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“What’s in a Name?”

The Russian Understanding of Patriotism



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Introduction

A quarter-century ago, renowned political scientist and economist Francis Fukuyama argued in his influential essay “The End of History?” (1989) that the world was witnessing “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” Fukuyama’s essay appeared just as democratic protests were taking place in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square and numerous democratic transitions were under way in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa. It was also just months before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, events that were inextricably linked to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the apparent ultimate triumph of democratic values.

The euphoria surrounding democracy’s gains and supposedly auspicious future, however, were short-lived. Russia’s progress toward democracy stalled in the mid-1990s and questions arose about the country’s commitment to liberal governance. The authorities began moving away from a democratic ideology and instead sought an alternative system of values that could unify society.

Over time, a central tenet of official Russian discourse became that the Russian state must become a great independent power and a “stronghold of conservative forces” fighting against revolutions, chaos, and the “false liberal values” of Europe and the United States (Zevelev, 2014). The narrative posited that Western liberalism “fac[ed] a dead-end,” that the European Union project was in crisis, and that the United States was on the edge of disintegration (Salin, 2013). In many cases, liberal ideas were portrayed as a Western product alien to the Russian national spirit, which Russian power-holders depicted as traditionally conservative.

In the view of the “conservative majority,” the model suitable for the Great Russian World and Russian civilization, which reaches beyond the borders of the state, is different from the Western model. As one commentator put it, previous efforts to reconcile diverse aspirations did not succeed. “The utopian dream of the pseudo-reformers of the 1990s to make the Great Russia part of the great Europe was doomed from the very beginning. The same is true about efforts to reconcile Statism and Westernism, liberalism and conservatism” (Tarkin, 2012). An increasingly common view in policy circles held that the Western model of democracy had not only failed in Russia but had also caused serious harm to the country. Members of the so-called “realist camp” of the Russian elite—people who, according to Shlapentokh (2005), served the Kremlin—believed that Russia faced a “mortal threat from the West.” As Shlapentokh put it, “[r]everting to Stalin’s concept of Russia as a besieged fortress, they contend[ed] that the Cold War in fact never ended” (p. 65). They suggested that Russians were unwilling and even unable to adopt Western values and a Western way of life.

In the 2000s, the rejection of liberal Western values and orientation became one of the key sentiments shared by prominent politicians, church leaders, and public intellectuals (Mal’tsev, 2012). In this milieu, Russian patriotism was portrayed as the antithesis of Western liberalism, and the authorities attempted to leverage that sentiment to consolidate the Russian people.

This paper examines the Russian “traditional value” of patriotism within the context of the Russian leadership’s proposal of an alternative to Western liberalism. The study is part of a project by the Institute of Modern Russia (IMR) called “Faces of Russian Patriotism,” which explores the ways in which Russians from diverse backgrounds understand and relate to the concept of patriotism. For its empirical base, the paper uses data from surveys administered by the Levada Center, a leading Russian polling organization. At the request of IMR, the Levada Center included questions about patriotism in three monthly omnibus surveys conducted from February 2014 to March 2015. The questions were developed by IMR analysts in collaboration with Levada Center sociologists for the purpose of identifying the meaning Russians attach to the concept of patriotism.

Russian policymakers have leaned heavily on patriotism, promoting it as a creed to fill the ideological vacuum that resulted from the fall of the Soviet Union; to “save” Russia from Western ideology; to consolidate society; and to restore and promote national pride. Given the current environment, the significance of this study is also tied to the insertion of patriotism into virtually all areas of social life in Russia and its assumption of an “ideological posture shared by all parties” (Laruelle, 2009). Another point that needs to be taken into consideration is that the project was launched at a time when the lines between Russian patriotism and xenophobia appeared to become increasingly blurred. With the development of the Ukraine crisis, the concept of patriotism has acquired additional significance and new meanings.

What Is Patriotism?

The words “patriot” and “patriotism,” borrowed from the French *patriote* (“a fellow countryman”), entered the Russian language during the time of Peter the Great. The Russian Tsar was called by some observers a “true patriot,” who became “the father of his old [fatherland], and the creator of a new fatherland” (Viroli, 1995, p. 114).

In Russian as well as in English, the term “patriotism” has typically had a positive connotation. As Nathanson (1993) argued,

Most people think of patriotism as a trait that is valuable and worth encouraging. Indeed, patriotism is something that most citizens of a country expect of one another. They expect other citizens to care about and support the country and assume that patriotism is a virtue. It is no accident that patriotism is generally viewed in a positive light. (p. 3)

MacIntyre (1984) described patriotism as one of the “loyalty-exhibiting virtues” and placed it on the same level as love of one’s family, marital fidelity, and friendship, among other values. Viroli (1995) maintained that patriotism was “morally mandatory”:

We have a moral obligation towards our country because we are indebted to it. We owe our country our life, our education, our language, and, in the most fortunate cases, our liberty. If we want to be moral persons, we must return what we have received, at least in part, by serving the common good. (p. 9)

The core definition of the word “patriotism” is “love of the country,” although the concept is much more complex. The actions of an individual (or the readiness to take action for the sake of one’s country) are often said to be the most significant measure of one’s patriotism (Ivanova, 2013).

