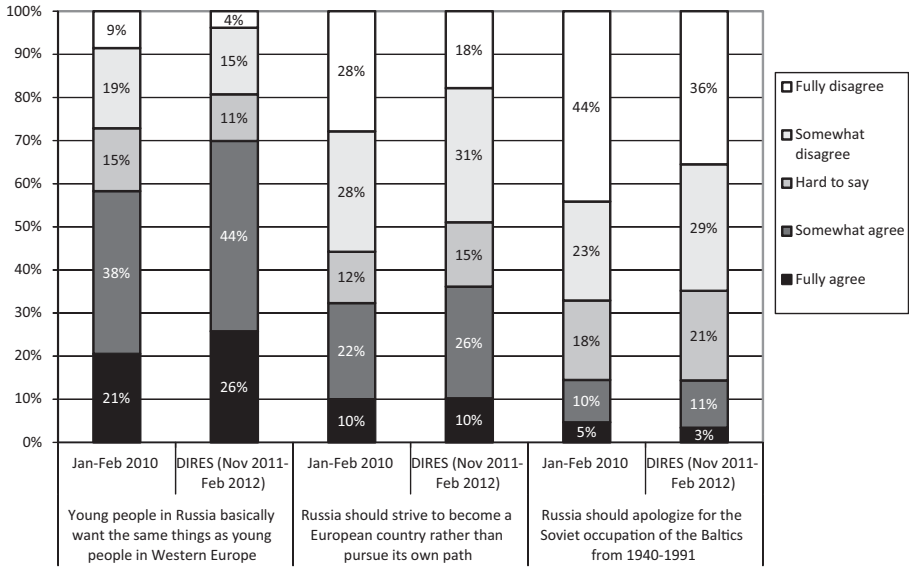


survey given to 20–59-year-olds in early 2010. Both surveys exhibit substantial variation in the extent to which ethnic Russians embrace nationalist ideas.

As seen in Figure 1, responses to three measures of attitudes toward foreign influence suggest that suspicions of foreign machinations do run relatively deep and wide in Russian public opinion: in the DIRES data, 87 percent agree (strongly or somewhat strongly) that "Russia would be better off if foreigners stopped sticking their noses in our affairs," about two-thirds concur that foreigners who assist Russian NGOs "are actually trying to meddle in our affairs," and 41 percent agree that "AIDS was introduced in Russia by foreigners in order to weaken Russia." But for the latter two questions, the strength of agreement is uneven and tends toward softer agreement, while sizable minorities disagree or find it hard to say. Comparing the DIRES results to the 2010 survey results, we see a slight movement toward more agreement with each of these statements; but although these shifts are statistically significant,[8] they are modest in magnitude.

The picture is more mixed in regard to the three questions about Russia's place in the world (Figure 2). About seven in ten DIRES respondents in the appropriate age range agree that Russian youth basically want the same things as young people in Western Europe, an idea counter to the "Eurasianist" view that Russia represents a distinct people with its own norms and values. Moreover,

Figure 2. Views of Russia's distinctiveness, 2010 vs. 2011/2012 (Results are reported for respondents 20–59. Change over time statistically significant)



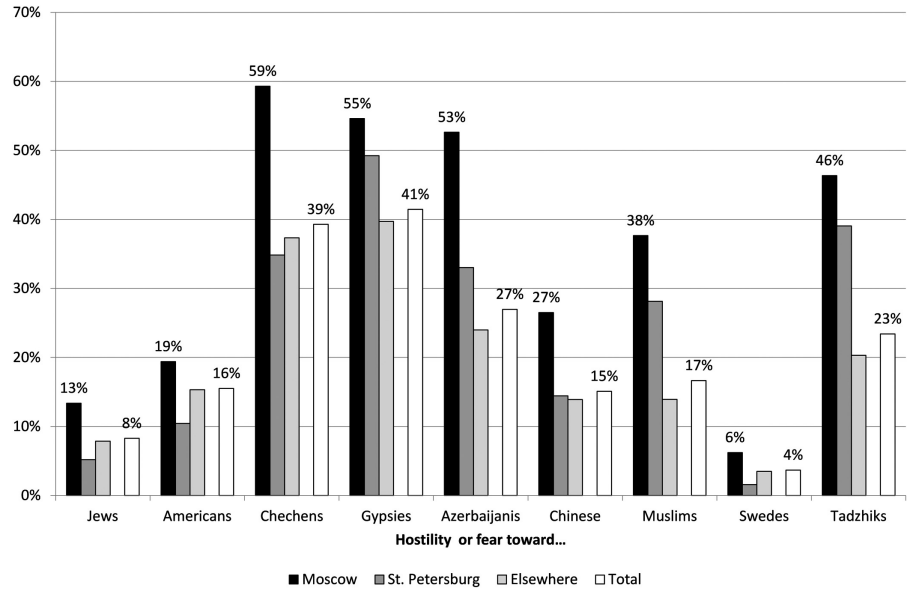
there is a pronounced trend toward more agreement that Russian youth want the same as things as their West European counterparts. Yet, half disagree that Russia should strive to become a European country rather than pursue its own path, with only about one-third agreeing; this implies that Russians are more likely to envision their country as pursuing a distinct path. Furthermore, about two-thirds reject the notion that Russia's government should apologize for the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states.

