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ARTICLE



Understanding the sources of anti-Americanism in the Russian elite

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ABSTRACT

This paper applies the model of opinion formation developed by John Zaller to the study of anti-American attitudes in the Russian elite. It examines the relative weight of political predispositions (interests, values, and experiences) versus immediately accessible “considerations” that depend on the flow of information in elite discourse. Based on survey data from 1995–2016, we find that two key political predispositions (identification as a Westernizer or Slavophile and service in the military and security agencies) are highly significant in the Yeltsin period, when debates about Western intentions toward Russia were robust and the Kremlin’s messaging was diverse. By contrast, anti-American sentiment in the elite has become more uniform in the Putin era, which we attribute to an increasingly fervent anti-American narrative on state-controlled television. In a period of clear and unequivocal messaging emanating from Kremlin-controlled media, these signals have surpassed civilizational identity and service in the force structures in importance.

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In his 2018 state of the nation address, Vladimir Putin stunned the world by announcing the development of new nuclear weapons capable of evading American defenses, prompting speculation about the start of a new arms race between the United States and Russia. He phrased this decision as a response to new missile defense systems deployed by “the American machine” despite Russia’s “numerous protests and appeals” (Poslanie 2018). Putin’s statement, however, is just the latest in a litany of grievances against the US that he and his top-level advisors regularly use to explain the deterioration in bilateral relations. Moreover, Putin’s concerns about US intentions are not limited to him. As we will show below, the view that the US is a threat to Russia (what we call “anti-Americanism”) has permeated the broader Russian elite as well, reaching new heights in 2016.

What is driving the fluctuations in anti-American attitudes observed in the Russian elite during the Putin era, and how enduring are these sentiments? Although answers to these queries are needed now more than ever – US-Russia relations are currently more fraught than at any point since the end of the Cold War – most of the scholarly research in this area relates to attitudes about the US held by the Russian mass public. As an initial step forward, this paper applies the model of opinion formation developed by John Zaller (1992) in *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* to the study of anti-American attitudes in the Russian elite. Although Zaller’s model explains the attitudes of non-elites exhibiting varying – and usually low – levels of political awareness, we demonstrate how concepts from this model can illuminate the

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opinions expressed by elites as well. Specifically, we examine the relative weight of political predispositions (interests, values, and experiences) and immediately accessible “considerations” that depend on the flow of information in elite discourse.

In our examination of elite surveys from 1995 to 2016, we find that two key political predispositions (identification as a Westernizer or Slavophile and service in the military and security agencies) are highly significant predictors of anti-Americanism in the Yeltsin period, when debates about Western intentions toward Russia were robust and the Kremlin’s messaging was diverse. By contrast, anti-American sentiment in the elite has become more uniform in the Putin era, which we attribute to an increasingly fervent anti-American narrative on state-controlled television. In a period of clear and unequivocal messaging emanating from Kremlin-controlled media, these signals have surpassed civilizational identity and service in the force structures in importance.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we review the extant literature on the factors shaping attitudes toward the US held by Russia’s elite and mass public and summarize the approach taken by Zaller with respect to the formation of mass public opinion in general. Second, we describe our data and methodology, including the operationalization of our “anti-Americanism” variable and independent variables. Third, we present the results of a probit model estimating the impact of various factors on negative views of the US held by Russian elites. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings and outlining an agenda for further research.

A new approach to studying anti-Americanism

Previous research on mass attitudes in Russia is somewhat inconclusive about the relationship between demographic factors and skepticism about or mistrust of the US. In a series of nationally representative surveys of Russian youth, Mendelson and Gerber (2008) find that gender, age, education, residence, and ethnicity are important predictors of anti-American views. Using an anti-Americanism scale as their dependent variable, the authors discover that “highly educated males living in Moscow are actually the most anti-American within Russia’s youth” (Mendelson and Gerber 2008, 140). Additionally, younger respondents, non-Muslims, and ethnic Russians are more negative toward the United States (Mendelson and Gerber 2008, 141–142). Yet when examining the views of the Russian mass public as a whole in 2011–2012, Gerber (2015) concludes that “[t]he regression results do not show many systematic relationships between demographic traits, socioeconomic measures, and attitudes toward the United States.” Although he finds that with regard to a preponderance (but not all) of the questions that constitute his scales, women and higher-income individuals are more favorably disposed toward the US, he also notes that across the board, “[a]ge has minimal and inconsistent significant effects” (Gerber 2015, 107).

If the factors driving anti-American views in the mass public are not clear cut, the correlates of anti-Americanism among Russian elites are even more elusive. William Zimmerman (2002, 2005) makes the most headway along these lines by identifying an important ideational basis of anti-American sentiments. He utilizes the following survey question to probe Russian elites about their openness to learning from and applying the experience of Western states to Russia: “Some people think that Russia should follow the path of developed countries and assimilate the experience and achievements of Western civilization. Other people, taking into account the history and geographic position of Russia at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, think that it should follow a unique Russian path. Which of these statements is closer to your point of view?” Based on data from 1999, Zimmerman finds that with respect to perceptions of a threat to Russia emanating from either the United States, NATO expansion, or “NATO intervention in a European country to mute ethnic conflict,” the “major divide” is between those favoring a unique path for Russia and those desiring to emulate the experience of Western civilization (Zimmerman 2002, 178–182). Although others have detected a parallel rise in negative attitudes toward the US and a desire to seek a “unique path” for Russia’s development in mass survey data (Zvonovsky 2005, 102–106), Zimmerman is the

first to apply this civilizational concept to explaining anti-US attitudes in Russia's elite stratum using survey research.

