

Do Autocrats Need a Foreign Enemy?

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Evidence from Fortress Russia

It is often claimed that autocracies need foreign enemies to stir up senses of threat and craft belligerent foreign policy stances to bolster their regimes' popularity at home. Autocrats can gain domestic support through international hostilities by presenting themselves as defending their country against external aggressors and perhaps even by creating enemies that do not already exist. But is a bellicose foreign policy stance really beneficial for autocrats? Surprisingly, prior studies have not fully explored the relationship between senses of foreign threat, aggressive international postures, and public support for nondemocratic leaders despite implications for leaders' incentives to foment or prevent international conflict.

We address this question by examining the case of Russia. After initiating Europe's largest conventional war since World War II by invading Ukraine in 2022, Russia has been treated as a country led by an autocrat trying to gain domestic support through aggressive international behavior. Michael McFaul, for example, writes that Kremlin agents harassed him personally as U.S. Ambassador in Moscow because "[Vladimir] Putin needed an enemy to rally his electoral base" in Russia's 2012 presidential vote.¹ Sergei Guriev argued in the *New York Times* that "reference to an external enemy" was an "easy tool to mobilize support" for Putin.² As Russia escalated pressure on Ukraine in December 2021, an op-ed by Leon Aron more explicitly claimed that Putin's

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1. Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), p. 255.

2. Sergei Guriev, "Putin's Anti-West Rhetoric Was for Domestic Consumption," *New York Times*, March 18, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/03/05/how-powerful-is-russia/putins-anti-west-rhetoric-was-for-domestic-consumption>.

“brinkmanship is directly linked to . . . the fulfilment of Putin’s paramount goal to become president for life in 2024.”³ Some think that such domestic political concerns drove Putin to launch Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.⁴ Kremlin officials have sometimes even admitted that they see links between international hostilities and support for their leader. For example, McFaul reports that Putin’s then “gray cardinal” adviser, Vladislav Surkov, told him that anti-American propaganda gained “several percentage points” for Putin’s 2012 election effort.⁵ As another example, Putin’s campaign spokesperson partly attributed the Russian president’s 2018 reelection to the hostile reaction by the United Kingdom (UK) to the poisoning of former KGB agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, earlier that year.⁶

To test the validity of these claims, we study Putin’s own rhetoric, analyze public opinion data (including a survey experiment), and examine relevant events over the nearly two-and-a-half decades that Putin has been in power in Russia. The findings qualify conventional thinking about links between foreign threats, bellicosity, and authoritarian popular support. On the one hand, we confirm that Putin gains popularity from perceptions that the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are a menace to Russian interests. On the other hand, we show that through December 2021, Russians believed that Putin was responding to this threat with prudence, cooperation, and even a relatively pro-Western stance rather than with hostility and aggression. Moreover, we detect no evidence that Putin drew support primarily from people preferring a generally anti-Western policy orientation in this period. When anti-Americanism and Putin’s support appear to rise and fall in sync, we find other factors influencing both at the same time, such as the Crimea annexation, bilateral summits, and even international sporting events. In other words, before 2022, Russians consistently saw Putin as a foreign policy moderate who was responding to broad public concern about the West and NATO

3. Leon Aron, “Get Used to Putin’s Power Plays—at Least until 2024,” *The Hill*, December 14, 2021, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/585627-get-used-to-putins-power-plays-at-least-until-2024>.

4. Vicente Ferraro, “Why Russia Invaded Ukraine and How Wars Benefit Autocrats: The Domestic Sources of the Russo-Ukrainian War,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2024), pp. 170–191, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121231215048>; Aleksandar Matovski, “How Putin’s Regime Survivalism Drives Russian Aggression,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2023), pp. 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2023.2223839>.

5. McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace*, pp. 254–255.

6. “Near-Final Results Give Putin Landslide Win Amid Reports of Violations,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 19, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-expected-to-sail-to-fourth-term-as-russians-vote/29105971.html>.

expansion. Signs of a shift in this pattern appear in our data only as Russia's propaganda machine geared up for full-scale war in December 2021, when for the first time an anti-Western policy orientation became a statistically significant predictor of support for Putin, though a majority even then continued to see Putin as a moderate.

This evidence suggests a modified understanding of how autocrats like Putin use foreign affairs for domestic purposes. Our perspective reconciles the idea that "autocrats need a foreign enemy" with research identifying competence in providing stability and economic prosperity as common sources of authoritarian leaders' appeal.⁷ These two potential sources of authoritarian appeal are in tension with each other: international animosities can put stability and prosperity at risk.⁸ What we show, however, is that autocrats do not necessarily have to choose. Instead, they sometimes try to covertly stoke hostilities while overtly appearing to be moderate and cooperative pursuers of stability and prosperity. These efforts to have it both ways, we demonstrate, can be relatively successful.

We do not suggest that autocrats will seek to avoid actual conflict. Rather, we spotlight a more complex set of incentives that autocrats can face for initiating, escalating, and deescalating conflicts. At no time are our findings more relevant than today, with Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and continuing war. What our findings indicate above all is that this invasion marks a shift in rather than a continuation of Putin's long-standing domestic legitimation. Crucially, Russia's 2022 attack was more a luxury than a necessity from Putin's domestic politics perspective, a desired action that he appears to have thought he could afford rather than a move needed to sustain popularity or to stay on brand. In fact, his act of political indulgence was in some tension with his political brand. This interpretation helps explain the otherwise puzzling

7. Aleksandar Matovski, *Popular Dictatorships: Crises, Mass Opinion, and the Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Timothy Frye, *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021); Daniel S. Treisman, "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2011), pp. 590–609, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00500.x>; Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman, "Informational Autocrats," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Fall 2019), pp. 100–127, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.4.100>.

8. Jessica L. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 35–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818308080028>; Giacomo Chiozza and H. E. Goemans, "International Conflict and the Tenure of Leaders: Is War Still 'Ex Post' Inefficient?," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 2004), pp. 604–619, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519919>; Milan W. Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

way that Putin framed the conflict from the beginning, selling it to his people as a cautious and pragmatic “special military operation” required by Western imprudence in Ukraine. He stuck to this framing even long after it became apparent that a quick victory was unlikely and substantial human and material sacrifice would be needed to win. Indeed, over two years into the full-scale invasion, Putin continues to present himself as a moderate, resisting calls for general mobilization and denying any need for it. Remarkably, therefore, we find that even the most aggressive autocrats can still cater to public desires for prudent foreign policies. This reflects, we think, Putin’s attempt to navigate tensions that are inherent in the relationship between foreign threat, belligerence, and authoritarian support. While Russia has demonstrated its ability to maintain a degree of cohesion even while waging a full-scale war, our logic suggests that this strategy could break down if wartime losses mount, economic conditions worsen, or victory requires major new sacrifices from the masses.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we review the literature on authoritarian support strategies as they relate to foreign hostilities, highlighting the need for more focused analysis on the relationship between foreign threats, aggressive international postures, and support for autocrats. Second, we extend our review to scholarship on Putin’s support specifically, finding an analogous gap. Third, we introduce our research design. In the fourth section, we examine Putin’s major speeches regarding foreign affairs from 2000 into 2023. In the fifth section we turn to survey data to investigate whether Russians perceive Putin as anti-Western, view the West as a threat, and prefer an anti-West policy orientation. The sixth section examines whether Putin’s support has followed expressions of anti-Westernism during his time in power from 2000 into 2023, focusing on three case studies. In the seventh section we explore how our findings contribute to understanding Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and continuing war. Our concluding section summarizes our findings and outlines some broader policy implications.

Authoritarian Support Strategies

Sizable literatures show how leaders can benefit from “rallying around the flag” and “diversionary war,” while voluminous other studies document a wide variety of authoritarian legitimation strategies. Much remains to be learned, however, about the relationship between foreign threats, an aggressive international posture, and popular support for autocrats.

Studies of rallying around the flag and diversionary war show that incumbents' domestic fortunes tend to rise with the onset of international conflict, but they focus almost exclusively on democracies.⁹ They also define rallying as the political result of a single, concrete event like a war or terrorist attack and find that rallying tends to be short-lived (usually lasting just a few weeks).¹⁰ In contrast, we examine whether having an enemy can provide a sustained source of support over time.

While threat perceptions occupy a prominent role in theories of war, deterrence, and balancing,¹¹ we know less about the effects of threat perceptions at the mass level on foreign policy preferences or incumbent support in autocracies specifically. There is evidence from the United States that increased threat perception leads respondents to support a more hawkish foreign policy stance.¹² These findings are corroborated in research on Georgia, where perception of the Russian threat is associated with a more confrontational foreign policy preference toward Moscow.¹³ Similarly, research shows that foreign hostility—such as anti-American attitudes—can influence electoral behavior in countries that host U.S. military bases. But this behavior is different from how

9. William D. Baker and John R. Oneal, "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership? The Nature and Origins of the 'Rally Round the Flag' Effect," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (2001), pp. 661–687, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045005006>; Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Cindy D. Kam and Jennifer M. Ramos, "Joining and Leaving the Rally: Understanding the Surge and Decline in Presidential Approval Following 9/11," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Winter 2008), pp. 619–650, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfn055>; Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 1 (1998), pp. 139–165, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.139>.

10. Brian Newman and Andrew Forcehimes, "Rally Round the Flag' Events for Presidential Approval Research," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (March 2010), pp. 144–154, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2009.07.003>.

11. Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring 1985), pp. 3–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, rev. ed. (1976; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Kai He, "Undermining Adversaries: Unipolarity, Threat Perception, and Negative Balancing Strategies after the Cold War," *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (April 2012), pp. 154–191, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.679201>.

12. Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, and Christopher Weber, "The Political Consequences of Perceived Threat and Felt Insecurity," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 614 (November 2007), pp. 131–153, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25097965>; Shana Kushner Gadarian, "The Politics of Threat: How Terrorism News Shapes Foreign Policy Attitudes," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 469–483, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609990910>.

13. Alexander Kapatadze and Thomas Zeitzoff, "In the Shadow of Conflict: How Emotions, Threat Perceptions, and Victimization Influence Foreign Policy Attitudes," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 2021), pp. 181–202, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000479>.

nondemocratic incumbents not strategically aligned with the United States might exploit hostilities to their advantage.¹⁴

Scholars have yet to fully consider how perceptions of foreign threat might influence public support for authoritarians. On the one hand, Arturas Rozenas and Denis Stukal find that external factors such as poor economic performance can be useful as autocrats seek to shift blame for negative developments that they cannot hide.¹⁵ This finding suggests that having an enemy could benefit autocrats because it provides an enduring object of blame for bad news. On the other hand, a large body of work finds that the public bases its support for autocrats on their claims to provide political stability or prosperity. Having an enemy could be a negative because it potentially harms prosperity and creates instability.¹⁶

“Fortress Russia” and Putin’s Popularity

Despite a vast literature on support for Putin, few studies explicitly or thoroughly assess the degree to which the Russian leader’s approval ratings depend on foreign threats or hostilities.¹⁷ Those that do examine how hostilities with the West affect Putin’s support yield mixed results.

Some argue that the Kremlin gains politically from promoting “fortress Russia” conspiracy theories—the idea that Russia is surrounded by enemies bent on defeating it. They find that Russian war-mongering has helped Putin justify and win support for repression at home.¹⁸ But Maria Snegovaya’s ex-

14. Byong-Kuen Jhee, “Anti-Americanism and Electoral Politics in Korea,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 123, No. 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 301–318, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-165X.2008.tb00626.x>; Koji Kagotani and Yuki Yanai, “External Threats, U.S. Bases, and Prudent Voters in Okinawa,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 2014), pp. 91–115, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lct017>.