There is little consensus in how Russians view ethnic and religious minorities.

Xenophobia

The DIRES questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their main sentiment toward nine different minority groups, giving them five options: hostility, fear, neutrality (same as any other group), respect, and admiration. For brevity, I combine hostility and fear into a single "negative" category and I ignore the distinctions between neutrality and the two positive feelings. The data indicate that there is little consensus in how Russians view ethnic and religious minorities.

Figure 3. Percent expressing hostility or fear toward specific ethnic groups, by locality (Weighted DIRES data, ethnic Russians)



Overall, personalized xenophobia toward individual representatives of different minority groups is quite common among ethnic Russians (Figure 3). Although no group is viewed by a majority of the overall Russian population (see the "Total" bars) in such terms, one-quarter to two-fifths of the ethnic Russian population views several minorities inimically. Chechens and Gypsies are most likely to elicit such views (about 40 percent), with Tadzhiks and Azerbaijanis not far behind (roughly 25 percent). Chinese, Muslims, and Americans represent the next tier (approximately 15 percent negative). Jews and Swedes elicit hostility and fear from only 4–8 percent of ethnic Russians.

It is striking how Muscovites consistently stand out as more hostile toward all nine groups compared to residents of other parts of Russia. This is not likely due to Moscow's size alone, as St. Petersburg exhibits an inconsistent pattern of distinction from the rest of Russia. It could reflect a greater concentration of ethnic minorities in Moscow than elsewhere, though the large literature on the sources of xenophobia suggests familiarity with minorities may breed tolerance rather than contempt.[9] In any case, the evident tendency of Muscovites to take a harsher view toward all minority groups contradicts Moscow's reputation as a distinctively "progressive" Russian city, and it challenges the "modernization theory" perspective linking urbanization to greater tolerance and social liberalism.

Deeper Analysis

Survey data can reveal systematic patterns regarding which groups of Russians are more likely to ascribe to nationalism and xenophobia, especially when used with specific statistical tests to indicate how different independent variables relate to these attitudes. We have at hand fifteen distinct questions capturing different but related aspects of nationalist and xenophobic views. In order to produce a more manageable set of measures for further analysis, we first combine these variables into four scales that represent discrete underlying orientations. Scales have the advantage of incorporating information from answers to multiple questions, any of which may be idiosyncratic, in order to obtain a more reliable indicator of the common underlying concept that the questions all relate to. I chose which items to include in each scale based on both substantive and statistical considerations.[10]

The first two scales consist of the mean scores on the variables presented in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. The Figure 1 items all pertain to threats posed to Russia by foreign powers, a typical theme in Russian nationalist thought for centuries. The Figure 2 questions relate to a sense of Russia's distinctiveness vis-à-vis Europe.[11] Because both scales take on values from 1 to 5, with 3 representing a neutral response, the sample means imply Russians agree more strongly that Russia is threatened by foreigners than with the idea that Russia has a distinct identity (Table 1).

The full distributions of the two nationalism scales (Figure 4) paint a broader picture of the state of opinion regarding these two key nationalist ideas. Views on Russia's distinctiveness are almost normally distributed, which contradicts the idea that the society is polarized into opposing camps (e.g. of Westernizers vs. Slavophiles). Views on whether foreigners threaten Russia also exhibit a nearly normal distribution, but there is a distinctly high concentration of very strong adherents to this notion—the 9 percent who take the strongest nationalist position on all three of the questions and who score 5 on the scale. However, aside from this hard core, the distributions reveal that nationalist views in Russia are far from universally held, extreme views are less typical than moderate views, and that even where there is a concentration of radical nationalists (in regard to foreign threats), not quite one in ten are found in that camp.

The other two scales measure anti-western and anti-southern xenophobia by simply counting the number of constituent groups in each set that the respondent views mainly with hostility or fear.[12] On average, ethnic Russians in the survey sample hold negative views toward 1.5 (rounding up from 1.48) of the five southern groups and .3 (rounding up from .27) of the three western groups (Table 1). Forty-six percent express no hostility or fear toward any of the southern groups, while 8 percent have negative views of all five of them. In

Table I: Scales Measuring Xenophobia and Nationalism (DIRES data, ethnic Russian respondents)

