

Beyond Attitudes: Russian Xenophobia as a Political Legitimation Tool

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The Ukrainian conflict has had a curious effect on xenophobia in Russia, which had reached unprecedented levels in the autumn of 2013. Xenophobia in Russia was artificially stimulated by the regime in order to deflect attention from acute societal problems such as corruption, decaying democratic freedoms and the economic stagflation. The Ukrainian conflict shook up Russian society, causing the Russian State to tone down domestic xenophobic rhetoric. The attention concentrated on exploiting the threats of Ukrainian nationalism, which would be incompatible with Russian state-sanctioned xenophobia. This apparent paradox of supporting home-grown nationalism and xenophobia, but condemning Ukrainian nationalism, resembles the Soviet past, when the leaders argued for the benefits of 'good nationalism' for building the socialist state (Slezkine 1994).

Currently, the Levada Centre, a reputable Russian public opinion pollster, indicates that xenophobia has diminished somewhat, most likely due to the decrease in mass media attention to perceived societal problems caused by immigrants. Overall, in Russia xenophobia continues to be manipulated and sanctioned by the state as the regime steers popular discontent towards migrants while declaring its official intolerance to radical nationalism and racism. The current political climate is more conducive to sanctioning less aggression towards foreigners because the state deems it more in its interests. Instead, attention is focused on the threat from the West – a comfortable antagonist of Russian authoritarianism.

Existing Theories of Xenophobia

Xenophobia is the anti-immigrant sentiment exhibited by host societies towards immigrants from other cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. One of the prevalent explanations of xenophobia in existing literature attributes hostility towards immigrants to the perceived competition for local social and economic resources. The extant literature calls it the *competition hypothesis* (Kischelt 1995; Gorodziesky, Glikman and Maskileysen 2015). Fear of immigrants is most common among groups most vulnerable to the challenges of a globalised economy. Unskilled labour and lower-middle class workers, uneducated, underemployed and unemployed individuals are expected to express more anti-immigrant sentiment. The competitive threat from the influx of a younger, cheaper immigrant labour force has been found to significantly increase anti-immigrant sentiment in European countries (Gorodziesky and Semyonov 2015; Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodziesky 2006). Recent scholarship extends the relevance of the competition hypothesis and argues that the negative attitude towards immigrants is amplified among those who also hold conservative political views and support radical right parties (Gorodziesky and Semyonov 2015; Wilkes, Guppy and Farris 2007).

Semyonov, Gorodziesky, and Raijman (2006), using Eurobarometer survey data, found that anti-foreigner sentiment

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is significantly stronger in localities with higher support for radical-right parties. Their findings have been affirmed and extended by Wilkes, Guppy and Farris (2007), who argue that the strongest association between radical right party support and anti-immigrant sentiment is found for those radical right parties that promote cultural racism, which is based on the superiority of Western civilisation's culture and ways of life.

The competing *cultural theory* of anti-immigrant sentiment argues that resentment towards immigrants can be explained by the fear of losing cultural purity and the dilution of cultural homogeneity (Castles 2010; Putnam 2007; Raijman and Semyonov 2004). Recent world events add to the empirical understanding of developments across Europe by drawing our attention to the ethnic component of anti-immigrant sentiment: the increasing Islamophobia that differentiates attitudes toward immigrants based on their national and religious identity (Adida, Laitin, and Volford 2016; Givens 2007; Fredette 2014).

Much of the existing literature evaluates the merits of the competition and cultural hypotheses on the set of developed western European countries with stable national identities.

However, studies of countries that are still experiencing nation-building may offer an additional explanatory path. The statistical research of Russian anti-foreigner sentiments using the third round of the European Social Survey (2006), finds low explanatory power of either the competition or cultural hypotheses in Russia (Gorodziesky, Glikman and Maskileysen 2015). The authors ponder that low explanatory value of the existing hypotheses may be due to the different societal dynamics within Russia, stressing the aftermath of enormous societal transformation that led to a crisis of national identity.