15. Arturas Rozenas and Denis Stukal, “How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia’s State-Controlled Television,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (June 2019), pp. 982–996, <https://doi.org/10.1086/703208>.

16. Matovski, *Popular Dictatorships*; Frye, *Weak Strongman*; Treisman, “Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime.”

17. Frye, *Weak Strongman*; Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson, *Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); Matovski, *Popular Dictatorships*; Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror: Putin’s Leadership and Russia’s Insecure Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Regina Smyth, *Elections, Protest, and Authoritarian Regime Stability: Russia 2008–2020* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Richard Sakwa, *The Putin Paradox* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020).

18. Ferraro, “Why Russia Invaded Ukraine”; Matovski, “How Putin’s Regime Survivalism Drives Russian Aggression”; Ilya Yablokov, *Fortress Russia: Conspiracy Theories in Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

amination of Russian presidential speeches finds that the level of aggression in Putin's rhetoric is correlated with oil prices rather than domestic concerns.¹⁹ Similarly, Theodore Gerber's study of the 2011–2012 period concludes that "antipathy toward America is not a key source of support for Putin."²⁰ Using Russian Election Studies (RES) survey data in the 2000s, Timothy Colton and Henry Hale suggest that the reverse may even be true—that Putin has consistently drawn support from moderately pro-Western voters—though the effects that they detect are not consistently statistically significant.²¹ Longitudinal analysis by Daniel Treisman registers small changes in Putin's job approval from events pertaining to nationalist sentiment and foreign enemies, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq and terrorist attacks. He finds that such events *reduced* rather than expanded presidential popularity.²²

A handful of studies examine rallying around the flag effects in Russia but focus almost exclusively on the impact of the country's annexation of Crimea in 2014. These works concur that this event was politically valuable for the Kremlin, but none find that these gains accrued from the foreign hostility that the event generated. Instead, they point to a sense of collective euphoria²³ or the affirmation of status or identity (ontological security)²⁴ arising in Russia from what was seen as a bloodless national success in reclaiming territory long believed to be integral to Russia. One study explicitly finds that the Russian public supported the Crimea annexation (and by extension supported Putin) *despite*—not because of—the conflictual relations with the West that it produced.²⁵

19. Maria Snegovaya, "What Factors Contribute to the Aggressive Foreign Policy of Russian Leaders?," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (2020), pp. 93–110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2018.1554408>.

20. Theodore P. Gerber, "Foreign Policy and the United States in Russian Public Opinion," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2015), p. 98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1010909>.

21. Timothy J. Colton and Henry E. Hale, "The Putin Vote: Presidential Electorates in a Hybrid Regime," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (2009), pp. 473–503, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003767790019690>.

22. Treisman, "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime," p. 601.

23. Greene and Robertson, *Putin v. the People*; Henry E. Hale, "Authoritarian Rallying as Reputational Cascade? Evidence from Putin's Popularity Surge after Crimea," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 116, No. 2 (May 2022), pp. 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001052>;

Henry E. Hale, "How Crimea Pays: Rallying 'Round the Flag and Authoritarian Support," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (April 2018), pp. 369–391, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532691>;

Elena Sirotkina and Margarita Zavadskaya, "When the Party's Over: Political Blame Attribution under an Electoral Authoritarian Regime," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 37–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1639386>.

24. Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror*.

25. Mikhail A. Alexseev and Henry E. Hale, "Crimea Come What May: Do Economic Sanctions

Research Strategy

To address whether the presence of a foreign enemy might be an essential part of Putin's appeal, and therefore likely the appeal of many authoritarians worldwide, it is helpful to break the larger question into four specific ones. We employ a multi-method approach, varying our empirical strategy to fit each question as best possible given available data. First, is Putin's rhetoric consistent with needing an enemy? To answer, we examine all of Putin's major appearances in which he discusses foreign affairs before primarily domestic audiences from 2000 to 2023. Second, we investigate popular perceptions: Do Russians perceive Putin as anti-Western and do his supporters perceive the West as a threat and thus prefer a generally anti-Western policy orientation? For this, we analyze seven datasets from surveys conducted by multiple agencies from 2013 to 2021: four surveys in the RES series (2016, 2018, September 2021, and December 2021), two in the Nation-Building and Nationalism in Today's Russia (NEORUSS) series (2013 and 2014), and original data from a survey experiment that we designed and conducted in 2019.²⁶ In this experiment, we remind a randomly selected set of respondents about a foreign threat to track whether their support for Putin rises relative to a control group. We similarly explore whether support rises more if he personally plays up the threat, and whether he gains more from highlighting the threat than from advocating prudence and cooperation. Finally, do longitudinal trends support the idea that Putin gains from anti-Americanism? Here we use public opinion data as well as condensed case studies to see if Putin's support

Backfire Politically?," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (2020), pp. 344–359, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319866879>.

26. The following includes basic descriptions of the surveys. (1) RES surveys: iterations of the long-running Russian Election Studies surveys conducted by the Levada Center, November 8–December 4, 2016, June 21–26, 2018, August 26–September 15, 2021 (hereafter September 2021), and December 7–23, 2021 ($N = 2,000$, $N = 1,605$, $N = 2,700$, and $N = 1,200$, respectively). For full details, see section B.1 in the online appendix. (2) Nation-Building and Nationalism in Today's Russia (NEORUSS) surveys: the May 8–27, 2013, and November 5–18, 2014 waves of the NEORUSS survey project organized by the University of Oslo and conducted by the sociological agency ROMIR ($N = 1,000$ and $N = 1,200$, respectively). See Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, "Nation Building and Nationalism in Today's Russia," University of Oslo, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/research/projects/neoruss/outcomes/>. (3) 2019 Hale-Lenton survey: a block of questions the authors added to the Levada Center's omnibus tracking survey conducted July 18–24, 2019 ($N = 1,602$). See section B.1 in the online appendix for full details. We refer to all seven surveys in the rest of this article and in supplemental materials by name and either year or month/year. The wording of the items used from all surveys and specifics on how variables are constructed can be found in the online appendix A.1.

has indeed followed expressions of anti-Westernism during his time in power from 2000 into 2023. We elaborate on the methods used as we address each of these questions in turn.

Before moving on, we explain our choices for the terminology that we use for fundamental concepts. First and foremost is the concept of “the West.” As a macro-level, “civilizational” identity to which individuals believe that their—and others’—countries “belong,” it is highly polyvalent.²⁷ Drawing on Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane’s approach to “anti-Americanism,” we define anti-Westernism as a “psychological tendency to hold negative views of [the West] and of [Western] society in general.”²⁸ The West tends to have a strong geopolitical connotation, often encompassing the United States and other transatlantic organizations, such as NATO. This is consistent with other interpretations of how the West is understood in the Russian context (interpretations that accord well with our findings on how Putin discusses international relations).²⁹ The United States, NATO, and the West are not synonyms. Nor is the last term reducible to the first two. Although Putin often juxtaposes Europe and the United States in his rhetoric, these terms occasionally fall under the broader category of the West. Putin frequently mentions “our Western partners/colleagues” in particular when he discusses groups of states. Accordingly, we use the terms “anti-American,” “anti-NATO,” and “anti-European” to refer specifically to these subtypes of hostile sentiment, and we use “anti-Western” when Putin discusses hostility toward the West more broadly.

What Did Putin Say about the West through 2021?

A large body of scholarship points to Putin’s personality, ideas, code, or psychological traits as important in accounting for Russia’s internal regime dynamics and its foreign policy.³⁰ Although some social scientists systematically

27. Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Henry E. Hale and Marlene Laruelle, “Rethinking Civilizational Identity from the Bottom Up: A Case Study of Russia and a Research Agenda,” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2020), pp. 585–602, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.125>.

28. Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 12.

29. Hale and Laruelle, “Rethinking Civilizational Identity,” p. 593.

30. Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013); Michael McFaul, “Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy,” *International Security*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Fall 2020), pp. 95–139,

examine his political speeches over time,³¹ only a handful of studies assess Putin's rhetoric over the *longue durée* specifically regarding foreign affairs and "foreign enemies."³²

To assess Putin's attitudes toward the West in his statements, we conducted an interpretive analysis of forty-two prominent speeches from 2000 to 2023. We selected two main types of text: (1) his annual *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin* broadcasts, which are live television shows during which Putin answers questions from journalists and members of the public; and (2) his annual addresses to the Federal Assembly.³³ These texts have several advantages. First, because they are long (the *Direct Line* shows often last over three hours and his addresses to the Federal Assembly last around one hour), they present an ideal occasion for Putin to elaborate on foreign affairs. Second, because we are interested in the effects of Putin's rhetoric on citizens' attitudes, we use texts that are prominently featured in Russian domestic media and that primarily target the Russian public. We are confident that these texts, as high-profile events in the news cycle, are representative of the sort of rhetoric that citizens hear from Putin concerning foreign affairs more broadly.³⁴ Finally, because the format of these texts is roughly the same each year, we can conduct across-time

https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00390; Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

31. Elena Semenova and David G. Winter, "A Motivational Analysis of Russian Presidents, 1994–2018," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (August 2020), pp. 813–834, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12652>; Olga Malinova, "Legitimizing Putin's Regime: The Transformations of the Narrative of Russia's Post-Soviet Transition," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (March 2022), pp. 52–75, <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.postcomstud.2022.55.1.52>; Oksana Drozdova and Paul Robinson, "A Study of Vladimir Putin's Rhetoric," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 5 (2019), pp. 805–823, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1603362>; Susanne Wengle and Christine Evans, "Symbolic State-Building in Contemporary Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (2018), pp. 384–411, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1507409>.

32. Thomas Ambrosio and Geoffrey Vandrovec, "Mapping the Geopolitics of the Russian Federation: The Federal Assembly Addresses of Putin and Medvedev," *Geopolitics*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2013), pp. 435–466, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.717554>; Martin Mölder and Eiki Berg, "Conflicts and Shifts in the Kremlin's Political Discourse since the Start of the Putin Presidency (2000–2019)," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (2023), pp. 564–582, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2069677>; Snegovaya, "What Factors Contribute to the Aggressive Foreign Policy?"

33. *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin* was not held in 2000, 2004, 2020, and 2022. In 2020 it was included in Putin's annual press conference. From 2008 to 2011, while he was prime minister, *A Conversation with Vladimir Putin* was broadcast. The format was largely analogous to that of the other *Direct Line* programs. For the "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," we examined the following years when Putin was president: 2000–2008 and 2012–2023. There was no address to the Federal Assembly in 2017 or 2022.

34. Note that we are *not* claiming that these are the only messages that individuals will receive on foreign affairs. Individuals may not consume such media, or they may follow either hawkish or dovish media sources independent of their exposure to Putin's rhetoric.

analyses to identify change and continuity in Putin's rhetoric. We also draw on six texts that prominently feature Putin discussing foreign politics: (1) his famous 2007 "Munich speech";³⁵ (2) his 2012 op-ed "Russia and a Changing World";³⁶ (3) his "Crimea speech" of March 18, 2014;³⁷ (4) his 2021 article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians";³⁸ and (5–6) two televised speeches about Ukraine on February 21 and 24, 2022.³⁹

EXTERNAL THREATS: THE EU, NATO, AND THE UNITED STATES

Throughout his presidency until the eve of 2022, Putin referred to the European Union (EU), NATO, and the United States in different ways. On the one hand, Putin viewed NATO and the United States as interchangeable, drawing attention to the dangers of U.S. unilateralism and the United States' quest for hegemony, which Putin presented as dangerous to both the United States and Russia. On the other hand, he stressed Russia's European identity and suggested that European countries were willing victims of U.S. domination.