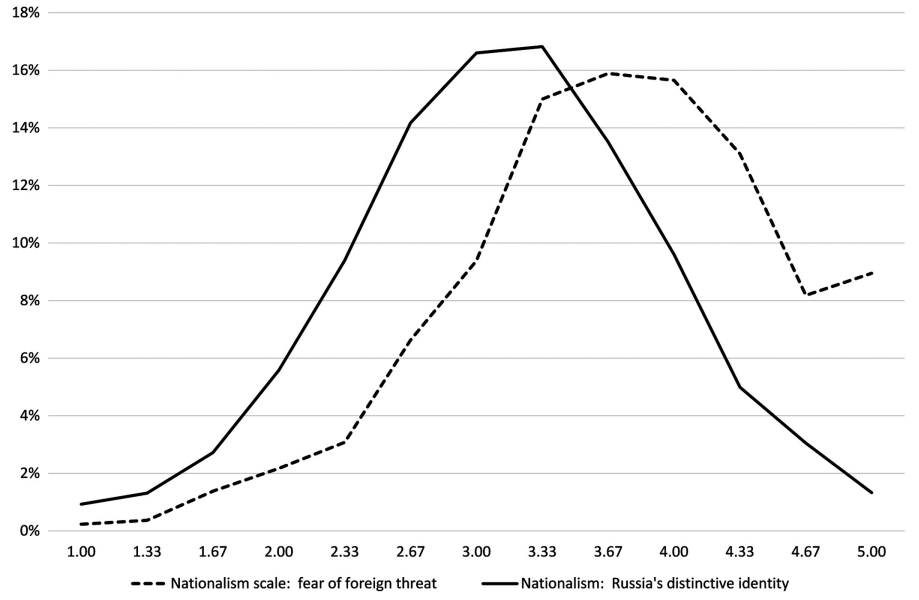
Scale Composition and Descriptive Statistics

Scale	*Description*	*Range*	*Mean*	*SD*
Nationalism: Foreign threat	Mean on first three variables in Figure 1, integer coded.	1 to 5	3.71	.80
Nationalism: Distinct Identity	Mean on second three variables in Figure 2, reverse coded so higher values indicate more support for Russia's distinctiveness.	1 to 5	3.14	.78
Anti-Western Groups	Number of the following groups viewed with hostility or fear (Figure 3): Americans, Jews, Swedes	0 to 3	.27	.62
Anti-Southern Groups	Number of the following groups viewed with hostility or fear (Figure 3): Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Gypsies, Muslims, Tadzhiks	0 to 5	1.48	1.70

Correlations

	Nationalism: fear	Nationalism: Identity	Anti-Western Groups	Anti-Southern Groups
Nationalism: Fear	1.00			
Nationalism: Identity	0.03	1.00		
Anti-Western Groups	0.13	0.06	1.00	
Anti-Southern Groups	0.09	−0.02	0.49	1.00

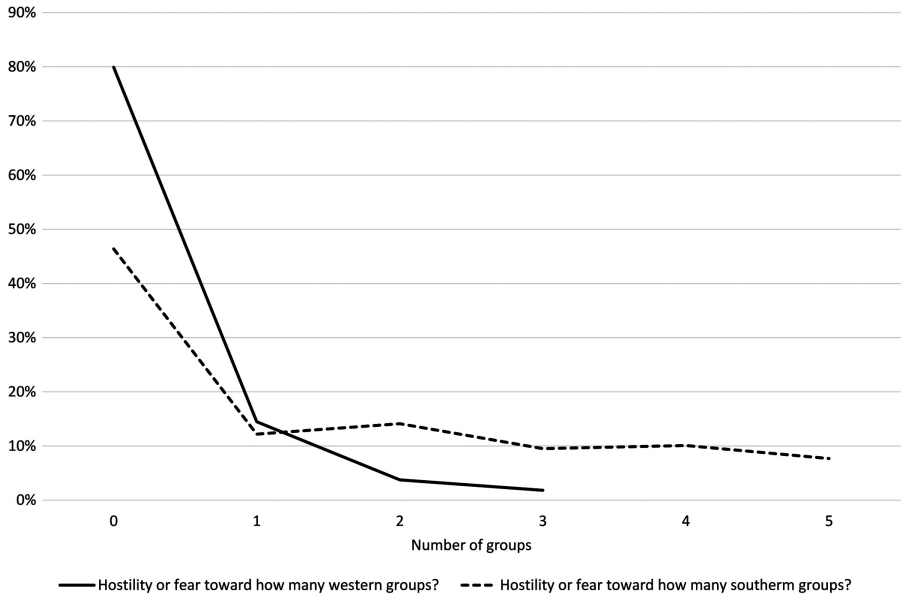
Figure 4. Sample Distributions, Foreign Threat and Distinct Identity Scales (DIRES data, ethnic Russian respondents)



contrast, 80 percent have no animosity toward any western groups, and only 2 percent view all three in negative terms. Clearly, anti-southern xenophobia is more widespread than anti-western xenophobia, which is evident from the distributions of the two scales (Figure 5). But even anti-southern xenophobia is far from a consensus view.

The correlations between the four scales indicate how closely the four aspects of nationalism and xenophobia are related. Apart from the high positive correlation between the two xenophobia measures, the correlations are very weak (see Table 1 above): xenophobia, perceived foreign threats, and belief in Russia's distinct identity represent three separate dimensions of nationalism in public opinion, loosely coupled at best. In other words, the ethnic Russians who dislike southern minorities are neither more nor less likely to fear foreign threats, and vice versa. Just as the most careful discursive analyses of different strains of Russian nationalist thought make sure to tease out its different components, analyses of the role of nationalism in public opinion must attend to its distinct dimensions and avoid lumping together xenophobia, perceived foreign threats, and the notion of Russia's distinctiveness under a unitary rubric.