This approach finds support among Russian scholars who place Russian anti-foreigner attitudes into a socio-historical context. Lev Gudkov (2007) argues that xenophobia can be at least partially attributed to the complex feelings of dissatisfaction and humiliation that citizens of the former world super-power may experience. This inferiority complex is akin to the Weimar syndrome. Gudkov[1] argues that xenophobia is caused by a cocktail of negative experiences, humiliation from the loss in the Cold War, and a growing instability that stems from the displacement due to the overhaul of the economic and political system following the collapse of the USSR (Gudkov 2016). Vladimir Mukomel (2015) argues that the rise of Russian xenophobia can be explained by the changing solidarities in the society, built by contemporary Russian elites on the basis of the new solidarity of traditional Russian values and order. The underlying premise of the argument is that immigration is eroding the Russian identity, Russian culture, and the Russian way of life. Together, these studies contribute an important socio-historical explanation to extant theoretical base.

Xenophobia as an Instrument of Power Legitimation

In addition to the existing explanations of xenophobia, I propose the political explanation. The elites manipulate popular immigrant phobias for political gain. Explanations of Russian xenophobia must include the role of the state, a tradition partially inherited from the past. Historically, the Russian Empire has been a heterogeneous state, with many ethnic and religious groups calling it home. After the Bolshevik Revolution altered the make-up of the Russian Empire, one of the tasks of the new government was the formation of the multi-ethnic state. Soviet elites played a decisive role in supporting tolerance in the multinational state. The USSR created a system based on multinationalism and ethnic heterogeneity (Brubaker 1994; Kellas 1998). On personal and institutional levels, the state defined and sponsored ethnic tolerance and promoted inter-personal harmony, while limitations to the freedom of movement restricted co-mingling of different ethnic and regional groups. These practices created a strong institutional barrier to the spread of explicit xenophobia.[2] At the end of the 1980s, about 20 per cent of USSR citizens had xenophobic views, while aggressive ethno-phobia was reported by six to 12 per cent of respondents. Xenophobia in Russia was significantly lower than the USSR average (Gudkov 2007, 49-50).

Upon the collapse of the USSR, the state ideology, including the support for ethnic federalism, perished as well.[3] The new Russian state opened opportunities for greater mobility of masses from within Russia as well as from abroad. In the absence of the state-enforced taboo on xenophobia and the rapidly increasing co-mingling of different peoples, attitudes towards others – immigrants from the Russian regions and abroad – started to change.

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Following the wild and unpredictable 1990s, when the state held a comparatively small role in regulating societal life, the new Putin government stabilised the economy, but also launched an assault on democratic institutions, slowly working to limit political dissent, undermine the transparency of elections, and to limit the accountability of governance in Russia. Russia in the 2000s was re-classified from a partially-free state into an autocratic state by the Freedom House. Russian media has been found to be restricted, characterised by government censorship, and persecution of bloggers. Elections have become unfair and not free (Freedom House 2015). Scholars of transition classify Russia as a competitive authoritarian regime, which can be characterised by the formal existence of democratic institutions such as multi-party elections of the executive and the legislative branches, but elections are neither transparent nor fair, the freedom of media and political competition has been stifled, and the turnover of leadership as a result of fair competitive elections has not happened since 2000 (Levitsky and Way 2002).

Extant scholarship emphasises the importance of regime legitimation for authoritarian leaders. Investing in regime legitimisation allows regime leaders to ensure survival. Authoritarian leaders rely on the threat of violence and co-optation of elites as an important source of legitimacy (Geddes 1999; Levitsky and Way 2012; Svoboda 2009). Kailitz and Stockemer (2015) broaden our understanding of authoritarian legitimacy by pointing to the importance of legitimation of their authority with the masses as well as the political elites. Ulfelder (2005) finds that authoritarian leaders may increase the chances of regime survival to a greater degree when they can maintain legitimacy and thus avoid contentious collective action (riots, general strikes, or anti-government demonstrations) rather than just relying on the threat of violence and elite co-optation. Dimitrov (2009) argues that competitive authoritarian regimes do worry about popular support and try to maintain it by exploiting populist rhetoric, keeping up with social welfare spending and exploiting some form of nationalist sentiment.

