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Noah Buckley & Joshua A. Tucker

Published online: 03 Sep 2019.

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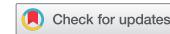
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Staring at the West through Kremlin-tinted glasses: Russian mass and elite divergence in attitudes toward the United States, European Union, and Ukraine before and after Crimea

Noah Buckley[a] and Joshua A. Tucker[b]

[a]Division of Social Science, New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE; [b]Wilf Family Department of Politics, New York University, New York, NY, USA

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigatethe divergence in Russian public opinion between the masses and elites in terms of attitudes toward foreign countries in the post-Crimea era. To do so, we combine elite surveys conducted in Russia from 2000 to 2016 with an extensive database of Levada Center mass public opinion polling to test two competing models for explaining the observed divergence in mass and elite opinion: a demographic-driven Common Determinants model and a novel Kremlin Cueing model. More specifically, we assess the extent to which a set of demographic variables trained on a model of mass attitudes is able to predict elite attitudes. Our empirical evidence is more consistent with the predictions of the Kremlin Cueing model, indicating that, in some cases, elite opinion reacts very differently to shocks such as the Crimea crisis due to "where they sit" rather than who they are as individuals.

At the core of any consolidated authoritarian regime is a group of elites. These individuals, most often in the higher ranks of the executive, maintain stable functioning of the regime, make and implement policy, and interface with the broader state. But in order to understand their behavior, we must understand who they are and what attitudes they espouse. In particular, if we can gain insight into how elites react to geopolitical stresses and how malleable their attitudes are in comparison to those of the mass public, we can improve our picture of how regimes behave. No less importantly, we can consider how possible cadre changes within elite ranks might – or might not – affect regime behavior.

In this paper, we leverage unique data combining Russian elite and mass opinion and develop novel methodological techniques in an effort to better compare elite opinion with the attitudes of the mass public. More specifically, we examine the empirical support for two different models of elite public opinion generation: the Common Determinants model, which is based on the assumption that elites and masses generally form opinions in the same manner; and the Kremlin Cueing model, which suggests that elites face special incentives to fall in line with the political leadership. We call this the Kremlin Cueing model because we believe it is particularly appropriate for competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010) such as Russia.

Rather than follow previous studies in comparing separate analyses of mass and elite surveys (Oldendick and Bardes 1982; Reisinger et al. 1996; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997), we instead combine data from a series of mass surveys in Russia (conducted by the Levada Center) with elite-level survey data. We do so in two ways: first, by taking the more traditional approach of simply pooling the data; and second, by using the mass-level data to create a model that predicts the foreign policy attitudes

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CONTACT Joshua A. Tucker ✉ joshua.tucker@nyu.edu

of ordinary Russians on the basis of demographic characteristics and then assessing how well this model can predict the attitudes of elites under different circumstances. The latter approach allows us to contrast the explanatory power of basic demographic characteristics with differences arising from elite status. What is more, it does so without requiring a strategy for measuring intangibles such as closeness to Kremlin ideology.

Substantively, we focus on attitudes toward key foreign policy players in Russia's orbit: the United States, the European Union (EU), and Ukraine. Figure 1 presents time trends for both mass and elite Russian public opinion. Until 2014, with a few notable exceptions, mass opinion about these entities corresponded quite well with elite opinion. However, both mass and elite support for these foreign entities dropped substantially in 2014, the year Russia occupied and annexed Crimea (Biersack and O'Lear 2014; Mankoff 2014; United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 2014). Most dramatic is the fall in elite opinion of Ukraine, which outstripped a parallel fall in mass opinion of Ukraine. Elite and mass opinion about the US fell somewhat. Elites remained positive about the EU, while mass opinion about the organization fell.[1]