Figure 5. Sample Distributions, Xenophobia toward Western and Southern Groups (DIRES data, ethnic Russian respondents)



Nationalism, Xenophobia, and Other Associated Characteristics

There are at least three separate dimensions of nationalism in public opinion, loosely coupled at best.

As the above data show, Russians have varying views about minorities and about two central nationalist themes. Is that variation systematically related to demographic and socioeconomic traits? If key groups of elites are especially prone to harbor xenophobic or nationalist orientations, their potential political impact might be enhanced. Alternatively, if those at the bottom of the social structure are more inclined toward such views, then xenophobic and nationalist themes could be used to mobilize mass actions including violence.

To see whether and how several factors such as age, education, gender, locality, time (due, for example, to the elections and ensuing protests), income, Orthodox affiliation, and place of birth affect xenophobic and nationalist views among ethnic Russians, I use a statistical procedure called multiple regression, which yields precise numerical estimates (coefficients) that measure how independent variables relate to a dependent variable while simultaneously controlling for all the independent variables in the analysis. The results are shown in Table 2.[13]

Table 2: Regression results: measures of xenophobic and nationalist views

	Nationalism: Foreign threat		*Nationalism:Distinct Identity*		*Hostility/fear toward Western groups*		*Hostility/fear toward Southern groups*	
	B	rse	B	rse	B	rse	B	rse
Age (40 to 49)								
Under 30	−.141 **	.042	−.158 **	.043	−.083	.106	.142 **	.052
30 to 39	−.045	.041	−.045	.040	−.086	.114	.003	.056
50 to 59	.114 **	.040	.113 **	.042	−.120	.117	−.099 *	.055
Over 59	.185 **	.038	.117 **	.043	−.092	.107	−.140 **	.057
Education (secondary diploma)								
University	−.083 **	.028	.118 **	.029	.061	.081	−.095 **	.039
Vocational/less	.053	.035	.038	.033	.147	.097	.096 *	.051
Locality (small/medium cities)								
Moscow	−.008	.073	−.175 **	.066	.285 *	.148	.604 **	.069
St. Petersburg	−.203	.164	−.057	.132	−.529	.361	.228	.173
Other large city	.249 **	.067	−.063	.080	.009	.165	.055	.116
Rural village	.105 **	.050	−.021	.050	−.217 *	.119	−.160 **	.072
Woman	−.102 **	.023	−.058 **	.024	−.320 **	.069	.014	.035
Survey (pre-Duma)								
Post-Duma	−.060	.041	.064 *	.033	.140	.105	−.065	.054
Pre-Presidential	−.100 *	.051	.107 **	.047	.198 *	.118	−.089	.062
Post-Presidential	.013	.050	.088 *	.047	.125	.124	−.041	.063
Income quintile (second thru fourth)								
Lowest	.100 **	.039	.000	.048	.174	.115	.031	.067
Highest	−.166 **	.045	−.116 **	.049	−.088	.122	.056	.056
Missing	−.097 **	.046	.008	.037	−.084	.108	−.082	.061
Orthodox	.026	.033	−.032	.033	.196 **	.095	.031	.047
Foreign born	.150 **	.073	.049	.069	.155	.181	−.021	.102
Constant	3.746 **	.057	3.140 **	.056	−1.394 **	.151	.362 **	.076
Specification	Robust OLS		Robust OLS		Negative binomial		Negative binomial	

Note: DIRES data, non-ethnic Russians excluded from analysis sample. Valid N = 4482.

*p < .05, one-tailed

**p < .05, two-tailed

In both types of analyses, a positive coefficient (denoted as "B" in the table, per convention) indicates a positive association between the variables—as the characteristic corresponding to the coefficient (such as age or level of education) increases, the measure of nationalism or hostility tends to increase, holding all the other variables in the equation constant. A negative B means the opposite: an increase in the corresponding independent variable is generally linked to a decrease in the dependent variable. But coefficients not marked with asterisks are too small relative to their standard errors (abbreviated as "rse" in the table, a measure of the inherent variability of the coefficient estimates across randomly drawn samples) to give us confidence that there truly is a relationship between the variables in the population. Asterisks denote a statistically significant (*) or highly statistically significant (**) relationship.

The above results are complex, but reveal interesting trends. For instance, the four aspects of nationalism and xenophobia exhibit quite different and even opposite patterns of association with background variables. Older Russians are more likely to fear foreign threats and believe in Russia's distinctiveness, but less likely to hold xenophobic views toward southern groups, and are neither more nor less likely to view western groups in hostile terms. University education is linked to lower anti-south xenophobia and more skepticism about foreign threats, but also a stronger sense of Russia's distinctiveness.