Patriotism “assesses the degree of love for and pride in one’s nation” and involves a feeling of “organic belongingness” to the fatherland, a particular community, and one’s people (Bar-Tal, 1993; Shapovalov, 2008). It is “attachment to national values based on critical understanding,” caring about the individual, human dignity, and trying to enhance the well-being and prosperity of the people (Adorno et al, 1950; Shapovalov, 2008). “Genuine” patriotism is “unconditional – irrespective of the ruling regime, practiced policy, dominant ideology or values emphasized. The attachment is not dependent on these and other factors, which are often temporary” (Bar-Tal, 1993, p. 49). According to Smith (2013), patriotic sentiments may serve to strengthen social bonds among citizens and provide “an incubator in which [trust and compassion can grow](#).”

Patriotism that is “genuine” or “true” is often contrasted with “false” or “pseudo” patriotism. The latter is defined by Adorno, et al., (1950) as a “blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing ways, and rejection of other nations as outgroups” (p. 107). Some have argued that patriotism can be a force “for good and for evil” (Bader, 2006). For instance, the concept of patriotism can be monopolized by certain groups in order to advance a particular agenda.

The monopolization of patriotism may lead to the “elimination of complexity and ambiguity” from discourse by preventing certain fundamental social issues from being examined (Johnston, 2007). In such an environment, rational criticism may be ruled out and top-down opinion may be ruled in (MacIntyre, 1984).

Russian Understanding of Patriotism

Leo Tolstoy bases his famous critique of patriotism partly on the argument that “[p]atriotism ... is nothing else but a means of obtaining for the rulers their ambitions and covetous desires” (as quoted in Nathanson, 1993).

A critical perspective on one’s own country may contrast with what Petr Chaadaev called a “beatific” or “lazy” patriotism:

I love my country... But I did not learn how to love my country with my eyes closed, with my head down, with my mouth shut. I believe that a person can be useful to his country only in the case where he sees everything clearly. I think that the time for blindly falling in love has passed and our primary obligation now is to bring truth to our country... The beatific patriotism, the lazy patriotism is foreign to me, because it causes its devotees to see everything in rosy colors and to live in illusion (as quoted in Pozdnyakov, 2010, p. 28).

Several commentators have posed an important (and often neglected) question: whether it is possible to be “pro-us” without being “anti-them,” or, similarly, whether it is possible to promote patriotism and tolerance simultaneously. The potential danger associated with patriotism is that it may degenerate into the “negative features of nationalism,” such as intolerance and xenophobia (Taras, 2008). Indeed, in [certain situations](#), “When we say ‘ours’ ... we imply ‘not ours’ and the search for the enemy of the people begins” (“V poiskah smysla. Novyi patriotism,” 2006).

These questions and concerns are not new. Authors of the 19th-century Russian canon of literature and philosophy in particular had views on patriotism worth examining. In his book *The Justification of the Good* (1897), Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov argued strongly against national hostility, which, in his view, is incompatible with the notion of “true patriotism”:

How ... can a true patriot, for the sake of a supposed ‘advantage’ to his nation, destroy its solidarity with other nations, and despise or hate foreigners? A nation finds its true good in the common good; how then can a patriot take the good of his nation to be something distinct from and opposed to everything else? (Solovyov, 2010, p. 296)

Reinforcing his idealistic stance, Solovyov wrote: “We must love all nations as we love our own.” Solovyov described patriotism as a “natural and fundamental feeling, as a direct duty of the individual to the collective whole immediately above him” (p. 297). Similarly, Fyodor Dostoevsky in his famous speech on Pushkin (1880) said:

Yes, beyond all doubt, the destiny of a Russian is pan-European and universal. To become a true Russian, to become a Russian fully (in the end of all, I repeat), means only to become the brother of all men, to become, if you will, a universal man.

Nikolai Dobrolyubov (1948), whose views are sometimes deemed to reflect the ideal of Russian national identity (Levashev, 2006), argued that true patriotism is an expression of love for mankind and “may not co-exist with unfriendliness toward other nationalities.” He considered patriotism to be unconscious and a very personal feeling (p. 564).

Interestingly, the period in which Dobrolyubov produced his *Readings in Russian Civilization* saw the [official Russian idea](#) as “practically identified with patriotism” (Yanov, 2013). In the mid-nineteenth century, the ideology of patriotism or state patriotism was aimed at consolidating power. In modern Russia, since the late 1990s patriotism has been presented by the authorities as the foundation of national politics.