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. In the following section, we draw out the logic underlying the Common Determinants and Kremlin Cueing models. In Section 3, we present our methodological approach to testing the observational implications of each argument, spelling out the limits of what can be done with the data at hand. In Section 4, we then present our empirical results. Although we are far from having the last word on the topic, our findings do suggest more empirical support for the Kremlin Cueing model than for the Common Determinants model. In the final section, we discuss the implications of our findings for understanding the puzzle that motivated our research inquiry, as well as lay out some directions for future research.
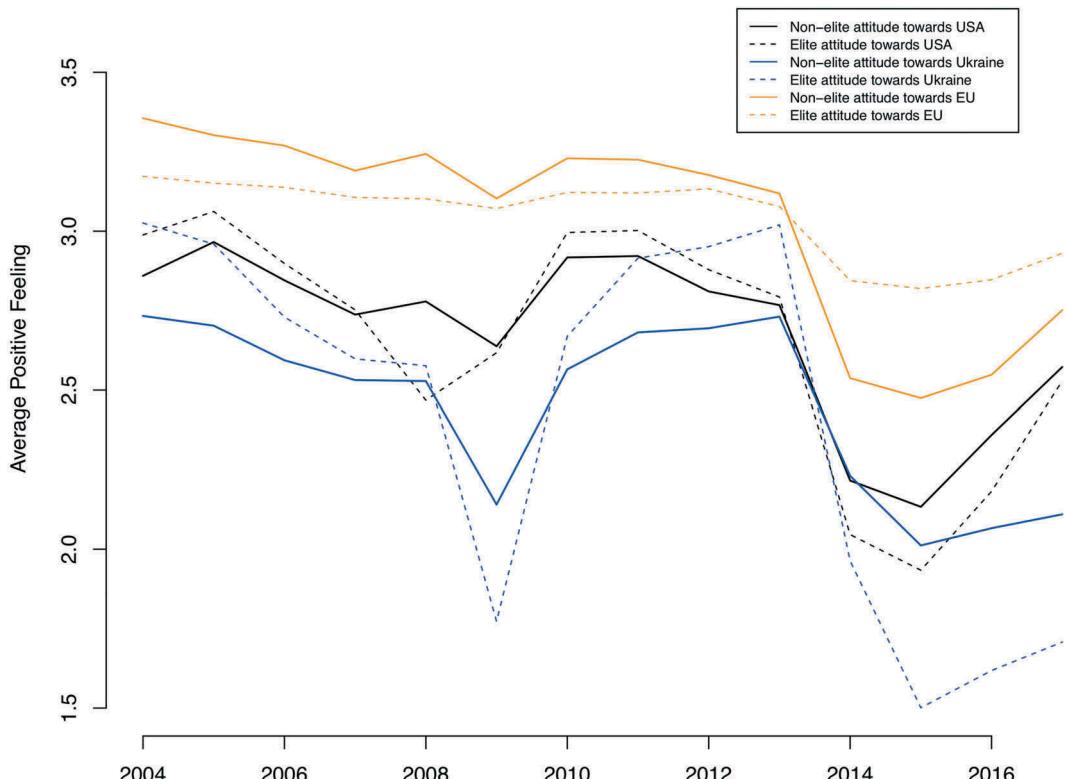

Figure 1. Mass and elite opinion on foreign countries over time. *Source*: Data from Zimmerman Survey of Russian Elites and Levada Center Mass Public Opinion Surveys. See the "Data and Methodology" section for further details.

Theoretical framework

When seeking to distinguish between elite and mass opinion, we must first define each group. We consider elites to be individuals in high-level positions of authority in the Russian government or institutions closely tied to the government. For its part, we define mass public opinion to be broad, nationally representative opinion.[2] As to what distinguishes these two groups in terms of our theory, several points stand out. First, elites on average have access to more and different sources of information about the world than the mass public does. Second, elites may face pressure to conform to pro-regime attitudes in a way that masses do not. That is, due to fear of losing his/her job, a desire to be promoted, or a simple psychological desire to "fit in," the average elite member of the regime may carefully monitor the opinions they express in order to follow the Kremlin line. By comparison, a typical "Ivan Ivanov" is much more free to express himself or herself – a freedom we can see in Russians' frequent willingness to protest in the streets and to express strong dissatisfaction in surveys.

