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Introduction: new directions in survey research on Russian elites

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Although a vibrant literature on mass public opinion in Russia emerged in the wake of communism's collapse in the USSR, the systematic investigation of elite attitudes using survey research has lagged conspicuously behind. This gap is particularly noticeable in the realm of foreign policy. Scholars have made strides in analyzing how the country's key decision-maker, Vladimir Putin, views the world (e.g., Taylor 2018), yet there is a paucity of research on what shapes the foreign policy attitudes of officials who occupy positions a rung or two down from Putin – much less of those who possess elite status in the economic, military, media, and education spheres. We know precious little about how these individuals arrive at their opinions of the outside world, what ideological and informational factors constrain and shape their foreign policy views, and whether and why their attitudes diverge from those of the mass public.

Designed to fill this gap in our knowledge, this special double issue of *Post-Soviet Affairs* examines the attitudes of Russian elites toward a wide range of foreign policy matters based on a unique survey research project spanning more than two decades. The contributions to this issue were originally presented at a conference held at Hamilton College (Clinton, New York) in April 2018 with generous funding from the National Science Foundation and the college's Office of the Dean of Faculty. The articles are based on the Survey of Russian Elites (SRE) – a data set consisting of seven surveys of high-ranking Russian individuals that were fielded in 1993, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016. While not a panel study, the collection is the only repeated cross-sectional survey of contemporary Russian foreign policy elites and therefore provides a unique window into how the attitudes of the elite stratum as a whole in Russia have changed over time. The following articles demonstrate the rich theoretical potential of this 25-year project by testing propositions drawn from a wide range of literatures, such as those on political psychology, Russian national identity, public opinion, and political communication. These articles are organized around four themes:

- *Cue-taking and the media*: How impactful are state-run media, online media, and cues emanating from the Kremlin on elite attitudes about foreign policy?
- *Civilizational identity*: How does identification of Russia with Western civilization influence elites' perspectives on foreign and domestic policy?
- *Ideological coherence*: What ideological orientations structure elites' foreign policy views and how coherent are their underlying dimensions?
- *Group affiliation*: Can subdivisions within the elite (e.g., more influential v. less influential, pro-regime v. anti-regime) explain differences in their stances on foreign policy?

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Survey research in the USSR and the early post-communist period

The research presented in this special issue has its origins in the solid empirical survey research on the region that dates back to the post–World War II period. The first such effort was the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System,[1] which received substantial funding from major American foundations and the United States Air Force. That project focused largely on interviews of Soviet refugees in displaced-persons camps in Western Europe, though some of the erstwhile Soviet citizens interviewed had come to the United States in the early post-war years. As one might imagine, complicated sampling issues arose with respect to these former Soviet citizens. As William Zimmerman's colleague at the University of Michigan, Robert Axelrod, pithily asked, "What is your population?" Answer: "People in the Soviet Union." He then retorted, "What is your sample?" Answer: "People outside the Soviet Union." That said, James R. Millar was right to argue in 1987 that "[d]espite the seemingly unpromising character of the sample, the Harvard study is widely regarded today as a success" (Millar 1987, 4).

The Harvard Project was a prologue to a second major post–World War movement of Soviet citizens abroad. Millar reports that between 1968 and 1984, roughly 355,000 Soviet citizens emigrated to West Germany and Israel, 265,000 of them with Israeli visas. Most of the remainder were ethnic Germans. Of those with Israeli visas, a sizeable fraction subsequently decided to migrate to the United States and not to Israel. And "[a]nother 20,000 or so left under other auspices." In sum, "[b]y 1986, more than 100,000 had arrived in the United States, with 35,000 former Soviet citizens arriving in 1979 alone, the largest inflow of any year" (Millar 1987, 4–5).