Putin consistently raised concerns about the threats of NATO expansion and U.S. missile defenses in his speeches. These concerns were muted, however, before 2007. For instance, in his first annual televised call-in show in 2001, Putin addressed the United States' announcement that it would withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, claiming that "the U.S. withdrawal of the United States [from the treaty] cannot influence our relations because it does not pose a direct threat to our national security," going further to positively assess how "everything that has been done of late makes us confident that the relations between our countries will develop positively."⁴⁰

35. Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," President of Russia, February 10, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

36. Vladimir Putin, "Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir" [Russia and a changing world], *Moskovskiy Novosti*, February 27, 2012, <https://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>.

37. Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

38. Vladimir Putin, "Article by Vladimir Putin: 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,'" President of Russia, July 21, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

39. Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 21, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>; Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

40. Vladimir Putin, "Live with President Vladimir Putin—Hot Line (excerpts)," President of Russia, December 24, 2001, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21457>.

By 2007, however, Putin had started to openly doubt the stated purpose of the U.S. withdrawal.⁴¹ The withdrawal, for Putin, had far more serious implications: “The balance of powers will be absolutely destroyed and one of the parties will benefit from the feeling of complete security. This means that its hands will be free not only in local but also eventually in global conflicts.”⁴² In his 2012 article on foreign policy, Putin explicitly claimed that international relations were destabilized by “certain aspects of the behavior of the USA and NATO” and “NATO expansion, including the deployment of new military infrastructure . . . to create an anti-ballistic missile defense system in Europe.”⁴³ He claimed that he “would not have touched upon this issue if these games were not taking place right on Russia’s borders, if they didn’t undermine our security, and if they didn’t work against stability in the world,” a claim that he echoed in 2014.⁴⁴ Putin similarly denounced the U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in February 2019, claiming that “our American partners should have just said so honestly rather than make far-fetched accusations against Russia to justify their withdrawal.”⁴⁵

That Putin stressed U.S. intentions and downplayed or omitted the role of Europe highlights how he distinguished between the United States and Europe. Though his 2005 address to the Federal Assembly drew attention mostly for his remarks that the collapse of the USSR was “the greatest [or, a very great] geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” he also underscored Russia’s European identity: “For three centuries, we—together with the other European nations passed hand in hand through reforms of the Enlightenment, the difficulties of emerging parliamentarism, municipal and judicial branches . . . I repeat we did this together, sometimes behind and sometimes ahead of European standards.”⁴⁶ In this respect Europe could be understood mostly as a model to which Russia sought to catch up. Putin’s outlook had changed drastically by 2014, when he increasingly portrayed Europe as having lost its way. On multiple occasions, Putin claimed that for Europe “national pride is a long-forgotten concept,”⁴⁷ that European countries “have voluntarily given up a

41. Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

42. *Ibid.*

43. Putin, “Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir.”

44. *Ibid.*; Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” President of Russia, December 4, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173>.

45. Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” President of Russia, February 20, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863>.

46. Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, April 25, 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>.

47. Putin, “Presidential Address,” December 4, 2014.

considerable part of their sovereignty,"⁴⁸ and that Europeans "whisper even at home for fear of being overheard by the Americans."⁴⁹ Especially regarding France and Germany, Putin was careful to stress a common overlap of perceived interests. He noted their opposition to the Iraq War,⁵⁰ increased public opposition by "many other European countries" to the United States' global influence, and the fact that both French and German government ministers had (reportedly) expressed concern to him about the United States' hegemony.⁵¹

DESIRED RELATIONS: THE EU, NATO, AND THE UNITED STATES

Putin drew a sharp distinction between Europe and the United States in terms of his desired relations. Putin consistently stressed Russia's affinity with Europe, and often called for various forms of integration, including the "formation of a single economic zone."⁵² He frequently included Russia as part of a "Greater Europe,"⁵³ even describing Europe as "a potential ally."⁵⁴ Putin's discussions of the United States, however, displayed consistent frustration regarding the United States' unilateral actions. As Putin presented himself to the Russian public, he was reasonable and pragmatic, whereas the West, especially the United States, was threatening. He portrayed the United States' proclaimed beliefs in universal values as a fig leaf to pursue security through domination. For Putin, the United States' misguided approach detracted from the common interests that the United States and Russia had in equal, cooperative relations.

Over time, Putin grew increasingly explicit about the United States' quest for unipolarity and hegemony and attempts to spread its political and economic model. Before 2007, the major speeches that we analyzed were generally limited to concerns about the infringement of states' sovereign rights under

48. Vladimir Putin, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, President of Russia, April 17, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Vladimir Putin, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, President of Russia, April 25, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17976>.

51. Vladimir Putin, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, President of Russia, June 7, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57692>.

52. Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, April 18, 2002, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21567>.

53. Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, May 26, 2004, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22494>; Putin, "Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir"; Putin, *Direct Line*, April 17, 2014.

54. Vladimir Putin, "A Conversation with Vladimir Putin," December 15, 2011, Government of the Russian Federation, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/17409/>.

the guise of humanitarian operations⁵⁵ and the need for interventions to be “carried out with the approval of the UN Security Council.”⁵⁶ By the time of his 2007 “Munich speech,” Putin had more definitively articulated what he considered the “unipolar world” to mean, arguing that it represented “one master, one sovereign” and that “at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Putin drew parallels between the Soviet Union and United States, whereby the former “tried to impose its will on its quasi-allies” but collapsed “as soon as the Soviet Union lost its might.”⁵⁸ To Putin, “the Americans . . . try to impose their model on practically the entire world, and they will fail as well.”⁵⁹ Much as Putin emphasized U.S. hegemony when discussing other European partners, he also blamed the United States for the deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations.

For Putin, the international behavior of the United States was not only detrimental to U.S.-Russia relations but also counterproductive for the United States’ own security. As far back as 2003, he remarked that “throughout the history of humanity, great countries and empires have always been afflicted with various problems that have only aggravated their situation. These include a feeling of being invulnerable, conviction in their own grandeur and a sense of being able to do no wrong,” adding that “I certainly hope that this will not be the case with our American partners.”⁶⁰

Putin stressed that the United States’ unipolar ambitions were “extremely dangerous” and were leading to a situation in which “no one feels safe . . . of course such a policy stimulates an arms race.”⁶¹ In 2008, Putin also blamed the United States for inflicting economic harm, claiming that the financial crisis “began in the United States,” and that “the financial and economic power of this country brought on a crisis, and all major countries in the world were then infected with this crisis.”⁶²

55. Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, July 8, 2000, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21480>.

56. Vladimir Putin, “Excerpts from the President’s Live Television and Radio Dialogue with the Nation,” December 18, 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22256>.

57. Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

58. Putin, “A Conversation,” December 15, 2011.

59. Vladimir Putin, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, April 16, 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49261>.

60. Putin, “Excerpts from the President’s Live Television and Radio Dialogue,” December 18, 2003.

61. Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

62. Vladimir Putin, “Razgovor s Vladimirom Putinyim” [A conversation with Vladimir Putin],

This sort of rhetoric became much more explicit by Putin's third presidential term (2012–2018). In 2012, Putin claimed that the United States had “developed an idiosyncratic understanding of security which fundamentally differs from ours. Americans are obsessed with the idea of securing absolute invulnerability. . . . Absolute invulnerability for one would mean absolute vulnerability for all others.”⁶³ In his view, the U.S. need to secure “vassals” was based on a never-ending quest for ultimate security. By 2015, he was publicly claiming that “superpowers that have laid claim to exceptionalism and see themselves as the only center of power in the world, do not need allies. What they need is vassals, I am referring to the United States.”⁶⁴

Though Putin frequently referred to the risks arising from what he saw as the United States' rash decisions (to which he warned that Russia would “asymmetrically respond”), he also frequently asserted that Russia sought an equal, cooperative relationship between the two countries.⁶⁵ In 2012, Putin wrote that a condition for advancing U.S.-Russia relations was that “the Americans govern with the principles of equal and mutually-respectful partnership.”⁶⁶ This position remained more or less unchanged in late 2016 when Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election. Putin underlined the importance of putting “bilateral relations back on track and to develop them on an equal and mutually beneficial basis.”⁶⁷ The next year, in 2017, Putin named the fight against nuclear proliferation as the primary sphere in which bilateral U.S.-Russia relations could develop.⁶⁸

In short, although Putin's emphasis on the Western threat through 2021 was consistent with the “authoritarians need an enemy” argument, the policy responses that he publicly advocated appealed to desires for pragmatism, moderation, and stability in standing up for Russia's interests. These responses emphasized the importance of international law and a willingness to compromise, a pattern that does not support the notion that Putin was surviving politically by stoking domestic support for hard-line, retaliatory, or otherwise aggressive actions against the enemy. Instead, he “othered” the United

Government of the Russian Federation, December 4, 2008, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/multimedia/video/2008/12/?page=6>. For a transcript, see <http://archive.government.ru/docs/2638/>.

63. Putin, “Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir.”

64. Putin, *Direct Line*, April 16, 2015.

65. Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

66. Putin, “Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir.”

67. Putin, “Presidential Address,” December 1, 2016.

68. Vladimir Putin, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, June 15, 2017, President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54790>.

States during this period, stressing what he believed Russia's traits to be and affirming the value of those traits. He also emphasized his own commitment to stability in the international arena and to protecting Russia's prosperity and status.

Little Evidence That Putin Needed an Enemy before 2022

Having examined Putin's rhetoric, we now turn to what Russians themselves think. Before 2022, did they see him as anti-Western? Did those advocating anti-Western stances support him? Is there evidence that stoking hostility was a beneficial political strategy? We use cross-sectional public opinion data to answer these questions. We consulted seven datasets compiled by two different polling agencies from surveys on relevant topics that were conducted at seven points after Putin began his third term as president in 2012. In what follows, we address each of the questions with which we began this section in turn.

DID RUSSIANS PERCEIVE (OR WANT) PUTIN TO BE ANTI-WESTERN?

According to our data and in contrast to the conventional wisdom, the answer was consistently "no" through December 2021, the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While Putin's supporters saw both NATO and the United States as posing a threat, they generally advocated for Russia to cooperate with the West. Crucially, they also believed that this is what Putin was trying to accomplish.

It is clear that majorities of Russians consistently viewed the EU, NATO, the United States, and the West as threatening during this period.⁶⁹ As of December 2021, 69 percent of the population either mostly or fully agreed that "the USA or NATO will weaken Russia if our President doesn't effectively oppose their influence."⁷⁰ In 2016 this percentage was even higher, with a full three-quarters of the population perceiving such a threat.⁷¹

We draw an important but often overlooked conceptual distinction between threat perceptions and preferences as to how threats should be addressed. Perception of a threat need not translate into support for a belligerent response. Analysis of the Russian data makes this clear (see table 1). Despite the strong

69. Theodore P. Gerber, "Beyond Putin? Nationalism and Xenophobia in Russian Public Opinion," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2014), pp. 113–134, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2014.978439>.

70. December 2021 RES survey.

71. 2016 RES survey.

Table 1. Distribution of Attitudes on How Russia Should Treat the West

Question: "There are various opinions about what relations should be like between Russia and the West. What do you think about how Russia should relate to the West?"