A central theoretical focus in this paper is on understanding why elite opinion might diverge from mass opinion, and in particular why this might occur in cases where we might expect the Kremlin to have a preferred position for governing elites to hold. Previous literature has stressed the importance of issue congruence between elites and masses for democratic governance. Classical political theorists such as Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Mill stress education as a defining difference between masses and elites (McAllister 1991). Others eschew efforts to explain variation in mass and elite opinion, instead preferring to carefully measure its dimensionality and extent of congruence (Oldendick and Bardes 1982; Reisinger et al. 1996; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997). Still other scholars, focused on the implications for policy outcomes that may result from divergences in opinion between masses and elites in democracies, look for elected representatives' responsiveness to their electorates' preferences and contrast this with elite cueing of mass opinion via information and persuasion (Steenbergen, Edwards, and De Vries 2007; Coan et al. 2008; Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2008; Brader and Tucker 2012a; Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2013). Here, as in Reisinger et al. (1996), we compare mass and elite opinion in Russia. However, the potential explanations that we explore fit Russia's non-democratic context better than do previous theories of representation-based congruence. We focus on two potential explanations for observed differences between mass and elite opinion – one that calls back to classical theory yet broadens the set of potential explanatory factors and another that focuses on cueing by the Kremlin at a time when the Kremlin has been intimately involved with shaping social views.

Our first model starts from the assumption that elites are no different from masses in the ways that their opinions are related to their demographic characteristics. The underlying idea here is that there is a country-level relationship between demographic traits and public opinion. Perhaps it flows through shared experiences, perhaps through similar expected returns from policies, or perhaps from exposure to similar information – the key point is that elites are assumed to be just like any other citizen. Thus, if we were to take a random sample of elites and a random sample of citizens, we would expect the correlation between any given demographic characteristic and opinions to be the same in both samples. Importantly, this does not imply that the aggregate opinion levels would be the same across both groups. Indeed, if the demographic characteristics of elites systematically differed from the demographic characteristics of the masses – and if the term "elite" has real meaning, then we would almost certainly expect this to be the case – then as long as the correlations between demographic characteristics and attitudes were constant across both groups, we would often expect to see aggregate-level divergences in opinion. We therefore call this the Common Determinants model.

Looking back at Figure 1, we actually see fairly small amounts of divergence in mass and elite opinion for most of the pre-Crimea period, thus calling into question whether the Common Determinants model is likely to accurately describe the real world. That being said, there are sharp deviations, common to both elites and masses, in the post-Crimea period, leaving open the

possibility that a process something like the one described by this model could be at work. Either way, taken together, the Common Determinants model offers, at least in principle, one way to find masses and elites holding different opinions on particular public policy issues.

An alternative explanation starts from the premise that elites and masses generate opinions about public policy using different processes. While there are of course many directions in which we could take such an argument, here we focus on one potential set of politically relevant causes: aligning one's position with the preferences of the Kremlin. The way we think about this data-generation process is that, like other Russians, elites are predisposed toward certain opinions because of their demographic characteristics. However, elites also take into account a factor above and beyond those considered by non-elites. Namely, elites are directly involved in the day-to-day functioning of the regime and thus are subject to pressures and personal circumstances that are likely to push them to toe the Kremlin line. A priori, it is possible that this other factor only represents a slight modification to the opinion the individual would have formed were she not a member of the elite; it is equally possible that this other factor completely swamps the position she would have held were she not an elite.

In this paper, we are agnostic as to whether this "other factor" represents some form of coercion on the part of the Kremlin, occurs because elites are actively seeking out guidance on opinion formation, represents a form of social desirability bias, or even happens subconsciously. Moreover, for the purposes of this paper we apply a very simple conception of the "Kremlin," assuming that the Kremlin holds a single attitude toward any given country. Richer theorizing in the future could allow for the fact that the Kremlin – or any other state leadership – is of course not a monolithic entity, and there may be multiple factions within the government holding different opinions. One might also seek to distinguish between issues on which the Kremlin desired genuine ideological conformity among elites and issues on which it would tolerate dissent. For now, though, we simply assume that there is a single attitude toward each foreign country that the Kremlin would prefer all elites hold.