I explore the argument that the Russian political establishment mounted the horse of nationalist populism in the mid-2000s to maintain popular legitimacy by taking advantage of nationalist popular moods. Authoritarian leaders often invoke anti-Western populist rhetoric to support their popularity, offering a visible, yet intangible enemy to the populace. Using the same logical framework, it can be argued that immigrants, as a form of the Other, can be portrayed as the enemy, especially if migrants are demonised as a source of evil, such as crime and terrorism. I propose that the Russian regime utilises xenophobia as a political tool to demonstrate that it is successfully addressing the threat that migrants reportedly create. This is largely an exaggerated threat, a political construction akin to the threat of the West that is used by authoritarian regimes to divert citizens' attention from internal societal problems, such as corruption, the lack of democratic freedoms, and economic stagnation. Xenophobia is utilised to maintain the regime's legitimacy in an effort to prevent contentious collective action.

Xenophobia in Russia

The active exploitation of social mobilisation around nationalist slogans (and the cultivation of the enemy image), as well as the growing authoritarian tendencies, created favourable conditions for the use of xenophobia as a political instrument by the end of the first decade of the 2000s. Opinion polls results indicate a rise in nationalism and transformation in the societal acceptance of others (Gudkov 2013). The old Soviet taboo on xenophobia eroded and was replaced by the increase of Russian ethnic nationalism, which can be gauged through the growing popularity of the slogan 'Russia for Russians.' Verkhovskii and Pain (2012) trace the emergence of the slogan to 2002, when the Russian ultra-nationalist movement DPNII[4] injected it into mainstream use. This slogan appealed to various radical-right, nationalist, populist movements by focusing on the visible enemy – immigrants. In 2005, Russian nationalists of various flavours organised the inaugural 'Russian March,' which became a yearly affair drawing more supporters each year.

Arguably, several factors contributed to rising migrantophobia: growing migration from ethnically-diverse Central Asian and South Caucasus countries, a rise in illegal immigration due to overly-restrictive immigration regulations, as well as acts of terrorism connected to the war in Chechnya. The change in the make-up and the growing volumes of migrant flows exacerbated the declining acceptance of migrants. If, in the early 1990s, the majority of migrants were ethnic Russians repatriating from the former Soviet Republics, at the turn of the 21st century, labour migration consisted of workers from the Central Asian republics, Southern Caucasus, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. By 2007, Central Asian countries, especially Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, became the leading countries of origin of

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migrant labour (Florinskaya 2013).

Immigrants supplied an easy target for the growing number of nationalist groups and political factions, which had enjoyed a lack of governmental restrictions. During the 2003 parliamentary election campaign, several political parties embraced the nationalist rhetoric, including the Communist Party (KPRF) and the far-right Political Party LDPR. The Kremlin jumped on the bandwagon as well, creating the nationalist faction Rodina, which later became a stand-alone party known for its political extremism and unapologetic nationalist sentiment. In 2005 Rodina featured a xenophobic political TV ad, portraying migrants as the source of crime.[5] The party was later disqualified from participation in elections for inciting inter-ethnic hate (Grani 2005).

By 2007, public xenophobic rhetoric emanated from the powerful Russian politician, Yuri Luzhkov, the Mayor of Moscow. His reappointment was proposed by President Putin in June 2007. The same month, Luzhkov made resonating statements calling for limiting migrant quotas in Moscow.[6] The Moscow government continued the anti-immigrant rhetoric throughout the summer of 2007, calling public attention to the threats of undocumented immigration and vowing to clean Moscow of undocumented migrants (New Izvestiya 2007). The 2007 Duma election campaign took place in December 2007 without parties publically endorsing anti-immigrant rhetoric.[7] However, pro-Kremlin youth movements, such as 'Mestnye' and 'Nashi' became involved in public hunts for illegal immigrants. These 'citizens' patrols' [*druzinniki*] were often co-conducted with local police units, including raids through open-air markets and migrant dormitories (Gazeta 2007). Among the slogans used were the calls to limit migrants' presence in public transportation vocations [*ne dadim rulit migrant*] (Grani 2007). In 2008, the Kremlin-backed youth group 'Molodaya Gvardia' staged pickets of builders and FMS offices with slogans like 'our money to our workers' [*nashi dengi – nashim lyudyam*] and 'every other one – out' [*kazdyi vtoroi – domoi*] (Lenta 2008; Vzglyad 2008). This tacit approval of the 'citizens' patrols' by Kremlin-backed groups created the overall impression in society that all immigrants are undocumented and that negative attitudes towards foreign workers are common.