The most consistent effect pertains to gender: women score lower on the two nationalism scales and on xenophobia toward western groups. Even controlling statistically for the other variables (a feature of regression models), Moscow residents are substantially more xenophobic. But they are also less likely to see Russia as distinct from Europe. Income may play a role in mitigating nationalist views: Russians in the top income quintile adhere less to both nationalist concepts, while those in the lowest income quintile are more prone to harbor fear of foreign threats. Surprisingly, Orthodox faith is only associated with one of the four measures of nationalism, with Orthodox believers more likely to express hostility or fear toward members of western groups. Overall, there is no clear pattern common to all four scales. With this degree of complexity, it is impossible to characterize any particular demographic group as especially prone to "nationalism."

Nationalism, Xenophobia, and Other Political Views

We gain a sense of the broader political relevance of the four elements of Russian nationalism and xenophobia with other political views and behavior (such as voting) by examining whether and how they are associated with 24 different outcome variables related to politics in 4 different categories. These associations are also assessed using regressions, which statistically control for

It is impossible to characterize any particular demographic group as especially prone to nationalism.

variables that could jointly affect nationalist views and the outcome variables and thereby produce spurious relationships unless they are controlled for.[14] With respect to politics, too, the different components of Russian nationalist thought correspond to varying, even at times inconsistent positions.

The first panel in Table 3 shows their associations with different measures of views toward immigrants and ethnic minorities, including two popular slogans, two measures of attitudes toward immigrants, and two statements pertaining to "Kavkaztsy," ethnic minorities from the north and south Caucasus region (including those from areas that are part of the Russian federation such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan). As we might certainly expect, anti-immigrant sentiment is consistently associated with anti-south xenophobia, somewhat less consistently with anti-west xenophobia. The perception of foreign threats to Russia also exhibits consistent positive associations with various measures of anti-immigrant views, while belief in Russia's distinctiveness has either negative or non-statistically significant associations (which are denoted by "0s" in the tables) with hostility toward immigrants.

Nationalist views do not drive support for the ruling party (United Russia), particularly not in distinction to the other parties that contested the election (and the extremist National Bolshevik Party, which was banned). Xenophobia toward both southern and western groups is linked to lower support for nearly all the parties. In contrast, nationalist views—particularly perceived foreign menace—tend to be positively linked to support for most of them. The component of Russian nationalism that is consistently and positively related to support for Putin and the ruling party is fear of foreign threats, not xenophobia nor belief in Russia's distinctiveness. Thus, xenophobia is not driving Russians toward more support for the Putin regime; instead, it is fear of the encroachments of foreign powers on Russia's interest that plays this role. Belief in Russia's distinctive identity is positively associated with support for "nationalist" parties in the abstract, but this should be discounted because it is unrelated to actual choices at the ballot box.[15]

Notably, all four dimensions of Russian nationalism are positively related to seeing the United States as an enemy or rival. This makes intuitive sense, except for the effects of anti-south xenophobia (which bears no logical connection to the United States, especially once the other variables are controlled). Russians who dislike Westerners at the personal level are less likely to advocate cooperating with the United States on "easy" issues like scientific exchanges and trade, while both perceptions of foreign threat and

Table 3: Associations of nationalist and xenphobic views with other political attitudes and behaviors among ethnic Russians

Immigrants and minorities in Russia:	Agree: "Russia for Russians"	Agree: "Stop feeding Caucasus"	Should evict immigrants	Scale: support ban of immigrants	Protect Kavkaztsy from violence*	Send Kavkaztsy back to Kavkaz*
Nationalism: threat	+	+	+	+	0	+
Nationalism: identity	–	0	0	0	–	0
Anti-West xenophobia	+	0	+	+	0	0
Anti-South xenophobia	+	+	+	+	–	+
Support for political parties and organizations:	United Russia	KPRF	LDPR	Yabloko	Right Forces	National Bolshevik Party
Nationalism: threat	+	+	+	0	+	+
Nationalism: identity	0	+	+	0	0	0
Anti-West xenophobia	–	0	–	–	–	–
Anti-South xenophobia	–	–	0	–	–	–
The United States and Putin:	US is enemy or rival	Scale: work with US, easy issues	Scale: work with US, hard issues	Confidence in Putin	Voted for Putin, 2012	Soviet collapse = catastrophe
Nationalism: threat	+	0	–	+	+	+
Nationalism: identity	+	0	–	0	0	+
Anti-West xenophobia	+	–	0	–	0	0
Anti-South xenophobia	+	0	0	–	0	0
Domestic issues:	Russia on the right course	Russia on the wrong course	Strong support for civil rights	Dissatisfied with Duma elections	Sympathise with protestors	Scale: support for protests
Nationalism: threat	0	+	–	–	–	–
Nationalism: identity	0	+	–	0	0	–
Anti-West xenophobia	–	+	0	+	+	0
Anti-South xenophobia	0	0	–	+	+	0

Age, education, gender, locality, income, survey wave, Orthodox faith, and foreign birthplace are controlled using regression techniques. Sample sizes vary.