Monopolization of Patriotism

In November 1999, then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin met with the heads of leading Russian universities and emphasized to them the importance of introducing a new national ideology based on patriotism. [According to Putin](#), after the dramatic changes in Russia over the preceding decade, a serious ideological vacuum had opened up. One ideology had been destroyed and nothing had been offered in its place.

In December 1999, in a campaign article titled “[Russia at the Turn of the Millennium](#),” Putin underscored the importance of traditional Russian values, including those of patriotism, *derzhavnost’* (the belief that Russia is destined to be a great power), statism, and social solidarity. He stressed that Russia was and would remain a great power and that “[it would] not happen soon, if it ever happens at all, that Russia [would] become the second edition of ... the United States or Britain, where liberal values have deep historic traditions” (Putin, 1999). Similarly, in an [interview](#) in 2000, Putin said Russian values were “none other than patriotism.” “Everything that makes us a nation, that is the source of our uniqueness, everything that we can be proud of—all this will be the foundation of [the national] idea” (as quoted in Tuminez, 2000).

From his first days in office as president, Putin reaped praise for his patriotic stance. When Dmitri Rogozin, then the chair of the Congress of Russian Communities, was asked in March 2000 who the leader of Russian patriotic forces was, he answered: “Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.”

In post-Soviet Russia, the statist-patriotic rhetoric was not new. Boris Yeltsin started the conversation about the “united and inseparable” Great Russian State, the reintegration of the Eurasian space, and the necessity of using domestic historical experience and building on national traditions and values. Putin, who in many ways distanced himself from Yeltsin’s circle, sharpened and reinforced the focus on patriotism (Panteleev, 2004).

In the early 2000s, the Russian government followed the president’s lead and took numerous steps to reinforce patriotism in the country. Among the first initiatives was the introduction of a patriotic education initiative, the state program *Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation, 2001 – 2005*.¹ The main coordinator and developer of the program was the Russian State Military Historical-Cultural Center (Rosvoentsentr).

¹ The Concept for Patriotic Education of Russian Citizens (2003), as well as new state programs adopted in the following years, furthered the systemic approach to patriotic education in Russia.

The program’s authors said unnamed “events” that had occurred in Russia created the need for a patriotic education initiative. Although not specified in the program, one can guess that the authors meant the events that occurred during the period 1985-1999. According to this line of argument in Russian official discourse, the negative state of affairs with patriotism and patriotic education was attributed to:

- the de-heroization of Russian history;
- the stripping of Russia’s national dignity;
- the prioritization of universal human values over national values;
- the neglect of military training; and
- the de-ideologization of Russian youth (Rapoport, 2009).

The state program presented the task of using patriotic education to consolidate society and strengthen the state as urgent. The state was expected to serve as a key institution in organizing and guaranteeing the functioning of the system of patriotic education.

In 2002, the Ministry of Education ordered the creation of a new government entity as part of the program: the Russian Center for the Civic and Patriotic Education of Children and Youth, the mission of which was to “foster [in citizens] a heightened patriotic consciousness, the feelings of love and devotion to the Motherland, and a readiness to perform their civic duty and constitutional obligations to defend the interests of their country”.

The patriotic education initiatives were framed in a state-centric manner, required the coordinated efforts of numerous actors at the federal, regional, and local levels, and targeted the representatives of all social and age groups. The top-down approach, coupled with mechanisms of state oversight, was expected to ensure “consistency and uniformity in propaganda work in order to counter the “anti-patriotic” attitudes allegedly appearing in the “liberal-dominated” mass media” (Blum, 2006, p. 3).

Within a comparatively short period of time, patriotism came to be understood as “an integral part of the emergence of a cohesive and self-confident Russia” and became the “ideological posture shared by all parties” (Laruelle, 2009; Horvath, 2012). A new elite of “patriotic managers” also emerged in Russian society. In that environment, people “who refuse[d] to present themselves as ‘patriots’ [were] delegitimated and ushered off the public stage” (Laruelle, 2009).

The issue of patriotism reemerged with new force during Putin’s first year after his return to the presidency in 2012. In an article titled “Putin, in Need of Cohesion, Pushes Patriotism,” *The New York Times* wrote, “[A]fter a wave of unsettling street protests, Mr. Putin needs an ideology — some idea powerful enough to consolidate the country around his rule” (Barry, 2012). As Laruelle (2009) argued about the earlier push for patriotic initiatives, the Kremlin sought to “mobilize the population behind the state enterprise while, at the same time, restricting political freedoms.” The protests of December 2011 – May 2012 were followed by an “unprecedented crackdown” on civic activism in Russia (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

According to Rachel Denber, deputy director of Human Rights Watch Europe and Central Asia, "...[S]ince the so-called 'color revolutions,' the Russian authorities [attempted] to marginalize, demonize, and discredit opposition politicians, human rights activists, [and] civil society organizations..." Additionally, significant concerns were raised regarding new laws and restrictive amendments, including the [law on public gatherings](#) and the administrative code, the [law on "foreign agents,"](#) and the [law that re-criminalized libel](#), to name a few.