The mass media paid increased attention to migrant crime statistics, following press releases from the power ministries (Chudinovskikh 2009a). For example, after the Deputy Interior Minister Sukhodolskiy reported the increased incidents of crime among migrants in December 2008, several media outlets reported the news, including Interfax, Komsomolskaya Pravda, and internet portals NewsRU and RIA Novosti (Interfax 2008; Komsomolskaya Pravda 2008; NewsRU 2008; RIA 2008). In 2009, mass media focused on retranslating migrant crime statistics after a Russian Prosecutor's Office Investigative Committee official argued that crime rates rose by 134 per cent among the undocumented immigrants, who often commit the most violent offences (Infox 2009; KM 2009; Rossiyskaya Gazeta 2009). These figures were characterised as misleading by the head of the Federal Migration Office, Konstantin Romodanovsky (Vedomosti 2009). Nonetheless, the threat of heightened immigrant crime became a hot button topic publicised in Russian mass media, most of which is controlled by the state. Although crime statistics were often taken out of context, media reports resonated with the public, contributing to popular xenophobia. For instance, the media often cited data on crimes committed by migrants without comparing it to the total crime rates, creating a tendency to over-estimate crimes committed by the migrants. If taken as a proportion of total crime, migrant crime has stayed within two per cent of the total number of offenses (Chudinovskikh 2009b).

Anti-immigrant hysteria culminated in the summer of 2013 during the Moscow mayoral election which featured increased attention to the topic of immigration (Abashin 2014; Kingsbury 2015). The elections were highly contested, with candidates from six Russian parties participating: the ruling United Russia, the Communist Party KPRF, the far-right LDPR, the liberal party Yabloko, centre-left Spravedlivaya Rossiya, and the new opposition party RPR-Parnas. Every candidate devoted space in their electoral programmes to discussing the ills of immigration, and the need to combat irregular movement, with several candidates openly calling for outright prohibition of migration. The campaign was dominated by the notorious interviews of Sergei Sobyenin, the acting Mayor, who opined that immigrants should not settle in Moscow, rather they should return home promptly after finishing their seasonal work[8] (RBC 2013). Several candidates from the mainstream political parties expressed their support for implementing visas for workers from the former USSR countries, who can legally cross the Russian border visa-free as per provisions of the Eurasian Economic Union. The summer of 2013 was marked by large-scale illegal migrant raids organised by the police and migration officials (Vedomosti 2013). Russian sociologists argue that such disproportionately heavy emphasis on the issues of immigration contributed to the spike of xenophobia among

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Russians (Volkov 2013).

The conflict in the Moscow district of Biryolovo illustrates the tactic of using xenophobia to prevent collective action against the regime. In August 2013, an undocumented immigrant from Azerbaijan attacked and killed a local man. Mass protests followed the killing. Residents took to the streets to draw attention to their grievances. According to media reports, citizens of the Biryolovo district have continuously expressed dissatisfaction with a large vegetable warehouse located in the district. As reported by local residents, the warehouse harboured illicit activity and sidestepped sanitary norms. Mass media, meanwhile, emphasised the ills of irregular immigration, claiming that it breeds crime. Riots in Biryolovo exemplified the substitution of socio-economic grievances with a xenophobic message. Citizens were frustrated that the municipal government did not address their grievance that stemmed from the perceived corruption and mismanagement in the district. The overall dissatisfaction with socio-economic problems were carried by nationalist groups, which supplied activists to turn protests into violent riots.