+ statistically significant positive association; 0 no statistically significant association; – significant negative association

*"Kavkaztsy" are peoples from the the Caucasus regions (Kavkaz).

The nationalist component consistently related to support for Putin is fear of foreign threats.

belief in Russia's distinctive identity are linked to lower support for cooperation on "hard" issues like missile defense and Iran's nuclear program. Also, xenophobes are less supportive of Putin: it is not they but those who see foreign powers threatening Russia who are more likely to trust him. Anti-south xenophobia apparently has no relationship to broader perceptions about the country's direction, while anti-west xenophobia and the two forms of nationalist attitudes worsen perceptions of the path Russia is on.

Finally, fear of foreign threats and, somewhat less consistently, belief in Russia's distinctive identity are associated with positive views of the Soviet Union, greater concerns about the country's direction, and less support for civil rights and the protests. Ethnic Russians who dislike southern-origin minorities are less supportive of civil rights, but they are more critical of the Duma elections and more supportive of the ensuing protests, a reminder of the prominent role of "nationalist" groups (in fact, "xenophobic" would describe them better) in the demonstrations.

With some simplification, fear of the menace that foreign powers pose to Russia is the aspect of Russian nationalism that is consistently linked to support for the Putin regime, its policies, and messages. Xenophobia toward southern groups plays a quite different role in Russian politics, as it is more likely to be linked to critical or oppositional stances. The role of anti-west xenophobia is muted, and tends to be consistent with that of anti-south xenophobia, while the influence of belief in Russia's distinctive identity tends to track, if much more weakly, with that of perceptions of foreign threat—with an important exception pertaining to attitudes toward immigrants.

It is important to distinguish the different elements of Russian nationalism.

Implications for the United States

This analysis illustrates the importance of distinguishing different elements of "Russian nationalism" that journalistic and scholarly commentary on contemporary Russian politics often lump together. Russian nationalism is far from a unified, coherent worldview within the Russian public. Instead, it consists of discrete, highly variegated themes that are weakly associated with one another and manifest different, even opposite relationships to other political views and voting behavior.

When assessing the extent to which considerations about public support for "nationalist" ideas drive or constrain the decisions of Russia's leaders, it is important to specify which particular nationalist ideas have which specific effects rather than mix the diverse strains of nationalism under a single rubric. Rigorous empirical analyses cast doubt on whether any of the four strains identified in the DIRES data have consistent associations with views about Russian government institutions or policies. If anything, the quantitative analysis presented here simplifies the complex structure of nationalist ideas within Russian public opinion: a more extensive battery of questions would, most likely, reveal still more variants, with differing demographic, socioeconomic, and political correlates. The fact that even the relatively crude measures in the DIRES data reveal such disparate ideational components suggests that Russian nationalism is not a unified and coherent ideology with straightforward implications for political preferences.

Russian nationalism is not a unified and coherent ideology.

These findings have three implications for U.S. policymakers. First, the DIRES data clearly indicate that support for Putin's recent Ukraine policies is a fervent but likely ephemeral rally-around-the-flag response, not a deeper tendency in Russian public opinion. The nationalist and xenophobic attitudes purported to be beneath the recent surge in Putin's popularity are far from universally held, and they correlate inconsistently with attitudes on political issues. The DIRES data provide no evidence of a core nationalist or xenophobic consensus within Russian society that can be, and has been, used to justify the annexation of Crimea and other expansionist policies in Ukraine and elsewhere. To be sure, adherents of the view that foreign threats besiege Russia do exhibit fairly consistent political positions on other issues. But only one in ten fall into the most extreme camp regarding foreign threats. During the contested election season of 2011–2012, opinions regarding foreign threats varied, and more moderate views were modal, despite the prominence of the themes of western encirclement and U.S. aggression in Putin's 2012 presidential campaign.

Support for Putin's recent Ukraine policies is likely ephemeral.

Recent polling data that suggest public approval at over 80 percent for Putin himself and for the annexation of Crimea most likely distort the equilibrium state of Russian public opinion.[16] The problem is not that these numbers are wrong, in the sense of being falsified or inaccurate; it is that they most likely reflect very short-term and unsustainable blips driven by the Kremlin's massive propaganda efforts and the thrill of an apparently easy territorial expansion. As

the economic costs of incorporating Crimea and increasing isolation as well as sanctions from the West become evident, the underlying diversity of Russian views on nationalist themes that characterized Russian public opinion prior to the Ukraine crisis will become apparent again.

Indeed, more recent polling data as of this writing point to growing skepticism within the Russian public about the prospect of military intervention in Ukraine.[17] It is easy enough for the Kremlin, with its complete control over the main sources of mass information for most Russians, to whip up a frenzy of anti-Western sentiment using nationalist themes. But observers should not mistake the temporary surge in Russian popular hostility toward the United States for a deep-seated conviction or an emergent anti-Western consensus in Russian society.