In September 2012, Putin held a meeting in Krasnodar, where he spoke about the values and moral foundations needed for Russia's future. Putin argued that "cultural self-awareness, spiritual and moral values, and value codes" were a highly contested area sometimes "subject to overt informational hostility." Against that backdrop, Putin said Russians had to build the "future on a strong foundation, and that foundation [was] patriotism."

A month later, Putin signed a decree establishing a new agency within the presidential administration, the Directorate for Social Projects. The main goal of the directorate was defined as strengthening the spiritual and moral foundations of Russian society and improving state policies in the area of patriotic education. Reaction to the initiative was mixed. One Russian political scientist [argued](#) that the president sought to use the agency to promote the ideology of patriotism: "The main reason for creating such an agency is that the energy of the society has to be used – to the largest degree possible – for the development of the country, in the interest of the country. The ideology of patriotism will unite everyone around these goals of development" (V administratsii presidenta sozdano upravlenie, 2012). A different view was expressed by representatives of the opposition, who compared the new directorate with the Soviet-era Department for Agitation and Propaganda and called the initiative another effort to "tighten the screws" and curb political dissent in the country.

The notions of "patriotism" and "spirituality" were also at the core of the 2012 [presidential address](#) to the Federal Assembly. In the face of numerous internal and external threats, Putin said that Russia needed "spiritual staples" to consolidate society, and that the basis for consolidation should be patriotism (Putin, 2012). The idea was enthusiastically supported by the "Putin majority." Irina Yarovaya, head of the State Duma's Security Committee and coordinator of United Russia's "patriotic platform," [argued](#) that the national idea of patriotism ran like a leitmotif through the president's address: "A patriotism of action is our common national idea," Yarovaya said (Vinokurova, 2012).

Since then, state actors have proposed a multitude of ideas for how to help stimulate patriotic feelings. Young activists from St. Petersburg's City Commission on Patriotism suggested that every teenager should take an oath of allegiance before receiving a Russian passport. The governor of Penza region ordered the regional administration to print pocket calendars with the text of the national anthem and to organize rehearsals of the anthem. Oleg Mikheev, first deputy chairman of the State Duma's Energy Committee, [suggested](#) "legislatively protect[ing] the patriotic feelings of Russians from provocations and insults" aimed at the country. In Mikheev's view, an "insult to patriotic feelings" should be considered an act of extremism worthy of a five-year prison sentence. As an example of such an "insult," Mikheev cited the so-called "alternative

views” of certain historians who “reach a point of saying, oh, what a pity that civilized Germans did not take over the wild Soviet Union!” (Podosenov, 2013). More recently, the Russian culture minister and a Russian deputy prime minister [signed](#) a statement endorsing a patriotic Internet, radio, television, books, exhibitions, and video games, arguing that “we must consolidate the state and society based on the values instilled by our history” and “we need a patriotic trend in the public consciousness.”

Modern Russian patriotism is strongly derived from the Soviet Union’s role in World War II, which in Russian discourse is mostly referred to as the Great Patriotic War. For the majority of Russians, the war is associated with substantial sacrifice and heroism. In the political arena, however, it sometimes becomes the subject of controversy, especially in discussions of particular events or decisions made by the Soviet leadership. There have been an increasing number of cases in which the authorities have reacted harshly toward those who express opinions seen by them as “unpatriotic.”

The experience of TV channel Dozhd (TV Rain) is highly representative of this behavior. Dozhd was accused of disrespecting the memory of war victims when it published a poll on the channel’s website that asked whether the Soviet Union should have surrendered Leningrad to Nazi Germany in order to save hundreds of thousands of lives. In response, Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko [said](#) posing the question was “an act of blasphemy—another in a series of attempts to falsify the results of World War II and to rehabilitate those who unleashed the war and who were responsible for millions of the victims.” Deputies from the St. Petersburg legislature asked Russian Prosecutor General Yury Chaika to conduct an investigation into the Dozhd material and to take “appropriate measures,” which they said could include shutting down the channel. Russia’s largest cable operators canceled contracts with Dozhd as well.

In response to the accusations, the channel broadcast a marathon on the topic of patriotism and said the channel was against monopolization of the concept by the government. “We do not want [patriotism] to be confused with the notion of loyalty to the authorities. The more you love your country, the more concerned you are about it, the more questions you have,” the channel said in a [statement](#). Irina Prokhorova, former head of the Civil Platform party, also [accused](#) Russian authorities of attempting to monopolize patriotism: “There are people who have power and privileges, who know better than others what it means to love the Motherland, and we are told what it means ... [and those who do not conform] become non-patriots and non-citizens.” In a similar vein, Mikhail Fedotov, head of the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights, argued that there was a widespread belief in Russia that critics of the regime were “non-patriots,” a belief which he called a myth that did not correspond to reality.