We contend that these research trajectories can be merged by using the model of opinion formation developed by John Zaller (1992) in the study of elite attitudes. As Adam Berinsky (2017, 317) points out, surveys are no longer seen as revealing "preferences over political choices and policies generated through some sort of 'file drawer' model – a fixed stance on a given issue that people call from memory when prompted by the interviewer." Rather, Berinsky continues, Zaller's "Receive-Accept-Sample" (RAS) model "argues that individuals answer survey questions off the top of their head by 'averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient to them' due to their personal characteristics and political experiences at the time of the survey interview." In the case of anti-American attitudes held by Russian elites, the empirical studies cited above explore only the impact of *political predispositions*, i.e. "the critical intervening variable between the communications people encounter in the mass media, on one side, and their statements of political preferences, on the other" and which are shaped by such factors as "lifetime experiences," "social and economic location," and "inherited or acquired personality factors and tastes" (Zaller 1992, 23). Far fewer – if any – empirical studies of Russian elite attitudes demonstrate the relevance of Zaller's *immediately accessible "considerations"* that depend centrally on the flow of information. In this paper, we compare the impact of these two sets of factors on the views of Russian elites, devoting particular attention to the effect of state-sponsored messaging on levels of anti-Americanism. Although Zaller's focus is on *mass* public opinion and emphasizes "the role of elite-supplied information in shaping mass opinions" (Zaller 1992, 23), we contend that his general theoretical framework is applicable to understanding elite attitudes as well.

Data and methodology

To assess the role of political predispositions versus immediately accessible considerations in producing anti-American sentiments, we utilize the Survey of Russian Elites – a seven-wave series of interviews with Moscow-based foreign policy elites that extends from 1993 to 2016 (Zimmerman, Rivera, and Kalinin 2019). The samples consist of high-ranking individuals employed in a broad range of institutions in the Russian Federation – the media, state-owned enterprises, private businesses, scientific and educational institutions with strong international connections, the executive branch of the government, the legislature, and the military and security agencies. In all seven waves of the survey, individuals were selected on the basis of positional criteria using a quota sample. Each survey includes between 180 and 320 respondents, for a total of 1,664 individuals. (Complete information about the survey methodology can be found in the introduction to this special issue.) We drop the 1993 survey wave from our analyses because one of the survey questions foundational to our analyses (on civilizational identity) was not asked in 1993.

Efforts to measure levels of "anti-Americanism" – the dependent variable in our analysis – necessitate careful consideration, since researchers caution that Russian attitudes toward the US cannot be conceptualized in a simplistic dichotomous fashion. As Gerber (2015, 101) writes, "Russians' attitudes are complex, belying sweeping generalizations about the Russian public as either 'pro-American' or 'anti-American.'" He highlights "the importance of considering different dimensions of views toward the United States rather than relying on a single measure as broadly indicative" (Gerber 2015, 107). Although we agree with Gerber on this point, the option of creating a multi-dimensional measure of anti-Americanism was not available to us, since many of the relevant questions were not asked in all waves of the survey. We therefore decided to use the following survey question as our dependent variable: "Do you think that the US represents a threat to Russian national security?" The red line in the online appendix (Figure A1) tracks the distribution of responses over time. Three points are clear: first, there are two marked dips in levels of anti-Americanism (in 2004 and especially in 2012); second, each decline is followed by a greater increase; and third, there is a dramatic difference between the threat perceptions expressed in 2016 and those recorded two

decades earlier. Whereas 50.6% of elites agreed that the United States constituted a threat to Russia in 1995, fully 79.8% of respondents expressed that view in 2016.¹

Although this single “US as a threat” question is used as a measure of anti-Americanism in several key studies on this topic (Zimmerman et al. 2013, 30–34; Sokolov et al. 2018), we nevertheless assess the validity of our indicator by comparing it to a threat scale created from two additional questions. The first asks respondents “how friendly or hostile [they] think [the US] is toward Russia today: very friendly, rather friendly, neutral, rather hostile, or very hostile,” where responses of “very friendly” were coded as one and responses of “very hostile” as five. The second question requires individuals to assess the threat of “the growth of US military power compared to that of Russia” on a five-point scale, where one means “the absence of danger” and five means “the utmost danger.”² Figure A1 compares the percentage of elites stating that the United States is a threat to Russian national security (red line) to the mean level of threat in the two-item additive scale (blue line). Although the two lines diverge more noticeably in the most recent waves of the survey, the close relationship between them over time is clear. In addition, the point-biserial correlation (used when one variable contains interval or ratio data and the other is dichotomous) is positive and statistically significant (0.58, $p < 0.0001$). We therefore conclude that our principal measure of anti-Americanism – whether or not respondents believe that the US is a threat to Russia – possesses sufficient validity as an indicator of anti-Americanism to serve as the dependent variable in our analyses.

In addition to our dependent variable (anti-Americanism) and the independent variables of interest discussed in the next section (Slavophile orientation, military service, and disproportionate exposure to state-run media programming), we include several demographic control variables that previous survey research on either the Russian elite or mass public has shown to be correlated with attitudes toward the US. We control for gender based on Gerber’s study of mass attitudes (Gerber 2015, 107), which finds that “women view the United States more favorably than men based on four of [their] six measures.” Although Gerber (2015, 107) reports that “[a]ge has minimal and inconsistent significant effects” on attitudes toward the US and Zimmerman (2002, 172–174) shows that age is a comparatively weak and inconsistent discriminator of foreign policy attitudes, we nevertheless include a control for the respondent’s age. The variable takes a value of one if the respondent was born in 1960 or later and zero for all other years, which roughly distinguishes between those who worked mainly in the post-*perestroika* era and those whose professional careers were largely established before the onset of *perestroika*. In line with the research of Mendelson and Gerber (2008, Figure 4) and Gerber (2015, Table 2), we also control for ethnicity. We created a dummy variable (Non-Russian), in which respondents were assigned a value of one if they gave any answer other than “Russian” in response to the question, “What nationality do you consider yourself?”³ (Summary statistics for all independent variables are provided in Table A1 in the online appendix.)

In addition to these standard control variables, we also include a control for employment in the state sector in order to pinpoint those individuals whose livelihoods are most dependent on the good graces of the Kremlin. Our rationale is as follows: cue-taking is a product of both the strength of informational signals and the extent to which one’s personal welfare depends on responding to important cues properly. In his essay on Russian anti-Americanism, Shlapentokh (2011, 875 and 887) likewise emphasizes how “the elite take their cues from those at the Kremlin” and how “[f]or the Kremlin, one’s attitude toward this [anti-American ideology] is the primary test of loyalty toward the regime.” We therefore create a variable (Kremlin-Dependent) to identify those respondents who were employed in either the executive branch, the legislative branch, or a state-owned enterprise.⁴

Finally, we account for the likelihood that the international context affects the expression of anti-US sentiments in Russia. Indeed, some of the surveys were conducted during critical moments of tension between Russia and the West.⁵ According to Zimmerman et al. (2013, 30), “Heightened nationalism and, consequently, animosity toward potential enemies during times of wars and heightened international tension are a well-documented phenomenon,” a finding that they observe in several studies of Russian mass attitudes. Levada Center polling also shows this quite

well (see Lipman, Kachkaeva, and Poyker 2018, Figure 7–2). To isolate the effects of external factors, we run separate regression analyses for each survey wave.