	2004 (%)	2008 (%)	2012 (%)	2016 (%)	2018 (%)	2021 (September) (%)	2021 (December) (%)
As an enemy	4	3	5	6	5	7	6
As a rival	21	22	23	25	16	27	31
As an ally	61	61	56	46	61	46	44
As a friend	11	10	11	9	8	15	14
Hard to say / refuse	4	6	5	14	10	6	5

SOURCES: Russian Election Studies (RES) surveys. In addition to the 2016–2021 RES surveys cited earlier in the article, this table also presents findings from the 2004, 2008, and 2012 RES surveys, which were organized by principal investigators Henry Hale and Timothy Colton (with Michael McFaul in 2004) and carried out in Russia by the World Research Corporation, with data available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/tcoltonrussia>.

NOTE: Estimates are weighted to known parameters of the population.

threat perceptions documented above, until the end of 2021, 55–72 percent of respondents consistently preferred that Russia treat the West as either an ally or a friend (what we call soft-line responses to threat) rather than as a rival or an enemy (what we call hard-line responses to threat).⁷² The pattern is less consistent when the relevant question substitutes "the United States" for "the West." When we changed the wording in this way for our own 2019 survey, we find that 43 percent favored treating the United States as an ally or a friend, whereas 50 percent preferred treating it as a rival or an enemy. A separate 2019 survey conducted by Henry Hale and Olga Kamenchuk, though, uses virtually the same question (asking about the United States specifically) and finds that 52 percent of Russians still preferred the soft-line responses.⁷³

The balance of evidence, therefore, indicates that Russian public opinion before 2022 was generally supportive of a moderate, soft-line policy rather

72. See the 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2018, September 2021, and December 2021 RES surveys. The same pattern appears in the 2013 and 2014 NEORUSS surveys, which were conducted by a different survey agency, used the word "partner" instead of "ally," and conducted interviews via phone rather than in person.

73. Henry E. Hale and Olga Kamenchuk, "Don't Call It a Cold War: Findings from the Russian-American Relations Survey," Working Group Paper 10, Working Group on the Future of U.S.-Russia Relations (Cambridge, MA: Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, 2020), p. 20, <https://futureofrussiarelations.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/survey-on-russian-american-relations-2019.pdf>.

Table 2. Distribution of Russians’ Beliefs about How Putin Views the West

Question: “And what position on the question of relations between Russia and the West is taken by . . . Vladimir Putin?”

	2004 (%)	2008 (%)	2012 (%)	2016 (%)	2021 (December) (%)
As an enemy	0.3	0.4	1	4	7
As a rival	5	12	15	25	30
As an ally	68	68	66	47	39
As a friend	12	9	10	6	12
Hard to say / refuse	15	11	8	18	10

SOURCES: The 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and December 2021 Russian Election Studies (RES) surveys.

NOTE: Estimates are weighted to known parameters of the population. Compared to the seven columns in table 1, this table has five columns because the relevant question was not asked in the 2018 or September 2021 RES surveys.

than an aggressive, hard-line one, notwithstanding a substantial minority of hard-liners. As Hale and Kamenchuk put it, Russians consistently wanted to treat the United States and other Western countries better than they thought those states were treating them.⁷⁴ Table 1 does report a gradual decline in support for soft-line approaches during the Putin era, though a majority still backed moderate treatment of the West even on the eve of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Crucially, the same surveys make clear that a soft-line policy response is precisely what Russians, on balance, consistently believed that they were getting in Putin through the end of 2021. Starting in 2004, the RES surveys regularly included a question asking Russians what they thought of Putin’s stance on how Russia should treat the West. As reported in table 2, most Russians thought that Putin wanted to treat the West as an ally or a friend from 2004 to 2021. The share of respondents who viewed him as a soft-liner declined over the years from its high mark in our data of 80 percent in 2004. But a majority (51 percent) still held this view even in December 2021, when tensions were rising rapidly in the buildup to Russia’s all-out invasion of Ukraine. This finding is in keeping with our conceptual distinction between threat perception and preferred policy. Our evidence shows how Putin positioned himself as a foreign policy moderate in his public statements during this period.

74. Hale and Kamenchuk, “Don’t Call It a Cold War.”

DID PUTIN'S SUPPORT MOSTLY STEM FROM ANTI-WESTERNISM?

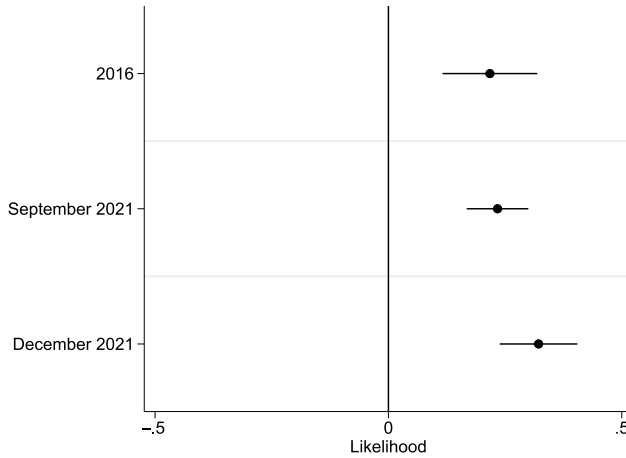
The previous section shows that most Russians supported foreign policy moderation and thought that Putin was not advocating a hostile response to the West through the end of 2021. Nevertheless, did he win disproportionate support from people who were anti-Western or saw him as anti-Western? To answer this question, we identify every appropriate indicator of support for Putin in the seven public opinion surveys that we study. We then examine relationships between these indicators and the three dimensions of public opinion that we discuss in the previous section: (1) levels of Western threat perception (agreement that the United States or NATO are threatening); (2) preferred foreign policy orientation (wanting Russia to treat the West as an enemy, rival, ally, or friend); and (3) beliefs about which of these orientations Putin himself shares. We find the following pattern: viewing the West as threatening was consistently a good predictor of Putin support, but Putin backers did not consistently stand out for advocating a hard-line response, instead strongly tending to see Putin as a soft-liner.

These results, using voting intention as our measure of Putin support, appear in the following three figures.⁷⁵ Figure 1 shows that perceiving the United States or NATO as a threat was a reliable predictor of support for Putin. In 2016 as well as at two different points in 2021, Russians who felt threatened by the United States or NATO were 22–32 percentage points more likely to be Putin voters than were those who did not sense such a threat, on average. The “whiskers” protruding from each dot represent 95 percent confidence intervals, showing that we can rule out the possibility of zero relationship (the vertical line at 0) for all three periods in question.

The relationship between hard-line policy preferences and support for Putin was less clear before 2022. In fact, as figure 2 shows, Putin gained political support disproportionately among *pro*-Western Russians in both 2013 and 2016. A shift occurred, however, between September and December 2021, when for the first time we register a statistically significant positive relationship between hard-line (anti-Western) policy positions and the likelihood of voting for Putin. The patterns in figure 2 suggest that this may be an acceleration of a gradual longer-term shift in Putin's support base, a trend crystalizing as the Kremlin began the military deployments for full-scale invasion.

75. Results are presented as support for Putin, coded 1 if someone said they would vote for Putin (if presidential elections were held at the time of the interview) and 0 for all other responses. Additional discussion of methods and the results of selected robustness checks can be found in the online appendix.

Figure 1. Full Effects of Russians' Perceptions of the United States or NATO as a Threat on the Likelihood of Their Voting for Putin



SOURCES: 2016, September 2021, and December 2021 RES surveys.

NOTE: Full effects are average marginal effects when all independent variables are scaled 0–1, when 0 reflects the minimum value on the independent variable in the dataset and 1 the maximum. Figure shows three bivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) models with 95 percent confidence intervals.

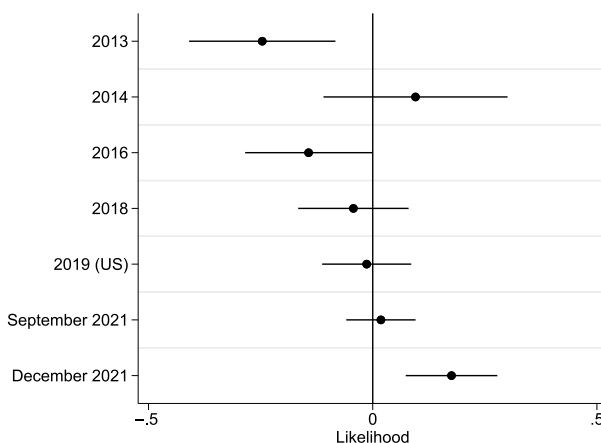
Figure 3 reveals something else important: Putin’s supporters—not his opponents—were consistently more likely to peg him as a soft-liner than as a hard-liner regarding the West. This pattern held even in December 2021. On the eve of all-out war, a typical Russian survey respondent who believed that Putin wanted to treat the West as an enemy was 32 percentage points *less* likely to want to vote for him than a respondent who thought Putin wanted friendly relations with the West.

In sum, our analysis of individual-level patterns of beliefs and opinions in Russia challenges the notion that Putin depended on anti-Western appeals for his support up to 2022. What earned him support was Russians believing in a Western threat. At the same time, however, Russians eschewed hard-line responses to that threat. Further, Russians were less likely to support Putin if they preferred responding to the Western threat with hostility and aggression.

WAS STOKING HOSTILITIES PUTIN’S BEST POLITICAL STRATEGY?

In a survey experiment we commissioned with the Levada Center in 2019, we find further evidence that Putin did benefit politically when people were re-

Figure 2. Full Effects of Russians' Anti-Western Foreign Policy Orientation on the Likelihood of Their Voting for Putin



SOURCES: 2013 and 2014 NEORUSS surveys; 2019 Hale-Lenton survey; 2016, 2018, September 2021, and December 2021 RES surveys.

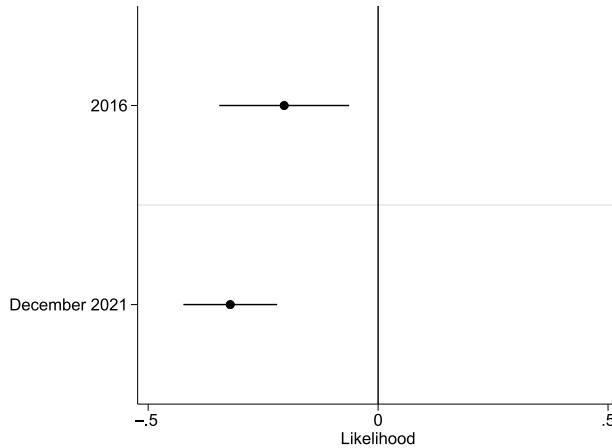
NOTE: Figure shows seven bivariate OLS models with 95 percent confidence intervals. In the y-axis, the "(US)" after 2019 indicates that the question used here from the 2019 survey asks how people think Russia should treat the United States; in all other surveys, the question asks how people think Russia should treat "the West."

minded of U.S. behavior that many Russians found threatening. But, true to his soft-liner reputation in Russia, he gained effectively just as much when he did not mention threat and instead advocated for cooperative relations with the United States.

Survey experiments allow us to measure the effects of different foreign policy prompts on respondents' support of Putin. These effects bring invaluable individual-level evidence to bear on the relationship between authoritarian foreign policy and incumbent support. Some scholars criticize surveys for not reflecting individuals' true dispositions given Russia's increasing authoritarianism.⁷⁶ Yet if this were the case, we would be more likely to find evidence that supports the "authoritarians need an enemy" argument. That is, if people were merely telling pollsters what they thought the authorities wanted to hear, and if this theory is correct that people perceive the West as an enemy and

76. On recent debates over the use of surveys in Russia, see Bryn Rosenfeld, "Survey Research in Russia: In the Shadow of War," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 39, Nos. 1–2 (2023), pp. 38–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2151767>.