The mass media content during the 2013 electoral campaign could be characterised as producing a coordinated campaign to demonise labour migrants. The ills of irregular immigration became a constant theme in mass media, including reports of crime statistics taken out of context. For example, mass media reports in 2013 emphasised the increased frequency of grave crime [tiazkoe prestuplenie] such as rape or murder following the announcements by the Moscow's Prosecutor Sergei Kudeneev. He reported that migrants commit every fifth murder, every second rape, and every third robbery[9] (Lenta 2013a). However, these statistics reflects portions of solved crime, not the overall crime. When compared to the full data, there has not been a significant increase. Full crime statistics reflects small fluctuation in the levels of crime committed by migrants in Moscow; it remained at the five to seven per cent levels between 2010 and 2013, while the levels of solved crime remained between 15 and 16 per cent (Zaionchkovskaya et al. 2014).

Even the country's leadership broke their silence in 2013. The Russian state has officially positioned itself as a multi-ethnic multinational state; Russian territories are home to a sizable population of Muslims, representatives of indigenous groups, and other religious and cultural minorities. However, the official message of tolerance diverges with the practice of tacitly supporting Russian ethnic nationalism by emphasising the Russian Orthodox religion and funding nationalist youth groups (Gorodziesky et al 2015; Pain 2007; Schenk 2012). By autumn 2013, the leadership retreated from the official stance as the President made anti-immigrant public comments. In August 2013, President Putin signed into law a bill that would increase the fines for breaking migration regulations in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Newspaper headlines reported Vladimir Putin's remarks calling on the Duma and the Administration to tighten migration regulations and especially prohibit migrants from retail occupations (Lenta 2013b). Two months later Putin argued that migrants must respect Russian culture and values and abide by Russian laws, implying that they presently respect neither.[10] Putin also stressed the necessity to stop corruption among migrants (RIA 2013). By the end of 2013, xenophobia became an outlet for public frustration with socio-economic problems, having been openly sanctioned by state officials and reinforced through the mass media.

The Ukrainian Conflict and Mass Xenophobia in Russia

Events of the autumn of 2013 and winter of 2014 in neighbouring Ukraine, where pro-EU demonstrations led to the escalation of conflict and the ouster of President Yanukovich, diverted public attention from the internal problems within Russia. The conflict in Ukraine has been positioned by the mass media as a conflict between the Ukrainian nationalists and the Russian-speaking Eastern Ukrainians. For the regime, justifying support for the Ukrainian separatists based on the claims of cultural discrimination appeared incongruent with using nationalist and xenophobia rhetoric inside Russia. As I showed above, throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century Russian authorities have appropriated anti-immigrant rhetoric to redirect public dissatisfaction towards immigrants. After the success of the Ukrainian Euromaidan revolution, the appeal of nationalism as a political tool lost its lustre for the Russian regime. Ukrainian nationalism was equated to fascism and blamed for Ukraine's misfortunes by mainstream mass media (Levada Centre 2014).

At home nationalist, xenophobic rhetoric became a powerful catalyst of mass protest by the end of 2013. The 2013 'Russian March' featured not only the anti-immigrant message, but also sounded out social discontent with the

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regime, calling for fair and transparent elections and freedom of speech (Nezavisimaya Gazeta 2013). The 'acceptable' Russian patriotic nationalism[11] utilised by the regime during the previous decade became difficult to distinguish from the 'bad' Ukrainian nationalism spearheaded by the Euromaidan movement. So the mass media xenophobic rhetoric was toned down. As reported by Levada Centre's spokesperson, federal television channels, which are the source of news to almost 94 per cent of Russians, almost eliminated xenophobic news segments about migrants (Levada Centre 2014). Instead, Russian media wrote about accepting refugees from Eastern Ukraine. The State Duma passed amendments to the Citizenship Law[12] that provided a streamlined procedure for Russian speakers [*nositeli yazyka*]. The rhetoric towards the Others – refugees, migrants, and foreigners in general, was somewhat toned down. Consequently, Russians' approval of the nationalist movements and slogans declined, as measured by the approval of the slogan 'Russia for Russians' (Levada Centre 2015). The official message became one of intolerance to radical nationalism.