Influences on anti-Americanism: political predispositions and immediately accessible considerations

Following Zaller's lead, we conceptualize anti-American survey responses as a product of both elites' political predispositions (interests, values, and experiences) and the immediately accessible considerations that come to mind when answering survey questions. The key political predispositions of interest to us are civilizational identity and the socializing impact of service in the military and security agencies. With regard to the former, much ink has been spilled over the question of whether Russia should follow its own "unique path" or, as Peter the Great recommended almost three centuries ago, adopt European institutions and customs. The notion of "a Russian third way that rejects the European model" is central to "Eurasianism" – an ideology that, as Marlène Laruelle writes, "is updating the traditional Slavophile ideology supposed to demonstrate the national specificity of Russia and the organic nature of its empire ..." (Laruelle 2004, 115–117). This debate over Russia's national identity and place in the world is the focus of much contemporary scholarship (e.g. Raskin 2007; Bassin, Glebov, and Laruelle 2015; Makarychev and Braghiroli 2016; Katzenstein and Weygandt 2017). Clunan (2009, 60), for instance, identifies five "main national self-images – Western, statist, national restorationist, neocommunist, and Slavophile" that "were in play in the Russian political discourse during the 1990s."

Although Clunan (2009, 74) contends in her chapter on the 1990s that "Russian political elites cannot easily be divided into two coherent camps," we focus on a binary "Slavophile-Westernizer" dimension for two reasons. First, the scholarship shows that "[t]he West in its general and particular forms is the primary significant other for Russian political elites" (Clunan 2009, 79). Or as Andrei Tsygankov (2016, 146) writes:

Since the Soviet disintegration, Russians have been in the process of intense discussions of what constitutes their system of values and whether it should be described as a civilization or a culture sufficiently distinct from values shared in other parts of the world. Over time, Russia moved from initial attempts to borrow and benefit from the West to maneuvering in a more isolationist direction.

Second, and more important, is that this particular split over Russia's national identity has been shown to be correlated with elites' attitudes toward foreign policy during the post-communist period. As noted earlier, Zimmerman (2002, 182) argues that positions on the so-called Slavophile-Westernizer question in the 1999 elite survey form "the major divide" between those who perceived a threat to Russia from the United States, NATO expansion, or NATO intervention in a European country to mute ethnic conflict and those who did not.

The magnitude of this relationship, however, has been shown to vary over time. In a follow-up study, Zimmerman (2005, 196–197) writes that between 1999 and 2004, "a homogenization in perspectives [between Slavophiles and Westernizers] had taken place," which was observed in "a battery of questions pertaining to East-West relations and the preferred relationship between Russia and Belarus and Russia and Ukraine." In other words, although "a substantial gap persisted in 2004" between Slavophiles and Westernizers on a range of security-related issues, that gap had narrowed. For instance, if the difference between Slavophiles and Westernizers on whether Russia should achieve a balance of military power with the West was 35 percentage points in 1999, the difference was half that – or 17 percentage points – in 2004 (Zimmerman 2005, Table, 7). Although we run the risk of simplifying the rich, nuanced, and animated debate over Russian national identity by focusing on a single dimension – and using a closed-ended survey question to measure it, no less – we nevertheless believe that the explanatory power of this Slavophile-Westernizer divide over the entire span of the dataset is worthy of evaluation.⁶

To assess whether civilizational identity as defined above is a predictor of US threat perceptions, we separate respondents based on whether they prefer that Russia “follow the path of developed countries and assimilate the experience and achievements of Western civilization” or, conversely, “follow a unique Russian path.” We created a dummy variable (Slavophile) that assigns a value of one to respondents who chose the latter option and zero to those who selected the former.⁷ We expect to find so-called “Slavophiles” expressing more concern about security threats emanating from the US than “Westernizers.”

Figure 1 displays the percentage of respondents falling into these two categories for all survey years between 1995 and 2016.⁸ The graph reveals that elite opinion on this issue is remarkably stable over time in the aggregate. Indeed, the percentage of responses in the two categories never deviates by more than six percentage points from the starting values of 41.1% and 52.8% recorded in 1995. This stability is all the more noteworthy in the face of numerous flashpoints (five of which are displayed in the figure) that sowed division in the US-Russia relationship over the span of the survey, culminating in bilateral relations that are now the most adversarial they have been since the end of the Cold War.⁹ Despite the peaks and valleys in the relationship, the survey data register only a sliver of change in the overall distribution of responses to the Slavophile-Westernizer survey question. Apparently, the low points have affected the overall distribution of Russian elite attitudes on this issue *only at the margins*. This lends credence to our operating assumption that the Slavophile-Westernizer orientation can be conceptualized as one of the key types of political predispositions discussed by Zaller: “political values,” or “domain-specific organizing principles, such as economic individualism, where each value dimension lends structure to public opinions within a particular domain” (Zaller 1992, 26).