Second, Putin himself most likely recognizes that there is no real consensus in Russian society in support of the nationalist themes he has promoted toward Ukraine, and he is not likely to feel particularly driven to take aggressive actions solely in order to mollify a nationalist or xenophobic Russian public. One account of his motives for intervening in Ukraine emphasizes how he has enhanced his domestic political legitimacy and isolated the opposition by doing so.[18] Some observers go so far as to suggest that by stoking the fires of nationalism, he has boxed himself into a trap: if he restores normalcy in his relations with the West, he risks incurring the wrath of the very same extremist nationalists whom Russian officials have promoted in recent months.[19] This perspective assumes that the views of extreme nationalist figures (such as the writers Alexander Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov, who have recently criticized Putin for not taking more decisive military action to support pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine)[20] are representative of the larger Russian public.

The notion that Putin bases his foreign policies on Russian public attitudes seems far-fetched.

The notion that Putin bases his foreign policies on the perceived preferences and attitudes of the Russian public seems far-fetched. It is more likely that he believes he can manipulate the public to support his policies using the symbolic, institutional, and political tools at his disposal. But even if he were to take into account the preferences of the public, the diversity of orientations toward nationalist and xenophobic themes evident in the DIRES data would make it impossible to craft a set of policies to satisfy a majority without a massive propaganda campaign and other inducements. In other words, Russian public opinion is highly unlikely to compel Putin to pursue aggressive foreign policies toward the United States and Europe. Other considerations will drive his evolving choices about whether to

pursue confrontation or cooperation with the West, such as his vision of Western motives and leverage, his understanding of Russia's national interests, and his concern to remain in power, which requires maintaining the loyalty of the Russian political elite. Should he decide, for whatever reason, that taking a softer line will better serve his own and Russia's interests, he need not worry about a negative reaction on the part of the broader public.

Third, given that Russian society remains diverse and lacks consensus on the ideal norms and values which characterize the Russian people and their relationship to the state, U.S. policymakers should continue to pursue ways of reaching the Russian public and countering the Kremlin's narrative about sinister Western motives. U.S. and European governments have limited tools to influence public opinion in Russia. The model of doing so via direct support for oppositional groups that prevailed during the 1990s and 2000s, whatever its merits in those years, not only plays into the hands of Kremlin propagandists who decry Western meddling but is simply infeasible under current political conditions within Russia. Instead, Western governments and other organizations interested in promoting progressive political change should take a longer-term perspective and work to quietly undermine the anti-Western and xenophobic narratives spread by Russian officials as well as those in the media and the arts whom they back.

This could be done by giving more Russians direct exposure to the West, so that they do not have to rely on Kremlin propaganda to form their impressions. Bolstering scientific, educational, economic, and cultural exchange programs would serve this purpose, as would joint projects that bring together civil- or government-based groups from Russia and the United States to work in other countries. The U.S. government might also identify small issues on which its interests clearly align with those of the Russian government, prioritizing cooperation on them in order to counteract Russian perceptions of its putatively malevolent intentions. Clearly, there are substantial numbers of Russians with deeply entrenched suspicions about the United States. However, a sizable contingent exists whose views are more malleable, and a reasonable policy goal should endeavor to reach this contingent with an alternative to the dominant official Russian narrative portraying the West as a menace.

Putin's high approval rating in the wake of the annexation of Crimea encourages a deceptive image of a Russian public overcome with nationalism and xenophobia. In fact, Russians' views on this (and other topics, such as the merits of the Soviet past, democracy, and capitalism; relations with the United States and Europe; and cultural and social issues such as gay rights) have been complex and heterogeneous for the last several decades, and remain so. Moreover, deep pockets of discontent in Russian society have come out in unexpected, forceful, and organic ways—irrespective of Western actions—when

political opportunities have presented themselves.[21] The most significant example of this prior to the 2011–2012 protests for honest elections was mass protest against a planned monetization of government benefits in 2005.

It is not clear how well directly fomenting such discontent would serve Western interests in Russia, because nationalist extremists who might well pursue even more aggressive foreign policies than Putin would probably also become more active in an atmosphere of large-scale social upheaval. Rather than thinking in terms of promoting the opposition (not to mention "democracy") in Russia, the United States and its allies should instead think of ways to promote positive images of U.S. and European culture, educational and social practices, government and civic institutions, and foreign policies.

The very diversity and complexity of Russian public views on nationalist and xenophobic themes suggest that room exists for such efforts. Perhaps they could sway at least some parts of Russian society in the hope that if and when significant political change does come to Russia, it will be in a direction more favorable to the United States and its allies.