This provided an opportunity for scholars (mostly American) to interview sizeable numbers of former Soviet citizens who had settled in the United States. For their new homes, the emigrés selected places where other Soviet Jews had previously settled (most notably Brighton Beach), but they also clustered in other places around the country, such as the suburbs of Detroit. With US government funding and support received by and through the new National Council for Soviet and East European Research, the Soviet Interview Project (SIP) was launched. It constituted a sizeable endeavor to interview former Soviet citizens and yielded a proliferation of journal articles, book chapters, and efforts designed to disseminate its findings to a broad international audience, including presentations at a joint Russian-American conference held in Tallinn, Estonia, in the late 1980s.[2] Zimmerman recalls that several of the participants in the group from Moscow were embarrassed, including its chair, who remarked, "We will never again come to an international conference without new data to share."

It quickly became clear that the SIP was a harbinger of a new and exciting era of survey research in the region. One consequence of the Soviet Union's collapse was that it was no longer necessary to interview people outside of the country in order to gain insight into how citizens in the former Soviet Union viewed key political, economic, and foreign policy issues. Survey organizations and projects, directed by both Westerners and non-Westerners,[3] proliferated in the late *perestroika* and early post-communist periods, and the resulting data were often used to test hypotheses developed in foreign contexts on the Soviet/post-Soviet cases (e.g., Finifter and Mickiewicz 1992; Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992; Reisinger et al. 1994).

Elite surveys in Russia

By the mid-1990s, interviewing in Russia was no longer limited to taking the pulse of ordinary citizens. Instead, it became possible to interview influential Russians with the potential to impact important policy decisions. A few early efforts along these lines include projects funded by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Germany) and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (US), among others (Hahn 1993; SINUS Moskva 1994, 1995; Ball and Gerber 1996; SINUS Moskva and VTsIOM 1996). It was an awareness of these new possibilities that prompted the first round of the Survey of Russian Elites in 1993. Zimmerman and others designed the first survey, which was piloted by Elena

Bashkirova. The richness of the data yielded by the project motivated them to continue fielding a survey on roughly a quadrennial basis from 1993 on, up to and including the most recent survey in 2016, at which time Sharon Werning Rivera of Hamilton College became the principal investigator of the project. The combined data set is on deposit with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan (Zimmerman, Rivera, and Kalinin 2019), and plans are underway to launch the eighth wave in 2020.

In every instance, the surveys have been implemented by Elena Bashkirova, who was a central figure at ROMIR (Rossiiskoe obshchestvennoe mnenie i issledovanie rynka/Russian Public Opinion and Market Research) when the first interviews were conducted in 1993 and now directs Bashkirova and Partners. Throughout the entire period, highly trained Russian interviewers have conducted the surveys – all face-to-face and all in Moscow.[4] Yet, as Zimmerman et al. argue, "[r]estricting the sample to Moscow [and thereby excluding regional elites] is unlikely to result in statistical bias, given Moscow's disproportionate impact on national political decision-making. Moscow is the financial, political, intellectual and cultural hub of Russia, where the principal decision-making centers and individuals occupying key positions in different spheres of public life are concentrated" (Zimmerman et al. 2013, 16).

The number of those interviewed in each of the seven waves ranges from a low of 180 to a high of 320 respondents, for a total of 1,664.[5] In all seven waves, individuals were selected on the basis of positional criteria using a quota sample, with an emphasis on identifying those connected in some way with foreign policy issues. Each sample included elites from the following subgroups: the legislative and executive branches of government, the military and security agencies, state-owned enterprises, private businesses, scientific and educational institutions with strong international connections, and the media.[6] In each of the seven waves, between 30 and 40 persons were selected from each category.

Those selected to be interviewed from these subgroups have been powerful people in their own right. Across all waves, as Zimmerman (2002, 21) writes, "those classified as elites had to have occupations that suggested a *prima facie* expectation that they would have substantial potential to affect policy." In the legislative and executive branches, they have been: members of the State Duma and Federation Council; heads and deputy heads of federal governmental departments, federal ministers, and deputy ministers; and members of the Presidential Administration at the level of advisor or higher. In the military and security agencies, they have held the rank of colonel or higher. In the economic sector, the respondents have been owners, managing directors, and key administrators of major private firms, and directors and deputy directors of state-owned enterprises and state corporations. And in academe and the media, they have worked as chancellors, vice-chancellors, directors, and deputy directors of universities and research institutes, and as editors and deputy editors of important print and broadcast media outlets. As is evident, these individuals would be regarded as having elite status anywhere.