The second political predisposition analyzed in this article is professional employment in Russia’s military or security agencies. Although the impact of this factor on attitudes toward the West is less grounded in survey research than that of the Slavophile-Westernizer dimension, there are ample theoretical grounds to believe that one’s service in the force structures (i.e. experience as a *silovik*)¹⁰

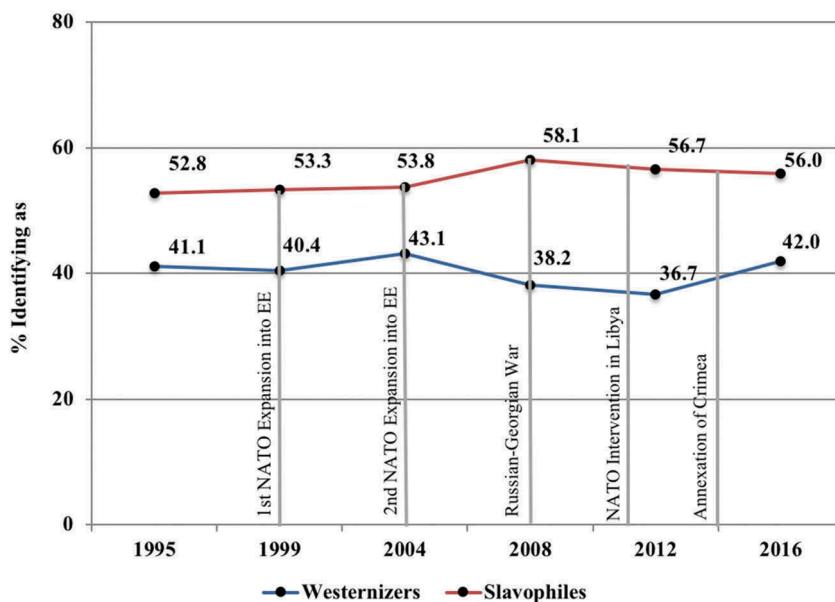


Figure 1. Distribution of Slavophiles and Westernizers in the Russian elite, 1995–2016.

Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 1993–2016.

Note: “Don’t know” responses and refusals are not shown.

Question Wording: “Some people think that Russia should follow the path of developed countries and assimilate the experience and achievements of Western civilization. Other people, taking into account the history and geographic position of Russia at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, think that it should follow a unique Russian path. Which of these statements is closer to your point of view?”

is correlated with a heightened concern about the capabilities and intentions of the West. For example, Kryshtanovskaya and White (2005, 1073) expound on what they call the “*silovik* ideology” in the following terms:

The state is the basis of society; therefore, the state should be strong. A strong state controls everything. A strong state should also control the economy, at least its natural resources, which cannot be allowed to remain in private hands. Pluralism of opinions is dangerous as it undermines the state from within. There is still an external enemy – the West – and this means that a strong army is needed, and a powerful armaments industry. [T]he aim of Russia itself should be to be feared, as only those who are feared are respected.

Moreover, they add, these ideas constitute a “national project” that *siloviki* regard as having “domestic and foreign opponents. Its external enemies are all who do not wish [for] or even fear a strong Russia, the USA in particular. Internal enemies, by extension, are those who support the West and share its values.” Similar judgments are expressed by Albats (2004), Bremmer and Charap (2006–2007, 89), and Taylor (2011, 62–64), among others.

This presumed connection between a background in the force structures and a hostile attitude toward the West is not limited to the scholarly research on the *siloviki* in contemporary Russia.¹¹ Along with journalists, “[n]umerous public figures and policymakers similarly attribute a xenophobic – or at least anti-American – worldview to Russia’s *siloviki*” (Rivera and Rivera 2018, 226). To take one example, after Security Council chief Nikolai Patrushev alleged that foreign websites fuel Russian protests, an opposition activist opined that “Putin and his ruling elite ... have not been able to get rid of their KGB mindset. Even while they enjoy the benefits of Western luxury goods and services, they continue to hate the West, consider it an alien and dangerous culture and harbor an almost instinctive fear of a menacing threat from abroad” (Yashin 2012).

Extant survey data suggest that these statements are more than just informed suppositions. In one early post-communist study – a 1994 survey of 615 Russian military officers – 32% of respondents named the US as an enemy of Russia, behind only the three Baltic states and Afghanistan (SINUS Moskva 1994, Table 787-E02). In contrast, a companion study of 103 civilian elites with expertise in foreign policy conducted two years later reports that although the US topped the list, a smaller share of respondents (22%) viewed that country as an enemy (SINUS Moskva and VTsIOM 1996, 27–28). Zimmerman (2002, Table 5.6) likewise reports significant inter-group differences. In 1995 and 1999, military and security officers were more inclined to agree that the US was a threat and that Russia faced a security threat from the growth of US military power, NATO expansion, and (in 1999 only) military intervention by NATO in ethnic conflicts in Europe than *both* those he terms “civilian liberal democrats” and all other civilian elites in the sample.¹²

Hence, to estimate the impact of service in Russia’s armed forces and security organs on anti-American attitudes, we include a dummy variable in our model (Active Military) to identify respondents who belong to the military-security subgroup.¹³ Also, since previous survey research shows that high-ranking *siloviki* are also more likely than other elites to agree that Russia is a distinct civilization and/or should follow its own unique path (Gudkov, Dubin, and Levada 2007, 105–106; Afanas’ev 2009, 112), inclusion of this variable allows us to estimate separately the impact of a Slavophile orientation and service in the military and security agencies on anti-American views. Note, however, that only active-duty military and security officers are included in this subgroup; as such, the variable does not capture individuals who had previously served in one of Russia’s “force structures” but are now in civilian employ.¹⁴

If the aforementioned traits can be conceptualized as fundamental, enduring factors that predispose individuals to accept or reject the political communications they receive, the “considerations” discussed by Zaller are much more fluid. The latter are “a compound of cognition and affect,” and “[i]ndividuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them,” i.e. “on the basis of whatever considerations are accessible ‘at the top of the head’” (Zaller 1992, 40 and 49). Furthermore, Zaller’s “accessibility axiom” proposes that “[t]he more recently a consideration has been called into mind or thought

about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use" (Zaller 1992, 48).

In keeping with Zaller's theoretical framework, we examine the role of political messages – specifically, the view of the US that is transmitted by the Kremlin through state-run media outlets – in producing the survey results under examination in this article. Numerous works cover Putin's takeover of television in Russia (e.g. Baker and Glasser 2005, Ch. 4; Lipman, Kachkaeva, and Poyker 2018). Likewise, Putin's suspicion of the West, and the US in particular, is well-documented (e.g. Hill and Gaddy 2013, Ch. 12; Taylor 2018, esp. 15–18). And finally, observers describe the (often colorful) anti-Western messaging that has become standard fare on Russia's state-controlled news outlets (e.g. Pomerantsev 2014, 228–234; Shteyngart 2015; Feinberg 2017). To cite one vivid example, on the state-run news program *Vesti nedeli*, host Dmitrii Kiselev (2014) once attributed to the US the following scheme for subjugating the world: "At first the US itself creates the centers of terrorism, fans the flames, and nurtures the cutthroats. And then when they get out of control and the flame bursts out of the furnace, the US launches a crusade that turns into genocide."