Figure 3. Full Effects of Russians Believing That Putin is Anti-Western on the Likelihood of Voting for Him



SOURCES: 2016 and December 2021 RES surveys.

NOTE: Figure shows two bivariate OLS models with 95 percent confidence intervals.

think that the leadership wants them to think this way, then answers in polls should display robust correlations between self-reported anti-Westernism and self-reported support for Putin.

The experiment began by randomly dividing a nationally representative sample of 1,602 people into five groups.⁷⁷ All five groups (including one control group) were asked the same question: “Please tell me, do you generally support Vladimir Putin’s activity in the post of president or not?” Respondents selected one of four options: strongly support him, tend to support him, tend not to support him, or definitely do not support him.⁷⁸ The four treatment groups were read different preambles, each designed to elicit a distinct consideration that the “fortress Russia” theory holds should (or should not) lead people to voice more or less support for Putin. The control group received only this question and no preamble.⁷⁹ Table 3 reports the precise wording and sizes of each group.

77. A balance table is presented in section B.4 of the online appendix.

78. We chose this measure of support so that we do not duplicate other measures of Putin’s support that regularly appear in the Levada Center’s tracking surveys, including approval and voting intention.

79. See sections B.1–B.3 in the online appendix for the specific wording of the dependent variable, coding, and distribution of responses.

Table 3. Wording of the Randomly Assigned “Primes” in the Experiment

Treatment condition	Treatment text (randomly assigned preambles to question on Putin support)	N
Control	[no additional text]	340
IR placebo	Whoever is president must deal with a wide range of issues in international relations.	310
U.S. threat	[IR placebo] + <i>One of these involves the United States.</i> In recent years, the United States government has treated Russia as one of the main threats to its security and has sought to counteract Russian influence worldwide and impose sanctions on important parts of the Russian economy. Considering this together with all the other issues that a president must deal with, . . .	301
Putin: U.S. threat	[IR placebo] + <i>One of these involves the United States. <u>Not long ago, Vladimir Putin remarked that</u> the Americans are using “madeup accusations against Russia” and that “Russia is called almost the greatest threat for the USA.”</i> Considering this together with all the other issues that a president must deal with, . . .	330
Putin: U.S. cooperation	[IR placebo] + <i>One of these involves the United States. <u>Not long ago, Vladimir Putin remarked that</u> “Russia wants to have fullfledged, equality-based and friendly relations with the USA” and that Russia “is not interested in confrontation . . . , especially with a global power like the United States of America.”</i> Considering this statement together with all the other issues that a president must deal with, . . .	321

SOURCE: 2019 Hale-Lenton survey.

NOTE: Column two shows the preambles to the experiment question on Putin support, with underlined/italicized text shared by multiple treatments.

The “U.S. threat” group was read a statement about the ways in which the Russian media had characterized the United States as being threatening to Russia. If perceptions of the United States’ threat tended to bolster Putin’s support (as the survey evidence reported above suggests), “priming” people to think of this threat should increase the tendency for Russians to express support for Putin in the survey question that immediately followed.⁸⁰ We were also interested in whether Putin created or increased any political benefit by personally articulating this threat. Thus, a “Putin: U.S. threat” group was presented with genuine quotations from Putin highlighting the threat posed by

80. Steven J. Sherman, Diane M. Mackie, and Denise M. Driscoll, “Priming and the Differential Use of Dimensions in Evaluation,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1990), pp. 405–418, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167290163001>.

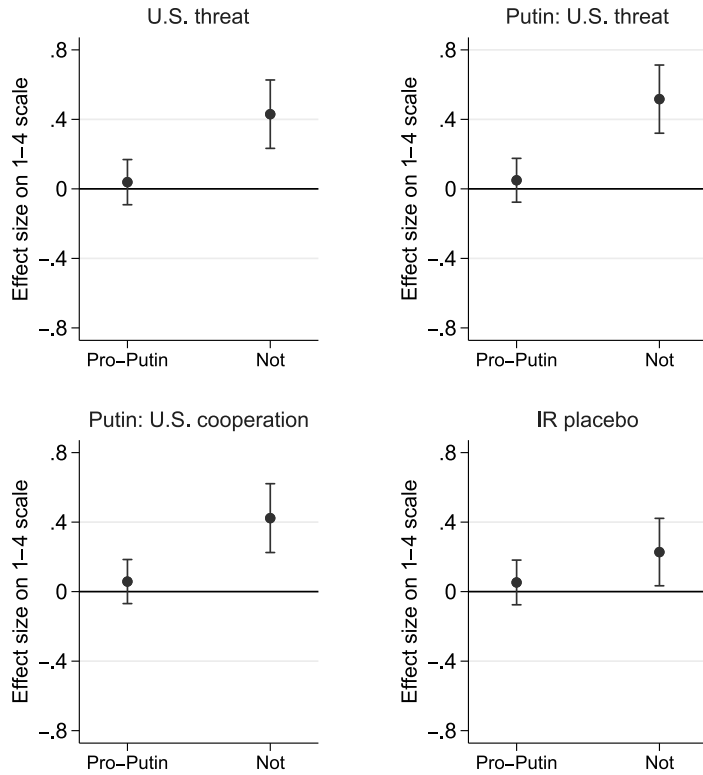
the United States. Importantly, however, we also tested the effects of Putin's soft-line rhetoric, which our analysis of Putin's speeches demonstrates held a prominent place in his foreign affairs discourse. A "Putin: U.S. cooperation" group was thus given real quotations from Putin that contained no mention of threat and instead called for a nonconfrontational, friendly relationship with the United States. Finally, to explore whether the mere mention of international relations might create any effect detected in the experiment, an "IR [international relations] placebo" group received a "placebo" prime on generic international relations (without mentioning the United States, the West, or threats).

We find that while Putin benefited when he pumped up anti-Americanism in 2019, he reaped essentially the same political benefit from advocating foreign policy moderation. Full results of our experiment are in the online appendix.⁸¹ The most important findings speak to what kind of rhetoric earned Putin new supporters. Here we exploit the fact that respondents were asked a simple yes or no question on whether they approved of Putin's job performance before they reached our experiment in the survey. Figure 4 thus presents the effects of all four primes on Putin's support as measured during the experiment itself, broken down by whether respondents had previously identified themselves as pro-Putin. As depicted in the figure, Putin attracted new supporters (relative to the control group) by appealing to *both* threats and cooperation. Results are similar if we employ a much tougher test and compare the threat and cooperation groups with the group receiving the general mention of international relations instead of the control group, though the effects for the generic "U.S. threat" and "cooperation" primes are now borderline, sitting just a hair outside the standard threshold of 95 percent statistical significance.⁸² The reduced significance levels could result from the fact that when people are primed to think about international relations generally, they are already thinking about the considerations related to U.S.-Russian relations that our other primes were designed to activate. Nevertheless, these results make clear that there is no statistically significant difference in political gains for Putin between when he plays up the U.S. threat and when he advocates friendly relations.

81. See sections B5–B6 in the online appendix.

82. See the results presented in the online appendix.

Figure 4. Effects of Four Experiment “Primes” on a Four-Point Scale of Putin Support by Whether Respondents Had Indicated before the Experiment That They Were Pro-Putin (Effects Measured Relative to Control Group)



SOURCE: 2019 Hale-Lenton survey.

NOTE: Figure 4 presents the effects of all four “primes” on Putin’s support broken down by whether respondents had previously identified themselves as “Pro-Putin” or “Not.” The “U.S. threat” group was primed with statements commonly found in Russian media characterizing the United States as threatening to Russia. The “Putin: U.S. threat” group was primed with quotations from Putin personally highlighting the U.S. threat. The “Putin: U.S. cooperation” group was primed with quotations from Putin calling for cooperative relations with the United States. The “IR placebo” group was primed with generic statements about international relations as a presidential responsibility. The dots represent the estimated average effect of each prime on levels of support for Putin as expressed on a scale from 1 to 4 (positive values mean an average increase in support; negative values mean an average decrease in support). The “whiskers” protruding from each dot show the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Did Putin's Support and Anti-Westernism Covary before 2022?

The “authoritarians need an enemy” approach would expect Putin’s aggregate support over time to track closely with anti-Western sentiment over time. Yet we find only partial support for this position. Putin’s job approval and anti-Westernism do appear to be historically connected. But their connection in the data primarily stems from the influence of two major events involving unusually large shifts in opinion: the 2014 Crimea annexation and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The data show that Putin’s popularity and anti-Westernism in other major periods were out of sync, sometimes moving in opposite directions. Examining several of the most important episodes in detail indicates that although Putin may benefit politically from a general sense of Western threat, he profits primarily from portraying himself as a stern but reasonable, pragmatic foreign policy moderate facing a bumbling, bullying West. Before 2022, moreover, other factors were usually responsible for any apparent correlation between anti-Western sentiment and Putin’s support.

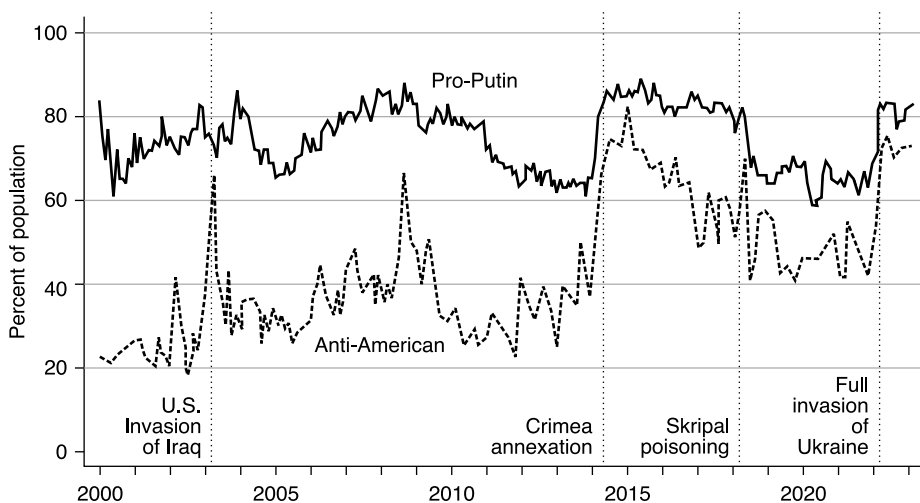
Specifically, we examine the share of Russia’s population reporting that they mostly or fully approved of Putin’s performance and the share having unfavorable views of the United States, using data from the Levada Center from January 2000 to February 2023.⁸³ Figure 5 displays the trends in each measure, and two patterns are striking.

First, Russia has historically had more Putin supporters than anti-Americans. Even after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, there were many more Russians who were Putin supporters than who held negative views of the United States. Thus, if all of Russia’s anti-Americans supported Putin, which our micro-level analysis reveals is far from the case, they would not be nearly enough to account for Putin’s overall support (though after 2022 the number of anti-Americans and number of Putin supporters became almost equal).

Second, while the two trend lines do occasionally vary together, there are many instances where movement goes in opposite directions. For example, compare the Iraq War’s outbreak in 2003 with the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In fact, statistically, whether one detects a relationship largely hinges on just three observations in the dataset that are, in turn, associated with only two major events and unusually large changes in

83. The specific wording of these questions can be found in sections C.1–C.2 in the online appendix.

Figure 5. Shares of Russian Population Approving Putin’s Job Performance (Pro-Putin, Solid Line) and Expressing Anti-American Sentiment (Anti-American, Dashed Line)



SOURCE: Data are from Levada Center omnibus tracking polls in Russia, <https://www.levada.ru/>.