The project has benefitted immensely from the financial support of a wide range of institutions over the past 25+ years, and we are grateful for their generosity. They include the National Science Foundation (Grant No. SES-1742798), Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center and Office of the Dean of Faculty at Hamilton College, National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, William Davidson Institute and Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia at the University of Michigan, MacArthur Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg.

Theory-testing and elite survey research

The first set of papers drawing on this seven-wave study explores the importance of *cue-taking and the media*. Noah Buckley and Joshua Tucker employ parallel questions asked in both mass and elite survey data to explain the divergence between elites and ordinary citizens in their attitudes toward foreign countries in the post-Crimea era. Using a novel methodological approach, they test whether a set of demographic variables trained on a model of mass attitudes is able to predict elite attitudes. Their

analyses show less support for this Common Determinants model than for their Kremlin Cueing Model, according to which elites (and especially "core" elites) react to external events more based on "where they sit" rather than "who they are." Sharon Werning Rivera and James Bryan highlight the impact of messages flowing from the Kremlin in their study of anti-American attitudes. Applying John Zaller's model of opinion formation to Russian elites, they show that foundational "political predispositions" (such as civilizational identity and the socializing impact of service in the military and security agencies) were reasonably predictive during the Yel'tsin years, but lost much of their explanatory power during the Putin era. By contrast, recent years have shown a growing uniformity of anti-US sentiment among Russian elites, which Rivera and Bryan attribute to clear and unequivocal messaging emanating from Kremlin-controlled media sources. Another paper on the role of the media, by Olesya Tkacheva, explores the mechanisms behind the media's impact on anti-American views among the elite, seeking to explain why users of online media exhibit more pro-American attitudes than consumers of traditional media. Drawing on theories in the political communication and cognitive psychology fields, she offers a nuanced assessment of both the "echo chamber effect" and the framing effect of new (online) media.

Civilizational identity is another important theme in this volume. In addition to Rivera and Bryan's paper showing that its predictive power to explain anti-American attitudes has waned over time, Henry Hale investigates the connection between identity and the expectations of leadership succession in non-democratic regimes. He explores a virtually untouched topic and demonstrates how ideas drawn from international relations and comparative politics can be productively cross-fertilized. His research shows that whether elites identify Russia with European civilization is a strong predictor of whether they believe the dominant United Russia Party (but not Putin) is likely to leave office in the next 10 years. Since this factor is more consistently relevant than traditional explanations centered on accountability and threat perceptions, Hale rightly lays out an agenda for additional research on this unexpected finding.

The next set of articles addresses the issue of *ideological coherence*, investigating how ideological orientations structure foreign policy views and how much coherence (and constraint) their underlying dimensions exhibit. In what appears to be the first attempt to apply the motivated cognition framework to the study of elites' foreign policy views using survey data from outside of the US, Kirill Zhirkov analyzes the internal structure of militant internationalism among Russian elites. He finds that its two constituent dimensions (anti-Americanism and militarism) are both positively related to a dogmatic cognitive style. Zhirkov's paper is framed by a literature on political behavior that spans at least a half century and moves us some distance toward integrating the literature on political psychology with the study of comparative foreign policy. Danielle Lussier also applies theory originally developed within the context of US public opinion to examine the level of ideological constraint among Russian elites. Drawing on Philip Converse's foundational work, she identifies two structured belief systems within the Russian elite stratum – one focused on attitudes toward the US and another regarding economic and political institutions. She identifies declining ideological constraint and ideological consistency within the foreign policy belief system and concludes that other than animus toward the United States, elites are left with few core principles around which to organize in developing policies.