We combine these three elements (Kremlin control of national television stations, Putin's negative view of the US, and the anti-Western fare that is commonplace on Russia's airwaves) to formulate two expectations. First, as anti-Western and especially anti-US messaging has permeated Russia's media and political landscape, we hypothesize that unfavorable attitudes toward the West will increasingly constitute the "considerations" that are immediately accessible to elites when responding to survey questions. Second, for those individuals who are *more* exposed to news on state-run television (while being *less* exposed to countervailing messaging), anti-US considerations will be more accessible; hence, individuals with lopsided exposure to anti-US programming should be more likely to express anti-American views.

To investigate these hypotheses, we created a variable to approximate respondents' exposure to state-controlled messaging. In each of the survey years, respondents were queried about the frequency of their news consumption from various sources.¹⁵ We constructed a State-Run Media dummy variable where respondents received a value of one if they reported learning about events in the world from television every day or almost every day *and* did not also listen to foreign radio broadcasts every day or almost every day.¹⁶ In this way, we identify those who relied primarily on the Kremlin-dominated airwaves for their news and were not exposed to competing narratives from foreign news sources on a regular basis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the fourth row of Table A1 in the online appendix shows a decline over time in the percentage of respondents relying on state-sponsored television for information, which reflects – in part – an increasing percentage of elites turning to online sources for their news from 2008 on.¹⁷ If in 1999, a high of 86.7% of elites got their daily news over the past week from television – while not also tuning in to foreign news sources – in 2016, only 28.8% reported doing so.

Results: predispositions down, considerations up

Because our dependent variable is binary, we construct a multivariate probit model for anti-American attitudes, in which the dependent variable is coded as one for respondents who agreed that the United States is a threat to Russian national security and zero if they disagreed. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, we present the average marginal effects of the explanatory factors. Since all of our independent variables are dichotomous, the average marginal effect of a given attribute is the average change in the estimated likelihood that a respondent will view the US as a threat when the respondent possesses the attribute (and when all other independent variables are held at their actual values in the dataset).

Table 1 displays the results of the probit analysis. In the two survey waves conducted during the Yeltsin period (1995 and 1999), we observe that the *political predispositions* included in the model – respondents' civilizational identity (Slavophile) and service in the military or security agencies (Active Military) – are relatively powerful predictors of anti-Americanism. In 1995, these

Table 1. Average marginal effects of variables on elites' anti-American attitudes, 1995–2016.

Variable	1995 (1)	1999 (2)	2004 (3)	2008 (4)	2012 (5)	2016 (6)
Male	0.21 (0.15)	-0.02 (0.10)	-0.14* (0.07)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.10 (0.09)	0.05 (0.06)
Born in 1960 or Later	-0.11 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	0.15* (0.08)	-0.10* (0.05)
Non-Russian	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.19** (0.08)	-0.08 (0.09)	0.04 (0.08)	-0.17 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.07)
State-Run Media	-0.01 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.02 (0.07)	0.16** (0.07)	-0.08 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.06)
Kremlin-Dependent	0.04 (0.07)	0.17*** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)	0.02 (0.08)	0.23*** (0.05)
Active Military	0.18** (0.09)	0.34*** (0.05)	0.01 (0.09)	0.12 (0.08)	0.15 (0.11)	0.01 (0.07)
Slavophile	0.50*** (0.07)	0.38*** (0.06)	0.17*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.06)	0.14* (0.08)	0.19*** (0.06)
N	162	206	288	225	186	233

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 1993–2016.

Notes: Probit model in which all independent variables are dichotomous and missing data ("don't know" responses and refusals) take a value of zero. However, respondents with missing data for the date of birth and Slavophile questions are excluded from the analysis.

Question Wording: The dependent variable is coded as one for those who answered yes and zero for those who answered no to the following question: "Do you think that the US represents a threat to Russian national security?" Missing data are excluded.

variables are the only two that are significant at the .05 level, and both are in the expected direction. In particular, serving as an officer in either the military or security agencies increases the average estimated probability of viewing the US as a threat by 18%. Even more noteworthy, adopting a "Slavophile" position (i.e. asserting that Russia should follow its own path rather than turn toward the West) raises that probability by almost 50% on average. The average marginal effects of these political predispositions are statistically and substantively significant even when controlling for demographic factors.

As column 2 of Table 1 shows, four years later, in 1999, the number of statistically significant variables expands, but political predispositions still appear to be the primary predictor of elite attitudes toward the US. As in 1995, the two political predispositions of interest still perform well: the estimated average increase in the probability that a respondent will view the US as a threat is 34% for military service and 38% for a Slavophile orientation. These results suggest that during the Yeltsin period, underlying predispositions (i.e. the "stable, individual-level traits that regulate the acceptance or non-acceptance of the political communications the person receives" [Zaller 1992, 22]) were important predictors of anti-American views. It is likely that since narratives about the US-Russian relationship were diverse, no single source of messaging constituted the "immediately accessible considerations" upon which elites could draw when answering foreign policy survey questions. (It should also be noted that the probability of viewing the US as a threat is 17% higher, on average, for respondents employed in more Kremlin-dependent positions in 1999 and 19% lower for those with non-Russian ethnicities.)

In contrast to the Yeltsin era, data from the four Putin-era surveys spanning the years from 2004 to 2016 reveal a weaker relationship between political predispositions and anti-American views. As Table 1 shows, military service is not a statistically significant predictor of anti-American attitudes in any of the four of the waves after 1999. Although the Slavophile variable is still an important predictor (and indeed, is the only one that is statistically significant across all waves of the survey¹⁸), its impact is attenuated in the Putin-era waves. This is somewhat surprising given what Tsygankov (2013) calls Putin's "civilizational turn" after returning to the presidency for a third term in 2012, with its emphasis on "Russia [as] a distinct civilization, the core of a special 'Russian world' ..." (Trenin 2014, 9).