NOTE: The top line shows the percentage of the Russian population that supports Putin. The bottom line shows the percentage of the Russian population that is anti-American. X-axis tick marks indicate January of each year.

attitudes.⁸⁴ These are the observation spanning the Crimea annexation (the difference between the two surveys in January and May 2014) and the two observations covering the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its immediate buildup (the differences between November 2021 and February 2022 and between February 2022 and March 2022).

Table 4 helps to unpack the patterns. Setting aside questions that we will address later about whether correlation reflects causation, the first column

84. In this analysis, we regress month-to-month first differences of Putin’s job approval on the first differences of anti-Americanism with an ordinary least squares (OLS) model. First differences capture the change in values from one period to the next. This is therefore a transparent method appropriate for assessing the short-term impact of changes in one variable on changes in another. Some months are missing for some measures, so this analysis includes only those months for which we have measures of both quantities. See Helmut Thome, “Cointegration and Error Correction Modelling in Time-Series Analysis: A Brief Introduction,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2014), pp. 199–208, <https://doi.org/10.4119/ijcv-3055>.

Table 4. Marginal Effects of Change in Anti-Americanism on Putin Job Approval, 2000–2023

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Anti-Americanism	0.14** (0.03)	0.06 (0.03)	-35.55** (10.30)	-15.31 (10.30)	0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
Year			-0.00 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)		
Anti-Americanism × year			0.02** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)		
Post-2014					0.25 (0.55)	-0.30 (0.52)
Anti-Americanism × post-2014					-0.27** (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)
Constant	0.01 (0.26)	-0.19 (0.24)	1.66 (81.90)	73.53 (76.54)	-0.09 (0.30)	- 0.09 (0.28)
<i>N</i>	158	155	158	155	158	155

NOTE: Ordinary Least Squares regressions. Standard errors in parentheses, no weights or clustering of standard errors. Years with missing data dropped. Each column represents an algebraic model that includes independent variables named in the left-hand column along with a constant term (“Constant”). *N* refers to the number of observations. Each observation on the Anti-Americanism and Putin approval variables is a “first-difference” (the change in that variable at a given point in time relative to the previous point in time). “Year” is the year in which a given observation took place, and “Post-2014” is a binary variable indicating whether the observation occurred after 2014. Models 1, 3, and 5 include all observations. Models 2, 4, and 6 report results when three observations are dropped from the analysis: one observation spanning the Crimea annexation (January–May 2014), and two observations spanning the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its buildup (November 2021–March 2022). Empty cells indicate that those variables were not included in the respective model.

p* < 0.05 *p* < 0.01

(model 1, “Anti-Americanism”) reports that a rise in anti-Americanism on average produces a statistically significant rise in support for Putin. The net effect is modest: the Kremlin needs to convince 100 people to become anti-American to create just fourteen new supporters of Putin. But as model 2 shows, the relationship is no longer statistically significant if we drop the three observations mentioned previously (out of the 158 observations in the analysis). Thus, we can no longer reject the null hypothesis of zero effect. Similarly, for all observations in the dataset, we find that anti-Americanism gradually becomes a better predictor of Putin’s support as the years pass (model 3, “Anti-Americanism × year”) and especially after the start of 2014

(model 5, “Anti-Americanism \times post-2014”). But dropping the three observations in question effectively wipes out these findings too (models 4 and 6, “Anti-Americanism \times year” and “Anti-Americanism \times post-2014,” respectively).⁸⁵ Patterns are broadly similar for the relationship between anti-EU sentiment and Putin’s support.⁸⁶ Overall, therefore, whether the relationship between aggregate anti-Westernism and aggregate support for Putin is statistically significant depends heavily on just two episodes in the almost quarter century of Putin’s presidency.⁸⁷ Of course, even though statistical significance depends on just these few observations, it does not mean that these outliers ought to be excluded from the analysis. To the contrary, it means that we must pay special attention to why these episodes are driving the relationship.

Ultimately, we believe that it would be a mistake to interpret the results in table 4 as showing that anti-Americanism increases Putin’s support. Instead, we conclude that other factors are likely to produce the covariation in anti-Americanism and support for Putin. We show this initially through a close analysis of three episodes during Putin’s presidency before 2022, when there were prominent shifts in the level of anti-Americanism (see figure 5): (1) the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, which sparked an unprecedented surge in anti-Americanism but no meaningful change in Putin’s support; (2) the annexation of Crimea in 2014, when both anti-Americanism and support for Putin rose considerably; and (3) events in the late spring of 2018, when both anti-Americanism and Putin’s support jointly increased before rapidly falling again over the summer.⁸⁸

85. Models 3 and 4 added an interaction term between anti-Americanism and year (including a straight year variable as a control). Models 5 and 6 added an interaction term between anti-Americanism and a binary variable coded 1 if the observation comes after the start of 2014 (including this binary variable by itself as a control).

86. Results reported in sections C.5–C.6 in the online appendix. Key differences include: (1) the relationship between anti-EU sentiment and Putin’s support becomes statistically insignificant when we control for economic variables; and (2) without economic controls, anti-EU feelings remain a significant predictor of Putin support even if the 2014 and 2022 variables are dropped, but this variable becomes insignificant if a fourth observation, corresponding to the events of late spring 2018, is dropped.

87. Analysis reported in sections C.3–C.4 in the online appendix shows that these patterns also hold if we introduce economic control variables and look only at post-2014 data. We also show here that patterns were not significantly different during Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency (2008–2012, often referred to as the “tandem” because Putin was prime minister during this period and the two claimed to be governing together).

88. An additional case study of another episode widely considered substantively important in Russia—the period spanning the Bolotnaya Square protests of fall 2011 and Putin’s reelection in spring 2012—is provided in section D of the online appendix. Because the events of summer 2008 occurred during Medvedev’s presidency during the tandem period, we do not address them here.

THE 2003 U.S.-LED INVASION OF IRAQ

Our first case study is the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, which is a crucial episode for two reasons. First, it represents the sharpest increase in anti-Americanism under Putin before the 2014 Crimea annexation. If the “autocrats need an enemy” logic were valid, there should have been a massive spike in support for Putin resulting from the dramatic increase in anti-American sentiment. Instead, we saw an increase in anti-American sentiment and a *decrease* in Putin’s support. Second, the events of 2003 set the stage for what McFaul terms a “new rift” with the United States.⁸⁹ Our analysis finds that the Iraq War was the foundation for much of Putin’s subsequent rhetoric on regime change and U.S. foreign policy.

Putin’s condemnation of the invasion came largely as a surprise to the George W. Bush administration, which had up to that point enjoyed relatively cordial relations with Russia.⁹⁰ Russian support for the U.S. war on terror was a lynchpin of the new bilateral relationship. Not only did U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan appear to eliminate a security threat to post-Soviet Central Asia perceived by Russia, but they helped Putin fold his domestic struggle against Chechen separatists into Washington’s narrative.⁹¹ Yet Putin’s condemnation faded quickly from official rhetoric. As soon as May 2003, Bush visited Moscow and St. Petersburg, and both presidents declared bilateral relations to be “partner-like.”⁹²

Russian public opinion, however, was sharply opposed to the Iraq War, causing an unprecedented increase in anti-Americanism. Over 80 percent of Russians held negative views of the invasion, and anti-Americanism more than doubled, from less than 30 percent in late 2002 to more than 65 percent in April 2003.⁹³

But Putin’s support did not rise; rather, it fell slightly.⁹⁴ About 38 percent of

89. McFaul, “Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants,” p. 110.

90. Michael McFaul, “U.S.-Russia Relations after September 11, 2001,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 24, 2001, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2001/10/24/u.s.-russia-relations-after-september-11-2001-pub-840>.

91. Dmitri Trenin, “Pirouettes and Priorities,” *National Interest*, December 1, 2003, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/pirouettes-and-priorities-1141>.

92. “Vneshnaya politika” [Foreign policy], *Kommersant’ Vlast’*, January 28, 2008, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/845861>.

93. “Press-Vypusk no. 13: SShA, Irak” [Press-release no. 13: USA, Iraq], Levada Center, April 29, 2003, <https://www.levada.ru/2003/04/29/press-vypusk-13-ssha-irak/>.

94. Daniel Treisman, “Putin’s Popularity since 2010: Why Did Support for the Kremlin Plunge, Then Stabilize?,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (2014), pp. 370–388, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2014.904541>.

Russians believed that the government should have been tougher against the United States.⁹⁵ Because Putin was seen as a foreign policy moderate, hard-line nationalists instead gained support, notably Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, whose Liberal Democratic Party of Russia made noteworthy gains in the December 2003 legislative elections.⁹⁶

THE 2014 ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

As the “authoritarians need an enemy” perspective would expect, there was a considerable spike in both anti-Americanism and support for Putin around the March 2014 annexation of Crimea. On closer inspection, however, the events of 2014 suggest that the annexation itself and ensuing conflict in Ukraine drove Putin’s support *and* anti-Americanism independently of each other. That is, Putin’s ratings jumped into the stratosphere because annexing Crimea catalyzed a wave of positive feelings and other social processes that benefited Putin, not because it generated anti-Americanism that then went on to benefit him.⁹⁷ Indeed, polling showed long before the event that it would be popular with a majority of Russians, even if annexation damaged relations with Ukraine.⁹⁸ Subsequent studies show that simply reminding people about the annexation without mentioning the United States or the West generated a substantial bump in Putin’s support.⁹⁹ Anti-Americanism was largely a side effect that resulted from the clash that ensued, including the imposition of sanctions.¹⁰⁰

This interpretation fits well with what Putin himself has stated on the subject. During Ukraine’s Euromaidan revolution, Russia’s leader was initially hesitant to address the annexation, first speaking out publicly almost two weeks after Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych fled the country.¹⁰¹ His

95. Ibid.

96. Andreas Umland, “Zhirinovskiy’s Last Thrust to the South and the Definition of Fascism,” *Russian Politics & Law*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2008), p. 36, <https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940460402>.

97. Greene and Robertson, *Putin v. the People*; Hale, “How Crimea Pays”; Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror*; Sirotkina and Zavadskaya, “When the Party’s Over.”

98. See, for instance, “Krym bez Rossii: 55 let spustya” [Crimea without Russia: 55 years later], VCIOM, February 18, 2009, <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/krym-bez-rossii-55-let-spustya>.

99. Hale, “How Crimea Pays.”

100. Timothy Frye, “Economic Sanctions and Public Opinion: Survey Experiments from Russia,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 7 (2018), pp. 967–994, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018806530>.

101. “Vladimir Putin otvechal na voprosy zhurnalistov o situatsii na Ukraine” [Vladimir Putin answered journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine], President of Russia, March 4, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366>.

December 2013 address to the Federal Assembly focused largely on questions of missile defense but contained barely any Western threat accusations.¹⁰² Putin's rhetoric, however, became much sharper following the annexation. For example, he launched straight into a lengthy discussion of foreign politics and Ukraine during his December 2014 address to the Federal Assembly: "How did the dialogue on this issue begin between Russia and its American and European partners? I mentioned our American friends for a reason, since they are always influencing Russia's relations with its neighbors, either openly or behind the scenes."¹⁰³ He even suggested that "sometimes it is even unclear whom to talk to: to the governments of certain countries or directly with their American patrons and sponsors."¹⁰⁴

Though Putin sharply criticized the United States, his rhetoric remained consistent with his addresses and discussions from previous years. For one thing, he continued to distinguish between Europe and the United States, portraying the former as having "long forgotten" about sovereignty, reminding Europe that it was "our army [that] crushed the enemy and liberated Europe" in World War II, and saving his most acerbic criticisms and accusations for the United States.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, the content of Putin's criticisms of the United States was the same as in previous speeches: concerns over NATO expansion, arms control, and U.S. power and interference more generally. For instance, he implicitly accused the United States of provoking separatism in the North Caucasus, stating that "we remember well how and who, almost openly, supported separatism [in Russia] back then and even outright terrorism . . . we remember high-level receptions for terrorists dubbed as freedom and democracy fighters."¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, he more clearly articulated the threat, notably during his *Direct Line* of 2014: "Let's recall what happened in Iraq, Afghanistan, [in] Libya," he said. "Look what they did with Yugoslavia: they cut it up into little pieces and are now manipulating everything that can be manipulated there."¹⁰⁷ For Putin, the implications were clear: "Appar-

102. Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," President of Russia, December 12, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>.