Thinking in the abstract about how to assess the impact of this "other factor" is difficult – how would we know it if we saw it? Yet if we can hypothesize how the impact of this "other factor" varies in importance across different categories of elites or across the same categories of elites in different time periods, then we can actually test (even in a statistical sense) the extent to which there is empirical support for the model. That is, we can test to see if in the subset of elites (or particular period of time) that this "other factor" is hypothesized to be less important, the relationship between demographic characteristics and opinion among elites looks more like the relationship between demographic characteristics and opinion among the masses than in the subset of elites (or period of time) where we predict this "other factor" to be more important. The relevant subset of elites is, of course, going to be a function of whatever we believe this "other factor" to be. For the purpose of this paper, we assume that the "other factor" is pressure to adopt the Kremlin's position.[3]

In this paper, we have a very obvious choice of two different time periods in which the pressure to conform with the government's position may have been different: before and after Russia's intervention in Crimea. In 2014, after pro-Russia demonstrations, disguised Russian soldiers seized control of governmental and other important sites around Crimea. Before long, a Russia-friendly separatist government had taken power in Crimea, quickly moving to secede from Ukraine and eventually joining the Russian Federation in March. The United Nations and many countries consider these moves to be annexation and a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 2014). Within Russia, meanwhile, the joining of the Crimean Peninsula with Russia is not only a fait accompli, but also a very popular boost to patriotic sentiment that deeply reconfigured Russia's relationship with Ukraine and with the Western world (Biersack and O'Lear 2014; Mankoff 2014).

To gain leverage from comparisons across subsets of elites, we break our elite sample down into what we call "core" and "non-core" elites. Core elites are individuals working in executive or legislative government structures, in the military, or in security bodies. Non-core elites are

individuals in the media, science and education, business, and state-owned enterprises. Our assumption is that because of their greater proximity to the center of state power, core elites generally face greater pressure to conform to the party line than non-core elites. This comports with what is known as Miles' Law: this informal law asserts that an individual's job or position is important in determining his or her views and stances (Miles 1978). In short, where you stand depends on where you sit.

Data and methodology

To study the determinants of opinion formation among elites and the mass public, we combine a survey of elites conducted over nearly two decades by William Zimmerman and colleagues, the Survey of Russian Elites (SRE; Zimmerman, Rivera, and Kalinin 2019), with a newly compiled dataset of hundreds of thousands of responses to monthly Levada Center surveys.[4] The latter data source represents a powerful resource for examining fine-grained trends in public opinion in Russia at the national and subnational levels from 2004 to 2016. In combination with the unprecedented insight into elite attitudes afforded by the Survey of Russian Elites, it gives us a better view into the nuances of opinion change over time in Russia than ever before.

The dependent variables that will underpin our analyses are simple: a set of questions about attitudes toward three countries/supranational entities: Ukraine, the United States, and the European Union. In the SRE, elite respondents are asked, "For each country or international organization that I will name, please tell me how friendly or hostile you think it is toward Russia today?," and given a list of countries (or, in the case of the EU, supranational entities). Possible responses are "very friendly," "rather friendly," "neutral," "rather hostile," and "very hostile." In the Levada data, respondents are asked, "In general, how do you relate right now to … " for a list of a few countries and the EU. The response scale here is four-category, running from "very good" through "mostly good" to "mostly bad" and "bad". We recode the "neutral" response in the SRE survey to "mostly good" so that the result is a unified set of four-category responses.[5] While the questions ask somewhat different questions in each survey, we feel that substantially the same set of factors will be driving each: an affective reaction to the country. In addition, we will primarily be leveraging change in these questions across various scenarios rather than comparing levels. In all our analyses, the higher numeric value of the scale is associated with a more positive assessment of the country in question.

To build and test our predictive models of attitudes toward these three countries/entities, we employ a set of demographic characteristics. In this, we are severely constrained by data availability, as there is only a restricted set of demographic features available for both elites and the mass public. We use gender, having received higher education, age, self-reported use of the internet, and an indicator for being born in 1970 or later.[6] As a robustness check, we also present results where we restrict the mass public sample to those living in Moscow.[7]

In the following section, we first test the Common Determinants model. If this is the true state of the world, then the opinions of any sample should have the same associations with covariates as in any other sample. The best way to test this is to run a pooled model across elites and masses with an interactive term on all of our demographic covariates indicating whether the respondent is from the elite survey or the mass sample. If the interaction terms are insignificant, then the possibility of "common determinants" remains open. If they are significant, then it falsifies the idea of "common determinants." In the baseline models we present in Table 1 in the following section, we include the five predictor variables discussed previously: gender, age, higher education, cohort, and internet use. We also include an indicator for the survey being conducted in the post-Crimea (2014–2016) era.