“Non-patriots” And “Illegals”

Over time, decision-makers have expanded the group of people deemed to be “non-patriots” to include not only those who have attempted to “rehabilitate Nazism,” but also opponents of the regime and critics of the pre-ordained patriotic ideals. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, a number of incidents have occurred that are similar to the situation with Dozhd. For example, Russian rock star Andrei Makarevich became a “blacklisted dissident” after he signed an anti-war petition and played a concert for refugees' children from Donetsk and Luhansk. On state-controlled channel NTV, Makarevich was portrayed as a traitor, as well as a friend and supporter of the “fascist junta.” His face was also printed on a banner targeting Kremlin critics that was hung outside a Moscow bookstore. The banner read, “Fifth column: aliens among us,” referring to individuals who allegedly sought to sabotage the government.

The annexation of Crimea was presented to the Russian public as a means of protecting ethnic Russians and reclaiming territory lost in Soviet times. The annexation campaign was accompanied by increasingly nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric filled with the ideas of victory, national pride, and unity in the face of a common enemy. Many of these ideas had an immediate connection to Russia’s World War II experience, which made the official message to the public especially effective. By speaking the language of World War II, as well as that of a great power that “was back,” and playing on patriotic sentiments, the authorities mobilized and consolidated the public, and achieved support for their actions and the values they promoted in society.

The patriots vs. non-patriots debate can be considered part of a broader discussion about a blanket group of “others,” meaning generic social outsiders, who allegedly threaten social and/or political stability and well-being. Several previous studies have suggested that the principal idea consolidating diverse segments of Russian society is xenophobia and general intolerance to “others.” For example, according to the results of a [research project](#) conducted by the Moscow-based Higher School of Economics in 2013, Russian society is divided into four major political streams: liberals, leftists, nationalists, and supporters of the ruling regime. The researchers found that xenophobia, which is often accompanied by calls for social justice, was the key sentiment shared by representatives of all four groups.

As a number of studies have shown, the formation of a negative attitude toward “others” is often unrelated to individual experiences, but rather can be attributed to pressure from above and/or the redirection of social tensions. Such influence on society can be exercised through various means, including the media, the education system, and literature. Messages from the top can descend the vertical to reach their intended recipients surprisingly quickly. One example is the attitude of Russians toward two nations with traditionally friendly relations with Russia, Ukraine and Georgia. As Shlapentokh (2011) points out, after the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008, the two countries transformed into enemies in a relatively short period of time. In the wake of the war, 62 percent of Russians described Georgia as Russia’s main enemy, while 41 percent named Ukraine. As the government shifted its political course and changed its rhetoric, the public’s perception changed as well: according to surveys, in a few years, 77 percent of respondents spoke positively about Ukraine while the percentage of those who related “positively” or “very positively” to Georgia increased from 16 percent in September 2008 to 48 percent in July 2013.

Similarly, examining the nature of anti-Americanism in Russian society, Shlapentokh argued that the regime and the elite play a substantial role in advancing anti-American sentiments in Russia. According to some observers, in 2012 anti-Americanism became “one of the most dominant features of Kremlin policy” and “was openly accepted as a key element of official patriotism.” State discourse was driven by the idea that the United States (including then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) backed major Russian opposition rallies, which were allegedly aimed at sparking a “color revolution” in the country. Another part of the plan was the appointment of Michael McFaul as U.S. ambassador to Russia, argued several pro-Kremlin commentators. The architect of the U.S.-Russia “reset” policy was painted as an “American expert in orange revolutions.” Among the [allegations](#) was that McFaul had sent opposition leader Alexei Navalny to Yale in 2010 as part of the World Fellows Program “in preparation for an ‘orange revolution’ in Russia.”

Gudkov (2013) [argued](#) that Russian society faced a significant “deficit of development ideas” in the 2000s (see Filina, 2013). With no change occurring, the deficit was coupled with an increase in public discontent that became especially pronounced in late 2010 and early 2011. Societal tensions were redirected and targeted at “the routine forms of mass hatred for the enemy,” Gudkov said. The broad list of “others” was continuously expanded. According to Pain (2013), “We treat others equally badly—those who come from overseas or a neighboring region” and “if we are friends, we are friends against somebody.”

Over the last year, conversations about Russia’s “special path,” statist values, and great power aspirations have dominated official discourse and made another brand of rhetoric—that promoting anti-migrant xenophobia, which had long been prevalent in many circles—somewhat less heated. It was not so long ago, however, that much of the official narrative was focused around that issue.