The diminished importance of the Slavophile and Active Military variables between 1995 and 2016 is also displayed in [Figure 2](#), which compares the size of effects of several key independent variables. (The dots are point estimates and the bars represent 95% confidence intervals.) Whereas at the high point of its influence (in 1995), believing that Russia should follow its own unique path increased the average estimated probability of viewing the US as a threat by 50%, by 2016 this impact had declined by more than half – to 19%. The confidence intervals for the point estimates do not overlap, so we are on solid ground in believing that the variable's impact has indeed decreased. (See [Figure C1](#) in the online appendix for more on the Slavophile variable's performance over time.) The average marginal effect of the Active Military variable also falls over this 20-year period – from 18 percentage points in 1995 to a statistically insignificant 1 percentage point in 2016.

In contrast, [Figure 2](#) shows the enhanced importance of cue-taking in producing anti-American survey responses in the Putin era. The average marginal effect of being dependent on the Kremlin increased between 1995 and 2016 – from 4% to 23%. Individuals whose professions were linked to the Kremlin were more likely to express a wary stance toward the US in 2016 than were active-duty military officers. This Kremlin-Dependent variable must be interpreted with caution, however, since its average marginal effect was also substantively and statistically significant in two previous periods: 1999 and 2004. It may well be that those closest to the seat of power are not only the most responsive to Kremlin cues, but may also for other reasons evaluate threats to Russian security emanating from the US as graver.¹⁹ As Kirill Zhirkov (2019) writes about the two major constituent dimensions of militant internationalism, “anti-Americanism was more volatile [than militarism], as members of the Russian elite apparently responded to high-profile events concerning the relationship between the two countries.” Even though we have tried to control for the effect of real-world events on our results by running the probit analyses separately by year, the interaction of international crises and developments with the Kremlin-Dependent variable is an avenue for future research.

A sizeable increase in the impact of the State-Run Media variable in 2008 is also apparent. In sharp contrast to the Yel'tsin era's more contentious and diverse elite-level discourse, a uniformity in state-sponsored messaging during the Putin years seems to have fostered suspicion about the

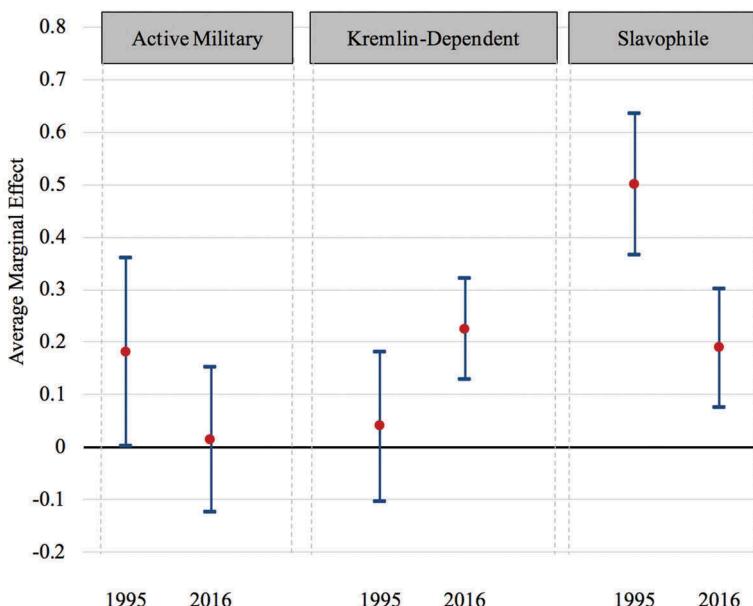


Figure 2. Comparison of size of effects of variables on elites' anti-American attitudes, 1995 and 2016.

Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 1993–2016.

Note: Estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

US among the Russian mass public. As Denis Volkov (2015) writes, "by the mid-2000s the Kremlin made anti-Americanism a key component of its propaganda campaign." This "propaganda model" produced the desired effect: "In the mid-2000s," Volkov explains, "the US and NATO rose to the top of the list of 'Russia's enemies' and the US was listed among those states 'most hostile towards Russia.'" The impact of Putin's anti-American narrative can be inferred from the first of our elite surveys conducted after Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution – an event that had a profound effect on Putin's attitudes toward the US (Myers 2015, Ch. 15; Taylor 2018, 6, 17–18). As column 4 of Table 1 shows, the State-Run Media variable is the only variable (other than civilizational identity) to emerge as a substantively and statistically significant predictor of anti-American sentiments in 2008.²⁰ Yet by 2012, the cumulative effect of Medvedev's four years as president – during which, as Lipman, Kachkaeva, and Poyker (2018, 165 and 169) write, "the control over media content partially softened" and "the technology of the Internet and social networks fused with the broadening worldviews of modernized urbanites" – resulted once again in exposure to state-run media producing no elevated likelihood of viewing the US as a threat, as seen in column 5 of Table 1.²¹

The final wave of the survey in 2016 (displayed in column 6 of Table 1) reinforces our conclusion that by this time, the explanatory power of political predispositions had noticeably declined. As already mentioned, service in Russia's force structures is unimportant as a predictor of anti-American attitudes and the average marginal effect of a Slavophile orientation remains attenuated. Logically, then, one might expect that the combination of heightened tensions between the United States and Russia in 2016 and the two years of "increasingly strident propaganda" on television following the February 2014 events in Ukraine (Lipman, Kachkaeva, and Poyker 2018, 171) would result in the State-Run Media variable once again being a strong predictor of anti-US attitudes in that year, just as we observed in 2008. Instead, the 2016 data reveal an insignificant average marginal effect of the media consumption variable, but a positive and statistically significant marginal effect of the Kremlin-Dependent variable. In that year, highly placed individuals in the executive branch, the legislature, and state-owned enterprises exhibited a record 23% higher estimated probability of viewing the US as a threat, on average, than elites employed in other sectors.

We suggest that by 2016, the Putin government's state-sponsored messaging had become so pervasive in the national discourse that most respondents, not just those who consumed state-sponsored news and refrained from seeking out counter-messaging from at least one foreign source, had fallen in line behind the Kremlin narrative, at least in this issue area. Therefore, the media variable is no longer significant; rather, those most reliant on the Kremlin – individuals whose livelihoods depend on reading and following its cues – were by that point much more inclined to characterize the US as a hostile power when asked. Interestingly, using a different model but the same data source, Buckley and Tucker (2019) also find that elite opinion formation with respect to Ukraine, the United States, and the European Union during the Putin era is consistent with their Kremlin Cueing model, as evidenced by the "shifts we see in the patriotic, Kremlin-dominated post-[Crimean] annexation period and among core elites who are close to the government."