The ideal way to test the Kremlin Cueing model of opinion formation directly would be to embed cueing survey experiments into elite surveys.[8] However, in view of the fact that the SRE survey contains only observational data, we propose the following method:

(1) Estimate the demographic correlates of opinion among mass respondents. This is the relationship between a "typical Russian's" demographic characteristics and public opinion.[9]
(2) Use this model to predict elite opinion.
(3) Calculate the predicted error across all elites. This measures how different elites are from "typical Russians."[10]
(4) Compare the size of the error when we split elites into categories where we think Kremlin cueing should be stronger or weaker.

The assumption underlying our inference strategy is that when cueing by the Kremlin is stronger, elite opinion should look less like mass opinion (i.e., have a higher prediction error from a model based on the masses) than when Kremlin cueing is predicted to be weaker. In the cases we are considering, this means that we expect higher error post-Crimea than pre-Crimea and higher error among core elites than among non-core elites. Ultimately, we will be able to assess the statistical significance of these differences in prediction error between groups of elites using t-tests or OLS.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that one possible source of bias in our analyses is varying levels of social desirability bias between elites and masses when they respond to inter-viewers' questions. Recent evidence points to quite low levels of social desirability bias in public opinion surveys in Russia when respondents are asked about approval of Putin (Frye et al. 2017). The mass public's concern about giving the "correct" response about foreign nations like those under study here is undoubtedly even lower. More to the point, might greater social desirability bias among elite respondents bias our results? We feel that this is not a large concern, primarily because outwardly expressed opinion (rather than "true," closely held views) is precisely what we are interested in. The fact that our Kremlin Cueing model predicts external, toe-the-line, fit-in-with-your-environment conformity means that it in a sense predicts increased social desirability bias among elites than among the mass public. Given the presumably high amounts of self-storytelling in which many elites in an authoritarian regime such as this one must engage, effects driven by social desirability bias are a feature of this analysis, not a bug.

Results

We first test the Common Determinants model described in the previous section.[11] Table 1 shows that, especially for attitudes toward the USA, demographic characteristics are related to elites' views in different ways than they are to the views of the masses. In Column 2, which shows the determinants of attitudes toward the USA, the interaction terms for age and internet use are both statistically significant. When we consider attitudes toward the Ukraine and EU, we find that in both cases the interactive terms for gender and the post-Crimea period are statistically significant.

While this is far from conclusive evidence ruling out the Common Determinants model of opinion formation, given the limited number of demographic characteristics at our disposal it does suggest that there are different patterns of opinion determination at work across elites and masses. At the very least, the results do not resemble what would have provided strong evidence for the Common Determinants model – a full set of non-statistically significant interaction effects – and there are too many significant coefficients here to suggest that the results are due to chance alone. Moreover, we also conducted a "harder" test of the model – rerunning the model using only the non-core elites, who we would suspect would be even more similar to the masses than the full set of elites – and find similar results (see Table A4 in the online appendix, which can be accessed at https://s18798.pcdn.co/fas-joshuatucker/wp-content/uploads/sites/1941/2019/08/Buckley-Tucker-Staring-at-the-West-Online-Appendix.pdf).[12] Given that "who you are" cannot consistently determine foreign policy views – this leaves the "where you sit" model of Kremlin Cueing as a potentially important explanatory factor. We test this model next.[13]

As discussed in Section 3, we test the Kremlin Cueing model by first training a linear model on mass-survey demographic data, then examining the predictive error that is obtained from

Table 1. Demographic determinants of mass and elite attitudes.

	DV: Positive attitude towards:		
	Ukraine	USA	EU
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Male	−0.067***	−0.081***	−0.083***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Elite Dummy	−0.137	−0.287*	0.147
	(0.167)	(0.168)	(0.221)
Higher Educ	−0.007	0.022***	0.026***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Age	−0.001**	−0.005***	−0.004***
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Cohort: Born after 1970	−0.040***	−0.045***	−0.030**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Internet User	0.031***	0.114***	0.105***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Post-Crimea Dummy	−0.625***	−0.562***	−0.622***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Male * Elite	0.138**	0.087	0.115*
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.066)
Age * Elite	−0.001	0.006*	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Cohort * Elite	0.093	0.102	0.063
	(0.078)	(0.079)	(0.087)
Internet * Elite	−0.088	−0.240***	−0.080
	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.089)
Post-Crimea * Elite	−0.605***	−0.024	0.342***
	(0.059)	(0.060)	(0.059)
Constant	2.890***	2.739***	2.909***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.025)
N	48,973	50,045	48,170
R^2	0.157	0.133	0.172
Adjusted R^2	0.157	0.133	0.172