A series of events in Moscow’s [Matveevsky market](#) in the [Biryulevo neighborhood](#) in 2013 led to a campaign to fight illegal migration. Human rights advocates [called](#) the situation “anti-migrant hysteria” and accused the authorities of conducting a “cynical manipulation of public consciousness” for their own benefit. The campaign included police raids and camps for illegal migrants, with thousands of people detained from countries such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Officials released statements emphasizing the negative factors associated with migration. New information also came out highlighting the number of crimes in which migrants were involved. According to Moscow police chief Anatoly Yakunin, 50 percent of all crimes in Moscow in 2013 were committed by individuals hailing from outside the region. Out of that 50 percent, 22 percent of crimes involved the participation of foreign nationals.

Analysts spoke about a transition from the narrative of “protective nationalism,” which was partially a result of trauma caused by the loss of the Soviet empire, to one of intolerance and hatred toward representatives of other nationalities. Unlike in 1990, when xenophobic attitudes were expressed mostly by marginal groups, such attitudes in 2013 became part of mainstream thinking in the bureaucracy and circles close to the authorities (Gudkov, 2013). In fall 2013, migration was a key issue in the Moscow mayoral campaign. For example, [according to then-acting Mayor Sergei Sobyanin](#):

Moscow is a Russian city and it should stay that way. Not Chinese, Tajik or Uzbek. . . . People who speak poor Russian and have a completely different culture are better off living in their own countries. Therefore, we do not welcome their adaptation into Moscow. I think that these are probably seasonal workers who must return to their families, their homes, and their countries after having worked here. (as quoted in Flintoff & Armitage, 2013)

Similar attitudes permeated Russian society as a whole. In 2013 and 2014, according to the Rating of National Threats developed by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center, the threat that most concerned Russians was the perception that Russia was being occupied by representatives of other nationalities. Another study conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation showed that two-thirds of Russians were cautious of migrants. Moscow and St. Petersburg topped the list of Russian cities with the highest number of incidents of xenophobia and ethnic intolerance. Elsewhere in the country, approximately 65 percent of survey respondents expressed support for strict limitations on migration.

In a survey conducted in February 2014 by the Levada Center at the request of the Institute of Modern Russia, one-third of Russians said they thought persons of “non-Russian nationalities” were responsible for many of Russia’s misfortunes. Similarly, when asked what a more appropriate government policy toward migrants might be, 73 percent of respondents said the government “should try to restrict the influx of migrants.”

In Search for An External Enemy

After public outrage over migrants reached a peak in October 2013, the Ukraine crisis and resulting conflict with the West pushed the issue into the background. In 2014, public opinion polls recorded a decrease in the level of anti-migrant xenophobia in Russia for the first time in many years. In fall 2013, 66 percent of Russians said they supported the slogan “Russia for Russians,” but by summer 2014, the number had decreased to 54 percent. Similarly, the number of Russians who believed that racist riots were possible decreased from 62 percent in October 2013 to 24 percent in July 2014. In fall 2013, 43 percent of Russians noted tensions with representatives of other nationalities in their localities. By summer 2014, the number had decreased to 23 percent.

Sociologists noted that this dynamic was not the result of increased positive perceptions, however, but a result of increased indifference toward migrants. New objects of xenophobia also emerged, such as members of the so-called “fascist Ukrainian junta.” Furthermore, as in the Soviet era, there has been a strong belief that the country is a “besieged fortress” threatened from both the West and the East. As one commentator argued, “In a besieged fortress it is essential to fear and to hate the external enemy, who has surrounded the stronghold, is undermining the walls and threatening your ‘home’ and your life” (Heller, 1988, p. 135).

According to Levada Center surveys, with the emergence of the Ukraine crisis in summer 2014, unfavorable views of the United States reached a “historical maximum” of 74 percent. Fifty-five percent expressed disapproval of Ukraine and 60 percent expressed disapproval of the European Union. At the same time, Putin’s approval rating rose to 86 percent and approval of the Russian government increased to 60 percent, both very strong levels historically.

Analysis of these data leads to comparisons between the present and the period following the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. Following that conflict, approval ratings for the Russian authorities were the highest since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with Putin’s approval mark reaching 88 percent. At the same time, Russians’ views of the United States, the European Union, Ukraine, and Georgia worsened dramatically, reaching historical minimums.

In the current period, an increasing number of Russians argue that the values and traditions of Russia and the West are incompatible. According to around 55 percent of Russians, the only form of democracy that could work in Russia is one that is “completely unique, corresponding with Russia’s national traditions and specific characteristics.” In the view of almost half of Russians (49 percent), Putin’s most significant achievement has been the restoration of Russia’s status as a respected world power. A majority of Russians believe the Russian state is a strong player on the international stage: 68 percent of respondents said their country has played either a “decisive” (11 percent) or “quite important” (57 percent) role in international affairs.