The fourth underlying issue examines the relevance of *group affiliation* to foreign policy views. Kirill Petrov and Vladimir Gel'man use the Politburo 2.0 model developed by Minchenko Consulting to subdivide the sample into what they term "influential" foreign policy elites (state enterprise managers, executive branch officials, and military/security officers) and "non-influential" elites. Although the authors find that all members of the elite generally rate their ability to influence foreign policy decisions as quite limited, they also detect a somewhat counterintuitive trend: representatives of *less* influential elite subgroups are more confident in their ability to impact the decision-making process than are representatives of *more* influential elite subgroups. Overall, Petrov and Gel'man's research confirms the personalist nature of Russia's political system – and the weakness of formal institutions – in the realm of foreign policy decision-making.

In addition to these theoretically-driven research articles, two papers are published here as research notes that fit nicely with the major themes of this special issue. Kirill Kalinin uses

sophisticated methods to challenge the ideological coherence of Aleksandr Dugin's writings, showing that the key ideas that comprise Dugin's neo-Eurasianist theory have limited utility for understanding elites' foreign policy perceptions. Analysts should therefore not overstate its influence, even in the post-Crimea period. In the second research note, Elena Bashkirova, Tamara Litikova, and Dina Smeltz subdivide Russian elites into two groups: regime "supporters" and "opponents" at odds with Russia's foreign policy direction. This approach allows them to identify items on which there is and is not consensus on the use of Russian military force and economic resources. In general, they observe a high degree of elite consolidation around Putin's foreign policy agenda in the data.

Taken as a whole, the authors in this special issue draw their inspiration from Zimmerman's longstanding call to "move the study of comparative foreign policy some distance in discriminating between those propositions about elite and mass opinion and foreign policy that are American-specific, or specific to Western democracies, and those that are of relevance to a broader class of open political systems" (2002, 7). The articles demonstrate the merits of testing novel theories and ideas gleaned from a broad and interdisciplinary perspective. Yet none of the contributors would disagree that such theorizing must be paired with a deep, contextual understanding of post-communist Russia; for instance, several of the works under discussion consider the relevance of Russia's actions in Crimea to foreign policy attitudes, the impact of Putin's superpresidential system, and the differences in attitude formation between the Yel'tsin and Putin eras.

We hope that this brief preface will encourage readers to dive into the set of methodologically rigorous papers that follows.

Notes

1. See Inkeles and Bauer (1959), and in particular, the detailed methodological section in Chs. 1–3.
2. For examples of research produced on the basis of the SIP, see Bahry (1987, 61–99), Silver (1987, 100–141), and Zimmerman (1987, 332–353).
3. For background on the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) and the Levada Center, see Yaklovev (2004), Grushin (2009), and Hartog (2016), as well as Masha Gessen's (2017) vignettes of Lev Gudkov's work. Several multi-year surveys important in the early post-communist period in Russia include the New Russia Barometer (under the direction of Richard Rose at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow), the World Values Survey (launched by Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan), and the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (conducted by Polina Kozyreva and Mikhail Kosolapov of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Sociology and Demoscope in collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
4. All respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the data and informed, in a manner approved by the Institutional Review Board at either the University of Michigan or Hamilton College, that their participation was voluntary and that their answers would be aggregated with the answers of other respondents into a larger data set that would then be analyzed with statistical tools.
5. Total sample sizes for each survey year are as follows: 200 (1993), 180 (1995), 240 (1999), 320 (2004), 241 (2008), 240 (2012), and 243 (2016). The surveys were conducted in December 1992–January 1993, October–November 1995, November 1999, March–April 2004, March–May 2008, July–August 2012, and February–March 2016.
6. One exception is the 1993 survey, which includes only a single category of "economic elites." In all subsequent years, economic elites were drawn from two separate sectors (state-owned enterprises and private businesses). In 1993 and 1995, elites from the legislative and executive branches were combined in one category. In 1999 and 2004, two legislative samples were selected – one from the members of foreign policy–relevant committees of the legislative branches and one from those national legislators who were not involved with foreign policy matters. Note that Zimmerman (2002, 20) excludes the non–foreign policy related legislators from the analyses in his book. See Zimmerman (2002, 18–30) for a complete methodological description of the project; for detailed information about the 2016 sample, see Rivera et al. (2016) and Bashkirova i Partnery (2016).

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