*$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

predicting elite views using the trained model and comparing these predicted attitudes to elites' actual reported attitudes. If the Kremlin Cueing model is an accurate depiction of opinion formation and we are right that the incentive to conform with the Kremlin increased following the Crimean conflict, then we should see our ability to accurately predict elite views using the model trained on mass opinion decrease sharply in the wake of the 2014 tensions with the West and Ukraine. Similarly, if we are correct that elites close to Kremlin centers of power are more strongly cued than those on the periphery of the regime, then we would expect to see higher predictive errors for core elites than for peripheral elites.

Looking first at attitudes toward Ukraine, we find clear confirmation in the first row of Table 2a that the post-Crimean annexation climate is associated with higher predictive error for our mass-trained model when used to predict elite attitudes. In other words, the demographic characteristics that we found predict mass attitudes well and pre-Crimea attitudes well, but do markedly worse at helping us predict attitudes toward Ukraine once tensions have ratcheted up. This change between the pre-2014 and 2014-and-onwards predictive error is stark: a loss of accuracy of over 0.3 units on the four-point outcome scale, or about 70% of mean absolute predictive error.

Predictive accuracy regarding attitudes toward the EU declines after Crimea even more dramatically than does predictive accuracy regarding attitudes toward Ukraine, starting at a high level of accuracy and then falling precipitously after 2014. For their part, attitudes toward the United States, shown in row 2 of Table 2a, reveal a contrasting finding that comports well with the visual evidence available in Figure 1. Here, the advent of post-Crimean tensions actually improves the accuracy of our predictive demographic model rather than worsening it. In short, it seems that the post-Crimea environment – the one where Kremlin cueing is most acute – does indeed affect elites'

attitudes, pulling those attitudes away from the more "natural" ones that their demographics would predict them to have.

What about Miles' Law – where you sit determines where you stand? In this case, if the Kremlin Cueing model has currency, we would expect core elites to be more strongly influenced by the incentive to align with the Kremlin than are non-core elites. Table 2b confirms that this is the case, at least with regard to attitudes toward Ukraine and the US. In each case, the "unpredictability" of elite attitudes toward these countries increases by almost 0.1 units, nearly 20%, compared to demographic expectations. Both differences are statistically significant. In the case of views of the EU, predictive error increases slightly but the change is not statistically significant.

In sum, situations where our theory would predict Kremlin cueing to bite do exhibit decreased predictability. The shifts we see in the patriotic, Kremlin-dominated post-annexation period and among core elites who are close to the government provide evidence in favor of the Kremlin Cueing model of elite opinion formation. Much more than just "who they are," officials' views of contentious foreign countries depend heavily on "where they sit" and how strong the Kremlin is pushing.

Robustness tests

To test the robustness of the results of the Common Determinants model, we rerun the pooled sample from Table 1; the results for these models are available in the online appendix (https://s18798.pcdn.co/fas-joshuatucker/wp-content/uploads/sites/1941/2019/08/Buckley-Tucker-Staring-at-the-West-Online-Appendix.pdf). First, in Columns 1–3 of Table A1, we show regressions with only Moscow residents from the mass public sample. Since all elite respondents in the elite surveys reside in Moscow, we do this in an attempt to show that our results are not simply a case of Moscow-dwellers being different than average Russians. Examining the elite dummy interactions with demographic variables, our results are substantively very similar and in fact cast even more doubt on the Common Determinants model than does the full sample. In Columns 4–6, we address the possibility that the variable measuring internet use is biasing the results, which we find not to be the case.

In the online appendix, we show analogous results using logistic regression with a dichotomized dependent variable and find our results substantively unchanged. We also present tables with mass-elite predictive error t-tests when excluding internet use as a predictor. In Table A2, also in the online appendix, we modify the definition of "core elite" slightly by including elites working in state-owned enterprises as core elites. Again, our results are substantively unchanged.