This ideological shift coupled with the increased popularity of Putin following the take-over of Crimea made unnecessary diversionary tactics such as focusing on the ills of immigration. Approval ratings of the authorities and of Putin personally rose contributing to the de-escalation of protest attitudes, according to the Levada Centre polls.[13] The regime no longer felt the immediate threat of collective action against it. As the Ukrainian conflict developed and the EU and the US initiated sanctions to contain Russia, the regime re-focused attention towards an external enemy – the West. Media reports paid close attention to NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe and the economic and political sanctions against Russia. The woes of the Russian economy were blamed on Western sanctions and the conspiracy that the fall in oil prices was designed to suffocate the Russian economy.

Following the change in official discourse, sociologists registered the reduction in popular xenophobia. Levada Centre noted the drop in hostility towards migrants, which was immediately reported by the mass media. The Levada Centre polls reported a decreased anticipation of violent inter-ethnic conflict and reduced tensions (Levada Centre 2015). At the same time hostility towards the West has risen substantially. To gauge the frequency of mentioning the migrants in the Russian mass media, I performed a content analysis of headlines that appeared in 34 large Russian print newspapers between 2014 and 2016 (N=450). In 2014, migrants were mentioned 121 times, gasterbeiters 11 times and [Ukrainian] refugees 18 times. In 2015, migrants were mentioned 128 times, gasterbeiters 11 times and refugees [to the EU] 50 times. In the first half of the 2016, migrants were mentioned 40 times, gasterbeiters five times, while refugees [to the EU] were mentioned 13 times. This content analysis indicates that the topic of migration was not abandoned by the Russian mass media.

Rather, headlines broadened the focus on the burdensome provisions of existing migration regulations, such as the transition to the patent system, the problems of medical insurance for labour migrants, and Russian language proficiency requirements as efforts aimed at immigrant integration. Mass media wrote about the problems of access to secondary school education for migrant children. The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation heard the case brought about by the families of migrants and refugees which contested the local residency registration requirements for school entry (Kommersant 2015). Considerable attention in 2014 was given to the accommodation of East Ukrainian refugees and to playing up the ills of radical Ukrainian nationalism: the strength of radical-right parties such as Svoboda or Right Sector in the Ukrainian parliament or ultra-nationalist marches on the streets of Ukrainian cities.

In 2015-2016, Russian media actively exploited the topic of the imminent dissolution of the European Union brought about by uncontrolled migration. The EU migration crisis, caused by the complicated security situation in the Middle East and North Africa, allowed Russian elites an additional legitimation opportunity. The unresolved migration problems within Russia have been fit into the world pattern – it no longer was the reflection of the incompetency of the Russian state, it became a universal problem with which even the EU countries cannot grapple successfully. After the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, Russian rhetoric intensified the theme of terrorism and the security threat that stems from uncontrolled migration.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Russian regime manipulated popular xenophobia to divert the attention of the masses from

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societal problems. By demonising migrants, the regime re-directed public dissatisfaction to the visible and often powerless migrant. These diversion tactics allowed the state to maintain legitimacy during a period in which its popularity declined. As the extant studies posit, competitive authoritarian regimes thrive and survive when they can maintain popularity. Putin's personal ratings continue at a high level, however, Russians' feelings about the regime, measured through citizens' evaluation of their lives, remain largely pessimistic, suggesting the existence of latent protest potential. The Levada Centre indices of family well-being, which reflect the subjective evaluation of families' material well-being, and indices of expectations for the future, which reflect citizens' feelings about their personal future as well as the future of the country, have remained mostly negative since 2007. The indices of family well-being and expectations for the future remain at a significantly lower level than the overall government approval rates, which combines citizens' evaluations of the President and the Administration [*index vlasti*] (Levada Centre 2016).