103. Putin, "Presidential Address," December 4, 2014.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*; Fiona Hill, "Putin: The One-Man Show the West Doesn't Understand," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July 11, 2018, <https://thebulletin.org/2018/07/putin-the-one-man-show-the-west-doesnt-understand/>.

106. Putin, "Presidential Address," December 4, 2014.

107. Putin, *Direct Line*, April 17, 2014.

ently, someone would like to do the same thing with us,” and “if you look at what’s happening you’ll be able to answer your own question about who is doing what.” Throughout the show, it is clear that he was referring to the United States and NATO. “Who does NATO act against?” he asked rhetorically.¹⁰⁸

Yet Putin still called for dialogue and mutual respect for what he portrayed as Russia’s interests: “Who does not want our relations to be good [with the West]? We want this. We are part of a common civilization . . . we want our relations to be good.”¹⁰⁹ Putin spoke at length about the crisis in Ukraine during his address to the Federal Assembly later that year, when he similarly expressed that mutual respect for national interests could form the basis for cooperative relations: “If you do not want to have a dialogue with us, we will have to protect our legitimate interests unilaterally.”¹¹⁰ In Putin’s view, it was the West that “forced” him, reluctantly, to undertake actions to “protect our legitimate interests unilaterally,” actions that he portrayed as reasonable rather than as aggressive or even hard-line.

The annexation of Crimea is a clear instance of a third, underlying factor influencing the correlation between anti-American sentiment and Putin’s support. Indeed, if in a counterfactual world the United States had publicly recognized Crimea as part of Russia in a show of mutual support, it is hard to believe that Putin’s ratings would have increased any less. The correlation between anti-Americanism and Putin’s support is thus clearly not causal in this instance. Without these observations, the relationship’s statistical significance for the period before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine disappears.

2018: FROM TENSIONS WITH THE WEST TO THE TRUMP-PUTIN SUMMIT

Both anti-Americanism and support for Putin shifted significantly in the spring and summer of 2018. Such shifts might appear in part to follow an “autocrats need an enemy” logic. Spring 2018 was marked by increased tensions with the West. On March 1, 2018, Putin addressed the Federal Assembly just seventeen days before the presidential election, announcing a new array of powerful nuclear weapons.¹¹¹ Western media responded with alarm to one animated video on display during his address that appeared to show nuclear

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*

110. Putin, “Presidential Address,” December 4, 2014.

111. Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” President of Russia, March 1, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>.

weapons attacking Florida.¹¹² As a spokesperson for the U.S. State Department put it, Putin “was playing to the [domestic] audience, certainly.”¹¹³ Shortly afterward, the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the UK provoked a diplomatic crisis between Russia and the West, with the UK publicly accusing Russia of the March 12 poisoning (or of losing control of the Novichok agent used in the incident).¹¹⁴ Similar accusations from the United States, NATO, and the EU resulted in more than 300 diplomats being sent back to their home countries.¹¹⁵ The case of the Skripals’ poisonings is curious because Putin’s campaign spokesperson claimed that an increase of “around 8–10%” in turnout for his March 2018 reelection was “thanks to the UK, which once more failed to correctly read the Russian mentality.”¹¹⁶

At face value, these accounts suggest that Putin benefited from these incidents by explicitly provoking an international crisis to cater to domestic audiences. But we do not find evidence that either of these incidents actually boosted Putin’s support. As shown in figure 5, Putin’s approval levels had largely plateaued before they dropped that summer. At best, all these efforts to stoke tensions were initially ineffective and were soon followed by major declines in his popular support. Moreover, what Putin says accords with our interpretation of his consistent foreign policy messaging to domestic audiences. Indeed, during the 2018 *Direct Line*, he downplayed the poisoning on multiple occasions, lamenting that “I have talked about this many times. I am not sure if I can add anything,” and that “I can only repeat myself.”¹¹⁷

Again, Putin emphasized his own reasonableness and—especially in this *Direct Line*—exasperation at what he portrayed as the West’s endless hysteria. To the Russian public, Putin juxtaposed this supposed rash Western behavior with his desired relations: respect for Russia’s interests. As he explained, “Even at the political level, everyone talks about the need to build normal rela-

112. “Why Would Putin Want to Nuke Florida?,” *BBC News*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43248794>.

113. Tony Weselovsky, “‘Listen to Us Now’: Putin Unveils Weapons, Vows to Raise Living Standards in Fiery Annual Address,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-set-give-annual-address-amid-presidential-election-campaign/29069948.html>.

114. Theresa May, “Oral Statement to Parliament: PM Commons Statement on Salisbury Incident: 12 March 2018,” GOV.UK, March 12, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-commons-statement-on-salisbury-incident-12-march-2018>.

115. Alia Chughtai and Mariya Petkova, “Skripal Case Diplomatic Expulsions in Numbers,” *Al Jazeera*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/4/3/skripal-case-diplomatic-expulsions-in-numbers>.

116. “Near-Final Results Give Putin Landslide Win.”

117. Putin, *Direct Line*, June 7, 2018.

tions. Yes, each country has its own interests. . . . It's obvious to us, for Russia, that we must protect our interests."¹¹⁸ Moreover, "all this pressure will end when our partners realize that the methods they are using are ineffective, and counterproductive, harmful to everyone and that they will have to deal with the interests of the Russian Federation."¹¹⁹

In the summer of 2018, however, both anti-Westernism and Putin's ratings declined. Did the decline in anti-Westernism cause the reduction in Putin's popularity, as the "autocrats need an enemy" approach would expect? The answer is no. Instead, other factors appear to have independently influenced these movements. First, in June 2018, reforms were announced that would increase the pension age from 60 to 65 for men and from 55 to 63 for women. Russians responded to the announcement with widespread indignation and protests, both of which drove down Putin's ratings.¹²⁰ Shortly before the pension reform was announced in July 2018, 89 percent of men and 90 percent of women opposed plans to increase the pension age.¹²¹ Given its unpopularity, the government tried to shield Putin from direct criticism or association with the reforms. Putin was evasive about the policy and avoided endorsing raising the pension age during the 2018 *Direct Line* show. Nevertheless, support for Putin declined significantly as several large-scale protests in cities throughout Russia peaked in July.¹²²

At the same time, anti-Westernism also decreased. Net feelings toward both the United States and the EU crept into positive digits for the first time since the annexation of Crimea. Why an unpopular pension reform might have caused this large shift toward positive views of the West might seem puzzling, but the source of the rise in pro-Western sentiment that we observe in our dataset appears to be the July meeting between Trump and Putin in Helsinki. This high-profile event was the first official summit between the two heads of state. Surveyed that month, 83 percent of respondents claimed to have heard about it (30 percent claimed that they knew a lot). Although a majority of Russians (53 percent) believed that the meeting would not improve U.S.-

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.

120. Maria Lipman, "There Is No 'Reform' in Russia's Recent 'Pension Reform' Bill: Interview with Evgeny Gontmakher," PONARS Eurasia, July 27, 2018, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/there-no-reform-russias-recent-pension-reform-bill-interview-evgeny-gontmakher>.

121. "Pensionnaya reforma" [Pension reform], press release, Levada Center, July 5, 2018, <https://www.levada.ru/2018/07/05/pensionnaya-reforma-3/>.

122. Lipman, "There Is No 'Reform.'"

Russia relations, a significant minority (29 percent) believed that it would.¹²³ Certainly Russians' expectations were limited, which fits with the narrative that we argue Putin has long pushed domestically in Russia. This summit could show that Russia and the United States were meeting as equals, while reinforcing his image as a moderate pragmatist with the Russian public.¹²⁴

Additionally, this meeting occurred just after Russia hosted the 2018 FIFA [Fédération Internationale de Football Association] World Cup. Taking place only every four years, this popular sporting event offered Russia a useful opportunity to legitimize its government through international engagement and nation-branding (the feel-good factor of Russia's best-ever result no doubt helped).¹²⁵ Spectators praised Russia's role as host, with the *New York Times* even claiming it was the "best World Cup for years."¹²⁶ Survey research found that 67 percent of Russia's population thought "relations towards Russia in the world" had either "improved" or "considerably improved" after the tournament.¹²⁷ Even so, these events did not offset the political hit to Putin's reputation for the bread-and-butter issue of pension reform in summer 2018.

It is hard to disentangle which of these factors might have been driving the shifts in attitudes and by how much, especially given that they all occurred during the same period. What is clear is that this decline in popular support did not prompt the Kremlin to engage in a major new anti-Western campaign to reverse its summer losses, as the "autocrats need an enemy" approach and theories of diversionary war might expect. Attitudes toward the United States and the EU did return to their 2017 levels by September, but Putin's ratings were not concomitantly restored.

Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine, February 2022–Present

The long-term perspective introduced in this study provides useful leverage for interpreting Russia's radical escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War to further subdue Ukraine. At the most general level, the invasion was not an in-

123. *Obshchestvennoe Mnenie: 2018 Yezhegodnik* [Public opinion: 2018 yearbook] (Moscow: Levada Center, 2019), p. 153.

124. "Anti-Americanism Wanes in Russia after Putin-Trump Summit, Survey Says," *Moscow Times*, August 2, 2018, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/08/02/anti-americanism-wanes-russia-after-putin-trump-summit-survey-says-a62425>.

125. Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, "Entertain and Govern: From Sochi 2014 to FIFA 2018," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2018), pp. 115–128, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2018.1433960>.

126. Rory Smith, "Was Russia 2018 the Greatest of All World Cups?," *New York Times*, June 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13/sports/world-cup/greatest-russia-history.html>.

127. *Obshchestvennoe Mnenie*, p. 126.

evitable outgrowth of Putin's long-standing domestic legitimation strategy. Before 2022, Putin had cultivated a reputation for moderation rather than belligerence in response to a Western threat. Nor was the invasion politically necessary for Putin. His popular support remained above 60 percent in 2021 (figure 5), and he historically benefited from a soft-line foreign policy reputation among Russians. Our analysis suggests that a cooperative turn vis-à-vis the West was also a viable way to bring in new political supporters. Indeed, from a domestic politics perspective, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine appears much more like something Putin felt he could allow himself than something he was driven to do for popularity at home. Some scholars root his indulgent choice in his own imperialist Russian thinking (believing Ukrainians and Russians to be "one people"), while others cite possible concerns Putin may have had about the security threat that Ukraine's increasingly pro-Western orientation posed to his regime.¹²⁸

At the same time, the Kremlin continued to draw on pre-2022 patterns to sell itself—and Putin—to the Russian people. First, because Russians had long trusted Putin as a reasonable leader who would not undertake hostile action without justification, many found it believable that the West was to blame for the conflict. Putin played this up from the beginning. Drawing heavily on themes he had mined deeply before, over the course of 2021 and early 2022, Putin and his supporters ramped up portrayals of imminent threat—ones that would seemingly leave even a moderate little choice but to respond with force.