Finally, we consider the possibility that assessing the absolute value of changes to prediction error (when fitting mass public demographic estimates to elite data) obscures important information about the direction of prediction error. In other words, perhaps predictions of elites' attitudes are consistently too positive or too negative toward a particular country rather than simply more or

Table 2. Predictive error for elite attitudes.

	(a) Before and after Crimean annexation		
	Pre-Crimea	Post-Crimea	Difference
Ukraine	0.443	0.788	0.344***
USA	0.599	0.410	−0.188***
EU	0.255	0.664	0.410***
	(b) Core and non-core elites		
	Non-core elites	Core elites	Difference
Ukraine	0.493	0.566	0.074**
USA	0.511	0.607	0.096***
EU	0.387	0.407	0.020

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

less accurate. We present these findings in the online appendix in Tables A8 and A9. While this leads to some loss of statistical significance, the overall magnitude and substantive interpretation of our findings change very little.[14]

Conclusion

The question of why mass and elite opinion diverge is a difficult one to study. All too rarely do scholars have the empirical tools at hand that in retrospect are necessary to assess the most appropriate theories. Survey evidence capturing elite opinion is scarce enough, let alone evidence that encompasses theoretically interesting variation. We are thus grateful for the pioneering work of William Zimmerman in providing repeated surveys of Russian elite opinions, allowing us to build on his previous work (e.g., Kullberg and Zimmerman 1999; Zimmerman 2009) in exploring this question.

Here we have presented two theoretical explanations for why mass and elite opinion may diverge in the realm of foreign policy views in Putin-era Russia. The first, the Common Determinants model, holds that differences in opinion between the public and officialdom result not from masses and elites being different "types" of people insofar as how they come to opinions on foreign policy, but rather because there are differences in the demographic make-up of Russian elites and the Russian mass public. The second, the Kremlin Cueing model, more closely follows the maxim that where someone sits determines where they stand: circumstances, outside pressure, and (ultimately) one's position in a power structure are strongly determinative of one's views.

To test these theories, we combine uniquely insightful datasets on elite and mass opinion. We then employ a new methodological approach to test the Kremlin Cueing model in the absence of direct survey or survey experimental evidence. This represents a novel use of data and the best feasible strategy for testing changes in the views of elite individuals who are normally difficult to study.

Our findings are intriguing, if not entirely surprising. We have presented evidence more consistent with the Kremlin Cueing model of elite opinion formation than with the Common Determinants model. This suggests that elites' attitudes are quite malleable. As one might expect, officials espouse views that are appropriate for where they are now rather than who they are or where they were in the past. That is not to say that elites are entirely dependent on Kremlin cues – we also find some evidence consistent with the Common Determinants model. This comports with the view that, while present circumstances weigh most heavily for determining how one presents his or her attitudes in public, there is also an aspect of demographic determination. Further research is necessary to elucidate the scope conditions for this Kremlin Cueing model and its external validity for other circumstances and issues.

The implications from our finding that the Kremlin Cueing model is on balance more strongly supported by the empirical evidence than the Common Determinants model are several-fold. First, this can help us put changes to Kremlin cadres in context and better understand what may result from them. If our analysis is correct, very little in regime behavior or disposition will change if all that happens is that new, young elites are brought in to replace retiring (or removed) colleagues. Even though, as in the case of current Kremlin Chief of Staff Anton Vaino, the new elites are demographically very different from those they replace, it is likely that their views in the realm of foreign policy will simply update to match their new position of authority in the regime. Hopes of young liberals or Westernizers "infiltrating" Russia's ranks of functionaries are probably misplaced.

Secondly, the relatively substantial malleability we find in both mass and elite attitudes hints that there is potential for change in the disposition of the regime. Optimistically, this means that positive changes to the "cues" that the Kremlin sends out will be quickly and effectively reproduced in the attitudes of the broader elite. In other words, perhaps the leviathan of the Russian regime is not preordained to follow its current course forever, but rather is highly sensitive to change from the top. Such responsiveness (of a sort) on the part of highly placed elites speaks to a certain nimbleness that foreign policy watchers and regime experts would be wise to keep in mind when looking to the future of the regime's attitudes toward the wider world.