Since 2014, a surge of patriotism has occurred among Russians due to a number of external factors. A Levada Center survey reported that 81 percent of Russians indicated an increase in patriotic spirit during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. A larger wave of patriotism followed the annexation of Crimea, which demonstrated the “revival of imperial feelings” in Russian society, according to some observers. At that time, approximately 88 percent of Russians reported feeling positive emotions about the annexation, such as happiness, approval, pride for the country, a feeling of victory, and a sense that justice had been restored.

In March 2014, when asked, “What does the annexation of Crimea by Russia mean to you?” 79 percent of Russians replied: “This means that Russia returns to its former role of a ‘great power’ and furthers its interests in the post-Soviet space.” It should be noted that a majority of Russians (55 percent in 2000 and 58 percent in 2004) had long expected their president to achieve the goal of returning the country to its former role of a “great, respected power.”

In fall 2014, 63 percent of Russians said the state had secured its status as a great power. By March 2015, 68 percent of Russians said they considered Russia to be a great power, the highest percentage since at least 1999.

Patriotism: Official vs. Personal

Aspirations to great power are not the only component of Russian patriotism. To understand individuals' feelings about patriotism in more depth and to find out whether they differ from the official stance, this section examines the results of surveys conducted by the Levada Center at the request of the Institute of Modern Russia. The surveys were conducted at three points in time—February 21-25, 2014, October 24-27, 2014, and March 13-16, 2015—and reported data on a representative sample of 1603 citizens of Russia from 130 settlements in 45 regions of the country, 18 years of age or over.

For 64 percent of Russians, patriotism is primarily associated with “love of country,” according to the surveys. Around 29 percent of respondents said that expressing patriotism meant to “work/act for the benefit and prosperity of one’s country.” This indicator remained relatively stable over the period of one year (for example, 27 percent of respondents felt this way in February 2014 and 30 percent in October 2014). At the same time, a significant increase was observed in several respondent groups, including Russians with high consumer status (from 25 percent to 47 percent) and Moscow residents (from 26 percent to 42 percent). Within a, the surveys found limited change in the percentage of Russians who said that expressing patriotism meant taking action to “change the current situation in the country to ensure a decent future for the nation” (22 percent in February 2014, 26 percent in October 2014, and 21 percent in March 2015).

The number of respondents arguing that patriotism involved defending the country against any accusations and criticism increased from February 2014 to October 2014 by around 8 percent, up to 26 percent, indicating the highest level since at least 2000. Within a year, the most significant increase was observed in cities with a population of 500,000 and over (+17 percent, up to 32 percent).

The surveys also indicated an increase of 5 percent, from 16 percent in February 2014 to 21 percent in March 2015, in the number of Russians who thought patriotism was associated with a belief that the country “is better than any other” (Table 1).

Table 1. What Does “Being a Patriot” Mean to You?

		2014 (February)	2014 (October)	2015 (March)
1.	Love your country	68	57	64
2.	Work/act for the benefit and prosperity of your country	27	30	29
3.	Defend your country against any accusations and criticism	18	26	26
4.	Strive to change current situation in your country to ensure a decent future for the nation	22	26	21
5.	Believe that your country is better than any other	16	20	21
6.	Tell the truth about your country regardless of how bitter it could be	11	11	12
7.	Believe that your country does not have shortcomings	5	6	6
8.	No answer/cannot decide	4	3	2

Source: polls conducted by Levada Center in collaboration with IMR

As discussed earlier, Russian policymakers have chosen and pushed for a top-down approach to strengthening patriotism in Russian society. Recent events in the country have shown that in an increasing number of cases, the authorities have sought to monopolize the concept of patriotism and consequently determine what constitutes “true patriotism.” But the vast majority of Russians hold an entirely different view of the matter. In March 2015, 86 percent of Russians said they thought patriotism was “a deeply personal feeling” whose definition could not be dictated from the top. Only 9 percent of respondents argued that the state held the power to define patriotism (Table 2).

Table 2. Which Point of View Do You Prefer? (March 2015)

1.	Patriotism is a deeply personal feeling – a person decides for him-/herself what is patriotic and what is not	86
2.	The state has to define what is patriotic and what is not	9
3.	Cannot decide	5

Source: polls conducted by Levada Center in collaboration with IMR

Furthermore, the majority of Russians disagree with the myth propagated by some regime supporters that critics of the government are “unpatriotic.” According to 81 percent of respondents in the March 2015 survey, one can criticize the authorities and be a patriot (Table 3). A majority of Russians also said that patriotism did not necessarily mean supporting the authorities (59 percent in March 2015). The percentage of Russians who said patriots must support the regime “under any circumstances” increased, however, from 23 percent in February 2014 to 34 percent in October 2014, before falling to 30 percent in March 2015 (Table 4). A similar level of support for the statement was observed in all respondent groups. For example, 31 percent of individuals with higher education said they agreed with the statement in March 2015 (a 10 percent increase from February 2014).