Conclusion

In this article, we argue that John Zaller's seminal work on mass public opinion is of value for understanding views expressed by Russian elites and, in particular, for explaining the sources of their anti-American attitudes in the post-communist era. Through an examination of elite survey data from 1995–2016, we find that two political predispositions were reasonably predictive of anti-Americanism during the Yeltsin years, when debates about Western intentions toward Russia were robust and the Kremlin's messaging was diverse. By contrast, the consolidation of media control under Putin has led to the diminution of visible elite discord. Not surprisingly, therefore, anti-American sentiment in the elite has become more uniform in the Putin era, which we attribute to an increasingly fervent anti-American narrative on state-controlled television. In a period of clear

and unequivocal messaging emanating from Kremlin-controlled media, these signals have surpassed civilizational identity and service in the force structures in importance. Although the effects are not uniform across all the Putin-era years, our main point is that political predispositions lost much of their explanatory power once the relatively open elite discourse of the Yeltsin years was replaced by a consistent state-sponsored message about the external environment.

Future research on this topic might progress along two lines. First, researchers might consider the interaction between demographic factors and exposure to media content produced by state-run outlets. Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017) explore various individual-level traits of post-communist citizens that either *intensify* the impact of exposure to communism or strengthen *resistance* to the socializing efforts of communist regimes. Resistance factors are also analyzed by Geddes and Zaller (1989) in their research on opinion formation in authoritarian regimes. Exploring these types of interaction effects on Russian elite attitudes might be a productive avenue for future research.

Another line of inquiry would be a detailed exploration of the content of the messaging aired on state-run television and its relationship to the expression of anti-American views. In other words, which narratives are most likely to elicit unfavorable attitudes toward the US? As Zaller (1992, 40) points out, “[c]onsiderations ... are a compound of cognition and affect,” so it might be worth identifying the narratives that elicit strong feelings. One emotion worthy of investigation is that of *ressentiment* (resentment), which, as Taylor (2018, 33) writes, “is all the rage among Russian scholars of national identity and elite and public opinion.” As Ponarin and Sokolov (2015) state, *ressentiment* has its roots in Friedrich Nietzsche’s work and was adapted by Liah Greenfeld, who “says that *ressentiment* can occur not only individually but also nationally.” This emotion appears when “one group takes another group as an example or model, but then feels angry and frustrated when it is unable to meet the standards, whether objectively or subjectively, of the exemplary unit” (Taylor 2018, 32). Applying this concept to post-communist Russia, Zimmerman et al. (2013, 35) contend that Russia’s inability to replicate the Western model of development and the difficulties associated with its post-communist transition laid the foundation for a “rise in mistrust and hostility toward the United States.”

Related ideas are also advanced by Vladimir Gel’man (2013), who sees in Russia a “mediocrity syndrome” brought about by a loss of status and global leadership. This syndrome is manifested in “frustration and a conspicuous assertiveness” on the part of many Russian elites and ordinary citizens, as well as a rejection of Western ideas, values, and institutions. Along the same lines, Volkov (2015) writes that “Russian anti-Americanism is rooted in the demise of groundless, unrealistic hopes in the 1990s – specifically, the hope that the new Russia would be unconditionally accepted into the core of the world’s leading states despite failing to meet Western political and economic standards.”²²

Researchers might use elite survey research to further our understanding of these ideas. For instance, they might profitably explore whether *ressentiment* is a core driver of Westernism and Slavophilism, as Olga Malinova (2014) contends it has been since the mid-nineteenth century, or is rather a “top-of-the-head” consideration that elicits anti-US responses in the moment. Although survey data analyzed by Sokolov et al. (2018, 545) lead them to conclude that “disillusionment was the *initial driver* of anti-American sentiment” in Russia as early as the mid-1990s (first among the elite, who then “unleashed mass anti-Americanism in order to secure its political power and shift the blame for political and economic failures from itself”), it would be fruitful to analyze the extent to which consumption of state-sponsored news by elites fueled and deepened their feelings of *ressentiment* once Putin had consolidated control of the airwaves. If it did to a significant extent, this would suggest that elites’ anti-US sentiments may wax and wane somewhat depending on the extent to which the news cycle emphasizes Russia’s status reversal in the post-communist period.

Notes

1. The percentage was even lower in 1993, with 26.0% of elites in agreement. Despite differences in question wording, negative views of the US expressed by the Russian mass public exhibited the same spike following Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea. When asked to choose the five countries most unfriendly and hostile to

Russia, the percentage naming the US rose from 38% in 2013 to 69%, 73%, and 72% in 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively (Levada-Tsentr 2016). For more, see also Smeltz, Wojtowicz, and Goncharov (2018, 2–3) and Lipman, Kachkaeva, and Poyker (2018, Figure 7.2). For an opposing view – that there were only modest shifts in mass attitudes toward the West between May 2013 and November 2014, in part “because Russian nationalism was already strong before the crisis in Ukraine emerged” – see Alexseev and Hale (2015, 1–3).

2. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.47. See Rivera et al. (2016, 8–12) for a fuller discussion of the two survey questions.
3. Question wording for standard demographic control variables:● Male: [interviewer records] “Mark gender of respondent without asking,” with the key being 1. Male and 2. Female. Responses of male are coded as one; all others are coded as zero.● Born in 1960 or Later: “Could you please tell me in what year you were born?” Responses of 1960 or later are coded as one; all other years are coded as zero.● Non-Russian: “What nationality do you consider yourself?” All responses except Russian are coded as one; all others are coded as zero.
4. Question wording: [interviewer records] “To which elite group does the individual belong?,” with the key being (for 2008–2016) 1. Media, 2. Science/Education, 3. Private Business, 4. State-Owned Enterprises, 5. Executive Branch/Ministries, 6. Legislative Branch (those involved with foreign policy issues), and 9. Military/Security Agencies. Responses of 4, 5, and 6 are coded as one; all others are coded as zero.
5. 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. For an elaboration of how these concepts can be investigated using survey research, see Henry Hale’s exploration (2019) of what identifying Russia as a European civilization means, as well as Rivera (2004, 2016a). See also the discussion by Vladimir Shlapentokh (2001, 18), who contends that “among those Russians who ‘reject’ the Western model, many of them simply do not believe that it is possible to implement it in the Russian context. In this case, it is not a matter of personal disapproval, but of practical consideration.”
7. Question wording: “Some people think that Russia should follow the path of developed countries and assimilate the experience and achievements of Western civilization. Other people, taking into account the history and geographic position of Russia at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, think that it should follow a unique Russian path. Which of these statements is closer to your point of view?,” with the key being 1. Russia should follow the path of developed countries and assimilate the experience and achievements of Western civilization, and 2. Taking into account the history and geographic position of Russia at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, it should follow a unique Russian path. (Between 1995 and 2008, the first part of the question included additional language, which is italicized below: “Some people think that Russia should follow the path of developed countries, *integrate into the world community*, and assimilate the experience and achievements of Western civilization.”)
8. A separate survey commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in 2001 of 210 foreign policy experts—including some with the same profile as ours, such as Duma deputies with committee assignments related to foreign affairs—showed exactly the same percentage of Westernizers (40%) as our 1999 data (but with a lower percentage of Slavophiles and higher percentage of “don’t know” answers). An analogous survey conducted five years earlier registered nearly identical percentages of Slavophiles and Westernizers (52% and 41%, respectively) as did our 1995 survey. See Rossiiskii nezavisimyi institut sotsial’nykh i national’nykh problem (2001, Table 2) and SINUS Moskva and VTsIOM (1996, Figure 3), respectively.
9. For a discussion of Russia’s perspective on some of these issues, see Lukyanov (2016).
10. Various definitions of this Russian term converge on the same underlying idea – that *siloviki* are, in the words of Kryshtanovskaya and White (2003, 289), “people in uniform.” Taylor (2007, vii) defines both the power ministries and their employees as “those state agencies in which the personnel generally wear uniforms and in which some people carry guns. More precisely, these bodies are military, security, or law enforcement bodies that possess armed units or formations. People with power ministry backgrounds are referred to as *siloviki*.” For more on defining and identifying *siloviki*, see also Rivera and Rivera (2014).
11. For a review of the scholarly literature on the *silovik* worldview, see Rivera and Rivera (2018, 225–228).
12. The third scenario (NATO intervention in ethnic conflicts in Europe) was not included in the 1995 survey.
13. Question wording: see note 4. Responses of 9 are coded as one; all others are coded as zero.
14. Data limitations prevent us from creating a true “*silovik*” variable, which would identify those with prior employment in the military and security forces. For more on how to construct such a variable using the 2016 data, see Rivera (2016b).
15. Question wording: “People find out about events in the world and in their country from various sources: radio, television, newspapers, the Internet. In regard to the past week, how often did you learn about events in the world and in Russia from each of the following sources?,” with the key being (for 2008 and 2012) 1. Once or not once, 2. Several times, and 3. Every day or almost every day, and (for 1995, 1999, 2004, and 2016) 1. Not once, 2. Once, 3. Several times, 4. Almost every day, and 5. Every day.
16. In 2012, the options for listening to foreign radio broadcasts and domestic radio broadcasts were merged into one variable, “radio broadcasts.” To maintain as much consistency as possible, a value of one on the State-Run Media variable for that year is assigned to respondents who watched television every day or almost every day and did

not listen to “radio broadcasts” every day or almost every day. In 2016, the survey question used for evaluating media consumption was much more fine-grained, asking how frequently respondents learned about world events from: First Channel, “Rossiya” Channel, NTV, REN-TV, satellite television, channels in your region or city, radio broadcasts, print journalism (newspapers, magazines), online media, social networking sites, other online sources, foreign news sources (television programs, radio, newspapers and magazines), closed or specialized sources of information (e.g. internal organization reports), personal communication with colleagues, and personal communication with friends and relatives. Respondents were assigned a value of one if they reported getting their news from any of the three national television channels (i.e. First Channel, “Rossiya” Channel, or NTV) every day or almost every day and did not report learning from “foreign news sources” every day or almost every day.

17. The merging of the “radio broadcasts” variable in the 2012 survey as described in the previous footnote was likely responsible for some of the decline in the percentage of respondents who were coded as one on the State-Run Media variable between 2008 and 2012, since the coding for 2012 excludes those who did not regularly tune in to either domestic or foreign radio stations (instead of just foreign radio stations). Specifically, 12% of respondents in 2008 watched state-run television, but were coded as zero because they listened to foreign radio broadcasts. In 2012, 33% of respondents watched state-run television, but were coded as zero because they listened to (domestic or foreign) “radio broadcasts.” This change in methodology, however, is not entirely responsible for the decline between 2008 and 2012 in the percentage coded as one for State-Run Media, since the percentage of respondents who watched state-run television, regardless of their radio listening habits, declined from 82% in 2008 to 60% in 2012.
18. Despite civilizational identity being the only statistically significant variable across all waves of the survey, when it is removed from the regression the average marginal effects of the other independent variables remain largely unchanged. The decrease in the size of the marginal effect of the Active Military variable over time remains the same, as do the substantive and statistical significance of the effects of the State-Run Media and Kremlin-Dependent variables in 2008 and 2016, respectively. See Table B1 in the online appendix for complete results.
19. Indeed, the average marginal effect of the Kremlin-Dependent variable is high (17%) in November 1999, after the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in the spring of that year.
20. Of course, it is possible that respondents who are more hostile to the US may seek out state-run media sources for their news. See the way in which Olesya Tkacheva (2019) addresses this problem in her study of the impact of online media consumption on the anti-American attitudes of Russian elites.
21. On Russia’s media during the 2011–2012 electoral cycle, see Zimmerman (2014, 278–280) and Hale (2011, 3–4).
22. See also MacFarlane (1994, 264–265), Shlapentokh (1998), Ponarin (2013, 2–3), and the special 2014 double issue of *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (3–4) entitled “Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy.” Of particular interest in the latter are the introduction by Forsberg, Heller, and Wolf (2014) and the discussion of *ressentiment* by Malinova (2014).

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Data availability

The Survey of Russian Elites database is archived at the University of Michigan’s Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR03724.v6>.

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