Notes

1. This last finding may reflect the tendency of a less-informed public to lump the EU in with a perceived "battle" of the West versus Russia, while elites understood better that the EU was taking a much more conciliatory stance with regard to Ukraine and Russia than others (such as the US). Unfortunately, data limitations prevent us from gaining a finer-grained view in time or in quality of opinion.
2. Due to the modest sample sizes involved and geographical sampling approaches employed by public opinion survey firms, we think it very unlikely that there is any more than miniscule overlap between our empirical mass and elite samples.
3. To reiterate, although for simplicity's sake we describe this as "pressure" to adopt the Kremlin's position, similar arguments could be made for simply social desirability bias to provide the right answer to a pollster or for a genuine desire to mimic the Kremlin's position, just so long as this desire is stronger among certain subsets of the elite or during particular periods of time. Ultimately, the methodological approach we have taken here is not able to distinguish between these different mechanisms, but simply to differentiate between the Common Determinants and Kremlin Cueing explanations.
4. Since Levada Center survey data is only available beginning in 2000, we use only the four most recent waves of the elite survey, from 2004 through 2016.
5. For the analyses in the body of the paper, we run OLS models with this four-category dependent variable, whereas in the online appendix (https://s18798.pcdn.co/fas-joshuatucker/wp-content/uploads/sites/1941/2019/08/Buckley-Tucker-Staring-at-the-West-Online-Appendix.pdf) we dichotomize the dependent variable and run logistic regressions.
6. The goal of this indicator is to capture cohort effects – basically related to whether or not one lived as an adult under Soviet rule – above and beyond age effects. All elites in the four waves of the SRE elite survey we use have a higher education.
7. We do so because all elites in the SRE survey are based in Moscow; restricting the analysis to mass respondents in Moscow therefore ensures that our results are not somehow simply picking up a Moscow vs. non-Moscow effect.
8. The way these experiments work is to randomly ask half the sample their opinion on an issue, and then to randomly ask the other half of the sample their opinion on the issue but include a cue as to the opinion of the party in question, which in this case would be the Kremlin, Putin, United Russia, or something along those lines. See Brader and Tucker (2009) for an example of such an experiment in Russia, and Brader and Tucker (2012b) for a more general introduction to partisan cueing experiments.
9. The results from these training models are available in the online appendix in Table A3 (https://s18798.pcdn.co/fas-joshuatucker/wp-content/uploads/sites/1941/2019/08/Buckley-Tucker-Staring-at-the-West-Online-Appendix.pdf).
10. This prediction procedure will involve some error. But of course, if we predicted mass opinion in this way it would also produce some error. As primarily a function of what is included in the model, the error itself is not inherently that meaningful.
11. To recap the estimation strategy described in the previous section, we evaluate whether a common set of demographic determinants are driving attitudes toward Ukraine, the US, and the EU by first pooling the elite and mass survey data. Estimating an OLS model that includes a full set of interaction terms between an indicator for being an elite respondent and each demographic predictor allows us to examine any differences in personal features that are associated with elites' views toward these countries and, separately, the mass public's views toward these countries.
12. The primary difference is that for attitudes toward Ukraine, internet usage is a strongly significant predictor of differences between the masses and non-core elites while being male is not; the rest of the results are similar.
13. Although not the primary focus of our research, it is interesting to note that some differences between assessments of Ukraine, the US, and the EU emerge. While in many cases the differences are small, three variables – age, education, and internet usage – have much larger correlations with attitudes toward the US and EU than they do with attitudes toward Ukraine. We suspect this is related to Soviet-era legacies of distrust for the West but not Ukraine; this would be an interesting subject for future research.
14. The primary additional insight we gain is that non-core elites' attitudes toward Ukraine were too positively estimated after Crimea, at the same time as their attitudes toward the EU were too negatively estimated. Core elites' views toward Ukraine were even more positively overestimated. These facts lend additional support to the Kremlin Cueing model of elite attitude formation. Elites (especially core elites) receive the strongest cues from the Kremlin on sensitive, politicized, "hot" topics – their opinions of Ukraine were much worse than our demographic model predicted. On more neutral topics such as the EU, where Kremlin cueing is minimal or absent, elites are actually more positive about the entity than our mass-based demographic model would predict. We can only speculate as to why non-core elites are much more pro-EU than are similar individuals in the mass public. Perhaps they are better informed about the true geopolitical positions that the EU is taking, so in the absence of strong Kremlin cueing they end up taking a much more pro-Western position than expected.

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