Table 3. Which Point of View Do You Prefer?

		2014 (February)	2014 (October)	2015 (March)
1.	One who criticizes the authorities cannot be considered a patriot	11	15	12
2.	One can criticize the authorities and be a patriot	82	76	81
3.	Cannot decide	8	10	7

Source: polls conducted by Levada Center in collaboration with IMR

Table 4. Do You Agree with the Following Opinion: “A Patriot Must Support the Authorities in Power under Any Circumstances”?

		2014 (February)	2014 (October)	2015 (March)
1.	Fully agree	4	8	6
2.	Mostly agree	19	26	24
3.	Mostly disagree	41	37	40
4.	Fully disagree	24	17	19
5.	Cannot decide	12	13	11

Source: polls conducted by Levada Center in collaboration with IMR

Patriotism is often understood as pride in one’s country. According to the March 2015 survey, Russians are most proud of Russian history (43 percent), the country’s rich natural resources (41 percent), Russian culture (34 percent), sports achievements (32 percent), the country’s size (31 percent), military forces (24 percent), and Russia’s position in the international arena (24 percent). The responses remained relatively stable over the period of one year. One exception was Russians’ pride in the military, which saw a 10 percent increase in support (from 14 percent in February 2014 to 24 percent in October 2014 and March 2015). Additionally, the number of respondents who spoke about their pride in Russian history and culture increased by over 5 percent.

A very small percentage of Russians consistently said they were proud of the country’s social and economic achievements. In 2015, only 2 percent of respondents said they were proud of the Russian healthcare system, 6 percent said they were proud of the education system, and 5 percent said they were proud of the nation’s economic achievements. A disturbing trend found in the survey was that only 7 percent of Russians declared pride in their fellow citizens. Previous research has shown that feelings of national pride are “fundamentally tied to one’s views toward those around [them].” According to some scholars, “If an individual does not trust those around [them] ... it is less likely that she will express positive feelings toward the country as a whole” (Amoedo, 2013) (Table 5).

Table 5. What Makes You Proud of Your Country?

		2014 (February)	2014 (October)	2015 (March)
1.	Russian history	38	39	43
2.	Rich natural resources	39	40	41
3.	Russian culture	29	30	34
4.	Sports achievements	29	33	32
5.	Size of the country	28	28	31
6.	Russia's position on the international arena	24	26	24
7.	Military forces	14	24	24
8.	Modern achievements in science	14	16	15
9.	Fellow citizens	8	8	7
10.	Russian system of education	5	6	6
11.	Economic achievements	5	6	5
12.	Healthcare system	2	2	2
13.	None of the above	7	3	3
14.	Difficult to answer	6	3	3

Source: polls conducted by Levada Center in collaboration with IMR

Conclusions

The Russian authorities have established a monopoly on forming collective assumptions and values in the country. In many cases, they conflate the notions of the state and society. The government's ideology is based on projecting Russia's status as a "great power" with attendant triumphs and victories, rejecting a "hostile" ideology of liberal democracy, and following Russia's own path. Within this context, patriotism is viewed as an antonym to liberalism and Westernism.

With the emergence of the Ukraine crisis, the government reintroduced the idea of Russia as a fortress besieged by enemies for the purpose of consolidating society around a strong conservative state promoting "traditional values." Previously dominant anti-migrant sentiments have become less common, with the public's attention having shifted to other groups. The problems of intolerance and xenophobia in the country remain acute. Consequently, the question of whether it is possible to be "pro-us" without being "anti-them" has continued to be answered negatively in today's Russia.

While the public previously had tried to distance itself from the official version of patriotism, in recent months this has become more difficult to accomplish. An increasing number of Russians associate patriotism with support of the authorities and military preparedness. One quarter of all Russians also associate the notion of patriotism with defending the country against accusations and criticism, and express pride in Russia's military forces. The population remains in a state of patriotic and military mobilization against the enemies that allegedly surround Russia.

At the same time, we see the co-existence of two different views of patriotism: patriotism as an ideology and as a natural and personal feeling. While the state intensifies patriotic rhetoric and pushes forward with top-down patriotic initiatives, the majority of Russians believe the state does not get to decide what patriotism is and is not. For the vast majority of Russians, patriotism is a deep and intimate feeling that cannot be commanded or directed from the top. Additionally, despite the official preference for the "uncritical conformity" to the ideals of state patriotism, a significant number of Russians still do not dismiss criticism as unpatriotic. As the data show, however, this number has decreased since last year.

Periods of mobilization cannot be sustained indefinitely. This period of patriotic mobilization will eventually come to an end and people will start to focus more on economic and social issues, rather than aspirations to great power and anti-liberal values. Will the meaning of Russian patriotism be redefined in this inevitable future?

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