Second, and accordingly, Russian central media reported that it was the Kyiv authorities who had actually begun escalating the armed hostilities. According to this narrative, "fascists" in Kyiv who illegitimately came to power in 2014 had laid siege to innocent ethnic Russians and pro-Russian Ukrainians in eastern Donbas. Their violent attacks supposedly intensified with Western backing in 2021–2022.¹²⁹ Putin himself consistently portrayed the West as ideologically zealous and malignant and Russia as pragmatic, rational, and defensive in its actions. Opening his televised speech on February 21, 2022, Putin announced that Russia would officially recognize the "breakaway" Donetsk and Luhansk regions, signaling the end of Russia's participation in international peace negotiations. Putin then described at length Russia-Ukraine relations.¹³⁰ Echo-

128. Paul D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States* (Cambridge: Polity, 2024).

129. *Vremia* (news program), First Channel, March 1, 2022, 15:00, <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2022-03-01/15:00#1>.

130. Putin, "Address by the President," February 21, 2022.

ing his article from summer 2021 “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” the Russian leader claimed that Ukraine “never had stable traditions of real statehood.”¹³¹ He depicted Ukrainian history as a series of attempts by local rulers, backed by malevolent foreign powers, to “undermine our unity.”¹³²

Putin identified the United States and NATO as the main culprits behind the onset and escalation of tensions over Ukraine, accusing the United States of trying to turn the latter into an “anti-Russia.” Putin wrote in 2021, “Inevitably, there came a time when the concept of ‘Ukraine is not Russia’ was no longer an option [to the West],” adding that “there was a need for the ‘anti-Russia’ concept which we could never accept.”¹³³ Putin depicted Western malfeasance as a constant force in Ukrainian politics: “The Western authors of the anti-Russia project set up the Ukrainian political system in such a way that presidents, members of parliament and ministers would change but the attitude of separation from and enmity with Russia would remain.”¹³⁴ As Putin put it, “the Americans simply used them [the Ukrainians] to carry out a clearly anti-Russian policy.”¹³⁵

Putin therefore portrayed the invasion as a response to U.S. hostility, a reaction to what he portrayed as a U.S. strategy that sought to turn Ukraine against Russia. In his February 21 address he bemoaned that the United States and NATO had since 2014 “started an impudent development of Ukrainian territory as a theater of potential military operations.”¹³⁶ Three days later, in his February 24 speech announcing the invasion, Putin claimed that “in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile ‘anti-Russia’ is taking shape” that was “fully controlled from the outside.”¹³⁷ In his address to the Federal Assembly one year later on February 21, 2023, Putin reiterated these points, stressing that the West “is turning Ukraine into an ‘anti-Russia,’” and that this “is part of a revanchist policy towards our country.”¹³⁸ As he summarized in that speech, “Importantly, our relations have degraded which can be credited entirely to the United States.”¹³⁹

131. *Ibid.*

132. Putin, “Article by Vladimir Putin,” July 21, 2021.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

135. Putin, “Address by the President,” February 21, 2022.

136. *Ibid.*

137. Vladimir Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

138. Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to Federal Assembly,” President of Russia, February 21, 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565>.

139. *Ibid.*

Long believing that Putin was in fact a soft-line pragmatist who would act with force only in response to a grave security threat, large majorities of Russians came to believe that the United States and NATO were responsible for the sharp escalation of hostilities and Russia's military actions.¹⁴⁰ This perception remained widespread as the United States became increasingly central in providing economic and military aid to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia after February 2022, facts that Russia's state-controlled media emphasized.¹⁴¹

With Russia's public primed in this way, and with increasingly brutal repression applied to all critics of the war,¹⁴² the all-out invasion prompted an unprecedented outpouring of anti-American sentiment. That it was the actual kinetic act of invasion itself rather than the media or rhetorical buildup causing the surge in hostility can be seen by looking closely at figure 5. Anti-American sentiment had been declining throughout 2021. Just a few months before the full-scale invasion, more Russians had expressed positive views than negative ones of the United States, which had happened only on a handful of occasions after 2014. By February 2022, however, anti-Americanism quickly rebounded to its historical peak of 2014–2015. And with Russian media playing up direct U.S. military support for forces portrayed as mortal enemies of Russia—even to the point of invoking terms like “fascist” to draw parallels between Ukraine's government and Nazi Germany in World War II—it became much harder for Russians to see the United States or the West in a positive light or as potential partners. Consequently, many Russians viewed the war through such frames, in turn disassociating themselves from its devastating effects on ordinary Ukrainians—effects that are systematically suppressed by Russia's official media.¹⁴³

The full-scale invasion also caused a jump in Putin's approval ratings in Russian polls. As seen in figure 5, though, the initial bump was only about a dozen percentage points. We write “only” because the ratings failed to reach

140. See “Obostrenie v Donbasse” [Escalation in the Donbas], press release, Levada Center, December 14, 2021, <https://www.levada.ru/2021/12/14/obostrenie-v-donbasse/>. Seventy-four percent of respondents claimed that a specific country had initiated tensions (26 percent claimed that “no one in particular” did or responded “don't know”). Of this 74 percent, almost all respondents blamed either the United States/NATO (67 percent) or Ukraine (27 percent).

141. Michael Kimmage and Maria Lipman, “What Mobilization Means for Russia: The End of Putin's Bargain with the People,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/what-mobilization-means-russia>.

142. Daniel Treisman, “Putin Unbound: How Repression at Home Presaged Belligerence Abroad,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 6, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/putin-russia-ukraine-war-unbound>.

143. Jade McGlynn, *Russia's War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2023).

the same levels as they had post-Crimea—even though wartime pressures may have prompted many Russians to overstate their support for him.¹⁴⁴ To put this into context, of the 276 months that the Levada Center asked Russians this question, Putin's highest approval rating following the full-scale invasion ranked thirty-fifth.

Also, unlike with the pro-Putin bump in ratings after the annexation of Crimea, anti-Western sentiment appears to be a source of support for Putin in February 2022. Indeed, anti-Westernism (specifically, the view that the United States started military aggression) was at the core of the Kremlin's public justification for the invasion, coloring how people interpreted Putin's actions. With the West arming the enemy in open battle with Russian troops, treating it with hostility could be portrayed as the prudent and even reasonable thing for the Kremlin to do for people who blamed the West for the conflict in the first place. There was no other independent factor explaining both anti-Westernism and Putin's surge in support in February 2022 as there was in Crimea in 2014. While there had been extensive evidence before 2014 that majorities of Russians simply wanted Crimea back for its own sake and were thus satisfied when Putin took it, no such widespread territorial attachment for the rest of Ukraine had been evident. For example, the 2014 NEORUSS survey found that only 21 percent of Russians thought that Ukraine's eastern Donbas region should be part of Russia—even after Russia had successfully annexed Crimea and started fomenting insurgency in eastern Ukraine.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

Our study asked whether nondemocratic leaders like Putin need an enemy to shore up domestic support as is often claimed, investigating whether the posited relationships existed between a sense of threat, bellicose policy preferences, and autocratic support. We detected no evidence that Putin systematically gained popularity from anti-Westernism right up until late 2021. Instead, majorities of Russians viewed the West as threatening but nonetheless preferred soft-line foreign policy responses. We showed that presenting himself and being perceived as a pragmatic and cautious moderate rather than as an aggressive hawk is in fact why Russians found Putin appealing. These re-

144. Guzel Yusupova, "Silence Matters: Self-Censorship and War in Russia," Policy Memos, PONARS Eurasia, January 19, 2023, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/silence-matters-self-censorship-and-war-in-russia/>.

145. NEORUSS 2014 dataset.

sults are consistent across multiple data sources and throughout two decades of Putin's presidency. Our experimental evidence added further confirmation that he effectively had as much to gain from anti-confrontational responses as from stoking anti-American threats.

If Putin indeed fanned the fires of anti-Americanism to bolster his support, we show that at best this strategy was unreliable and often completely ineffective. At worst, it could backfire. Not only was there no causal connection over time between Putin's favorability and anti-Westernism—we also demonstrated that these factors largely moved independently of each other across several key episodes, even when his popularity and anti-Americanism appeared to covary. Instead, we conclude that apparent covariance is often a result of other factors influencing each disposition independently. Indeed, other forces—including economic performance and policies like pension reform—appear far more powerful and thus capable of overpowering anti-Westernism as a driver of Putin's support.

A study of a single country naturally raises the question of generalizability. We believe that other nondemocratic leaders are likely acting in similar ways to Putin, promoting a sense of foreign threat behind the scenes while presenting themselves to their publics as stern but prudent moderates competently seeking stability and prosperity in international affairs. Future research might fruitfully examine other autocratic powers whose relations with the United States are competitive or adversarial (e.g., China, Iran, Venezuela, or even North Korea), as well as cases such as Turkey or Hungary where more recent autocratic consolidation has accompanied an increasingly anti-Western foreign policy orientation.¹⁴⁶ Further research might examine whether foreign enmity benefits autocrats in ways other than boosting their favorability, or whether so-called enemies other than the West might have different effects.

Our findings also carry important implications for understanding continuing developments in the Russo-Ukrainian War, including policy-relevant insights. First, our perspective frames the full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a distinct shift in rather than a continuation of Putin's domestic legitimation strategy. This view suggests that Russia's leader could have kept or gained domestic support with a very different, cooperative legitimation strategy had he wanted—he just chose otherwise.

Second, it will likely be challenging for the Kremlin to require Russians to bear more costs of the war. Over two years have passed since the full-

146. Bill Park, "Turkey's Isolated Stance: An Ally No More, or Just the Usual Turbulence?," *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (May 2015), pp. 581–600, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12280>.

scale invasion, and Putin is still trying to reconcile invoking the Western threat to justify the war and presenting himself as cautious and prudent, eschewing the total mobilization of Russia's society for the war effort. If anything, Putin has sought to *demobilize* the Russian public, a strategy that the Kremlin uses in elections but now has rearticulated under different circumstances post-invasion.¹⁴⁷

Third, our findings point to the importance of status in Russia-West relations.¹⁴⁸ We have shown that Putin's domestic claim to reasonableness has rested heavily on calls for the West to treat Russia as a geopolitical "equal." Sharp improvements in favorable attitudes toward the United States seem to stem from status-enhancing actions such as bilateral summits in 2018 and 2021. Beyond the current nadir of relations, there eventually will be considerable scope for such actions, including on issues such as arms control. Our evidence suggests that domestic audiences in Russia are likely to be supportive of such moves.

Fourth, and finally, our findings hint at the possibility that Putin could gain support for a negotiated de-escalation in Ukraine. From a domestic politics perspective, we find no evidence that such a step would influence Russians' support for Putin. But as we have demonstrated in this study, Russian public opinion is unlikely to be the driving factor were he to choose such an option.

The key word, though, is "choose." To explain authoritarians' cross-border behavior and their rhetoric about international relations, we find that it is not enough to cite a general need for an enemy. Instead, it is important to look closely at other factors that domestic audiences might support or that publics might value in their own right, including autocrats' beliefs, values, and moral codes, the constraints they face, as well as the potential gains or losses in national power, military or ontological security, or status.

147. Maria Lipman, "Putin's 'Besieged Fortress' and Its Ideological Arms," in Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov, eds., *The State of Russia: What Comes Next?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 110–136; Ian McAllister and Stephen White, "Demobilizing Voters: Election Turnout in the 2016 Russian Election," *Russian Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2017), pp. 411–433, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-8921-00204002>.

148. Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (April 2010), pp. 63–95, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.4.63>; Pål Røren, "The Belligerent Bear: Russia, Status Orders, and War," *International Security*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (January 2023), pp. 7–49, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00458.