These measures of public opinion reveal the massive potential for the loss of popularity for the existing government which can evolve from the dissatisfaction with the poor personal well-being to the dissatisfaction with the regime. Popular xenophobia rose sharply in the fall of 2011, culminating in October 2013. At the same time, approval ratings of the government and the President fell to their lowest point in 2013, at 61 per cent. Anti-immigrant rhetoric resonated with the public, which had been pre-conditioned by the massive anti-immigrant media campaign that focused on irregular migration and crimes committed by foreigners. Immigrants were presented as a visible and common object of blame for societal ills, especially corruption, crime, public health hazard, and even road accidents. The elites promoted the negative image of an immigrant as a convenient object for public anger. Just as populist social-welfare programmes can dissipate public anger and the resolve to demand government accountability, so can shifting the blame for problems from the government to the tangible enemy – the immigrant. To avoid mass protests akin those in 2011–2012, the state must maintain the visibility of a credible threat to disperse attention from vital societal problems: degradation of the economy, the gap between the rich cities and the poor provinces, growing poverty levels, and soaring corruption.

This analysis contributes to the socio-historical explanation of Russian xenophobia, advanced by Russian scholars, by showing how complex historical, political and social events shape up patterns of xenophobia, and how xenophobia is used as a political legitimation tool in Russia. As the Russian economy suffered from economic and political sanctions invoked by the West in response to the Ukrainian conflict, immigrants were no longer the prime enemy of the state. The West became once again the source of public threat and the object of blame for socio-economic problems. The regime did not have to artificially inflate xenophobia. Anti-immigrant sentiment fell in 2014, and continued at a lower level in 2015, while animosity towards the external enemy (the US and the EU countries) was on the rise. Looking forward, the 2016 Duma elections will show whether the use of xenophobia as a political weapon is the new go-to tool in the arsenal of the regime, or if the 2013 elections were an outlier.

Notes

[1] 'The country, generally speaking, suffers from the strongest complex of inferiority. And is frustrated about it. A great country – but lives in wretchedness, arbitrariness, boorishness. This is a stable complex of dividedness and shame before the West' (Gudkov 2016).

[2] However, not consistently, as anti-Semitism was quite common (SOVA Center 2003).

[3] For a review on the establishment of Soviet policies that promoted ethnic federalism see Slezkine (1994).

[4] Dvizenie Protiv Nezakonnoi Migratsii – Movement against Illegal Immigration.

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiBOg5JTJQs>

[6] 'My dolznyi obespechivat ob'em kvotirovaniya, I nam luchshe govorit o tom, chto u kogo-to vznikla nekhvatka v trudovoi sile I reshat vopros po uvelicheniju kvot, a ne zagodya dat' s izbytkom I poluchit nagruzku na meditsiny, registratsiu – i poluchit gulyaushikh migrantov' (Polit.ru 2007).

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[7] Although, one could argue that anti-immigrant statements made by Luzhkov could be taken as such, given that Luzhkov was the vice-chairman and one of the founders of the largest pro-government party United Russia.

[8] 'Ya protiv togo, chtoby ety ludy prosto tak ostavalis. Esli kogo-to ostavlyat, to v pervuyu ochered ruskoyazychnykh, s adekvatnoi nashim traditsiyam kulturoi. Sootchestennikov – tak my ih uslovno nazyvayem. Ludyam, kotorye plokhogo govoryat po-russki, u kotorykh sovershenno drugaya kultura, luchshe zit v svoei strane. Poetomy my ne privetstvuyem ih adaptatsii v Moskve' (DNI.Ru 2013).

[9] 'Migrantami v Moskve sovershaetsia kazhde piatoe ubiistvo, kazhde vtoroe iznasilovanie i kazhde tretie – grabezhi i razboi' (Lenta 2013a).

[10] 'Чтобы мы добились от мигрантов безусловного уважения наших законов, обычаев, культуры регионов, куда они приезжают' [So that we demand from migrants the unconditional respect of our laws, customs, culture of regions where they arrive] (RIA 2013).

[11] See the discussion on the Russian nationalism in Gudkov (2013) and Verkhovskii and Pain (2010).

[12] Federal Law on Citizenship of the Russian Federation [Zakon o Grazdanstve], № 62-ФЗ.

[13] These are the on-going polls of the authorities [organy vlasti]. The results can be found at <http://www.levada.ru/indikatory/odobrenie-organov-vlasti/>

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