Notes

1. See "Rossiiane obidelis' na Zapad iz-za Ukrainy" [in Russian], February 4, 2014, http://www.levada.ru; "Situatsiia v Ukraine i v Krymu" [in Russian], March 3, 2014, http://www.levada.ru; and other related reports on survey findings posted on the Levada Center's website. For an English-language account of relevant polling data, see "Chapter 3: Russia: Public Backs Putin, Crimea's Succession," Pew Research: Global Attitudes Project, May 8, 2014, http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/08/chapter-3-russia-public-backs-putin-crimeas-secession/.
2. For a review of competing perspectives, see Lilia Shevtsova, "The Putin Doctrine: Myth, Provocation, Blackmail, or the Real Deal?" The American Interest, April 14, 2014, http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2014/04/14/the-putin-doctrine-myth-provocation-blackmail-or-the-real-deal/.
3. Xenophobia is understood here as a visceral negative attitude toward individuals who personify minority groups. In contrast, nationalism represents a more abstract sense of commonality with one's co-ethnics and belief that the state is an expression of that commonality and should, first and foremost, protect the dominant group.
4. See Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, "Soviet Nostalgia: An Impediment to Russian Democracy," *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2005) pp. 83-9; Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, "Us and Them: Anti-American Views of the Putin Generation," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2008) pp.131-50; Thomas Sherlock, "Confronting the Stalinist Past: The Politics of Memory in Russia," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2011): pp.93–109.
5. See Marlene Laruelle, "Anti-Migrant Riots in Russia: the Mobilizing Potential of Xenophobia," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 141, December 2013; Alexey Malashenko, "Biryulyovo: More than just a riot," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 31, 2013, http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=53465.

6. See especially Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
7. The response rates in all four waves ranged from 36 percent–38 percent, which is standard for surveys conducted in Russia. The election surveys were conducted in 135 settlements (42 regional centers, 54 towns, and 39 rural regions), belonging to 46 subjects of the Russian Federation. The latter two surveys included a Moscow oversample, and I use weights to adjust the sample distribution by education, age, gender, and locality to match national parameters.
8. "Statistically significant" means we can rule out chance sampling fluctuations as the source of the differences in the distributions of responses over time with a reasonable, conventionally accepted level of confidence.
9. For a review of the literature on how intergroup contact relates to prejudice, see Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Intergroup Contact Theory," *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998), pp. 65–85.
10. I used principal components factor analysis as an empirical basis for assigning different variables to different scales. Full results will be provided to interested readers upon request.
11. Apologizing for the Soviet occupation of the Baltics relates to a sense of Russia's uniqueness vis-à-vis Europe due to the centrality of the Soviet Union's victory over the Nazis, and—to a lesser extent—Soviet nostalgia in Russians' positive image of their distinctive historical achievements. To recognize that the Baltic states were unwillingly subjugated to Soviet rule would undermine pride in their "liberation" from the Nazis at the hands of Soviet troops.
12. The factor analysis of the nine dichotomous measures of hostility/fear toward specific groups presented in Figure 3 yielded two factors: one with high loadings for Chechens, Gypsies, Azerbaijanis, Tadzhiks, and Muslims, the other with high loadings for Americans, Jews, and Swedes. Views toward Chinese load on neither factor, so I omitted them from both scales. This breakdown of the views toward minority groups into "southern" and "western" factors replicates similar analyses performed on slightly different sets of groups in numerous prior surveys conducted in Russia since 2002. Views toward the southern groups and western groups represent two different sets of orientations among Russians.
13. First, I estimated robust ordinary linear regression models (or Robust OLS) for the two scales measuring nationalist views, then I estimated negative binomial regression models for the two xenophobia scales. The robust estimation procedure adjusts the standard errors in these models for the clustering of observations within secondary sampling units and for heteroskedasticity.
14. Multivariate regression models are preferable to bivariate correlations because they allow for controls of background variables that are likely to mutually shape nationalism and the outcome variables. The form of regression and the sample size varied depending on the outcome variable (because the outcome variables were measured at different levels and some were derived from questions asked only a subset of the surveys). Complete results will be provided to interested readers upon request. All regressions included the same socioeconomic and demographic control variables as the models reported in Table 2, along with the four measures of xenophobia and nationalist ideas. Because this article focuses on the relationship between nationalism and political attitudes, I report only the associations, or lack thereof, between these four variables and the measures of political attitudes and voting.

15. The latter statement is based on analyses of voting in the 2011 Duma, not reported here due to lack of space. There are very few significant relationships between any of the measures of nationalism and party choice at the ballot box.
16. See, for example, "Russia: Public Backs Putin, Crimea's Succession." *Op. cit.*
17. See Neil MacFarquhar, "After Annexing Crimea, Euphoric Russia Turns Thoughts to Ukraine," *New York Times*, June 15, 2014; "Rossiia, kotoruiu vybiraet bolshinstvo—kakaia ona?" [What kind of Russia does the majority choose?] Interview with Lev Gudkov on the Ekho Moskvy radio station broadcast on June 20, 2014, transcript at: www.echo.msk.ru/programs/year2014/1343750-echo/.
18. Nicu Popescu, "Ukraine's impact on Russia," Issue Alert no. 32, European Union Institute for Security Studies, July 2014.
19. See Mark Lawrence Schrad, "Russia's Propaganda War Will Backfire," *The Moscow Times*, May 28, 2014.
20. Paul Sonne, "Russian Nationalists Feel Let Down by Kremlin, Again," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 5, 2014.
21. This point has been made, for example, by Anne-Marie Slaughter, "The War of Words Plays into Putin's Hands," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2014.