

When the Party Line Changes: State Media, Immigration, and Public Opinion in Russia

John Overstreet*

Olivia Jin[†]

William Pyle[‡]

Kristina Sargent[§]

Abstract

We document and assess the effect of a short-lived campaign on Russian state television to re-orient coverage of immigrants. Building on a historical narrative (Tolz and Harding, 2015) and evidence from a controlled experiment (Pan et al., 2022), we offer support from a real world setting that authoritarian regimes can leverage media control to realign public opinion on an important policy matter, even if the new frame is in conflict with the old. Drawing on repeated cross-sectional survey data collected before, during, and after the re-orientation in coverage, we demonstrate that public attitudes on immigration policy shifted in a manner consistent with the campaign having had a short-run effect. Compared to the periods before and after, more intense TV news viewers were more likely to express opposition to liberal immigration policies during the campaign. In line with its apparent intent, the attitudinal change was particularly pronounced among ethnic Russians contemplating non-co-ethnics and immigrants from poor, non-European countries.

keywords: state media, immigration, public opinion, Russia, Europe

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

*jpo9215@nyu.edu – New York University School of Law.

[†]oliviajin@stanford.edu – Stanford University, Sociology Department.

[‡]wpyle@middlebury.edu – Middlebury College, Department of Economics.

[§]kristinas@middlebury.edu – Middlebury College, Department of Economics.

1 Introduction

Much has been written about how and why authoritarian regimes exploit their control over the media to shape popular attitudes (Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Rosenfeld and Wallace, 2024). But research is sparse as to whether specific campaigns in such settings achieve their aim, particularly those that depart from, or even contradict, earlier frames. Indeed, an abrupt change in its media messaging on a particular issue presents a test of an authoritarian regime’s persuasive limits: can it bring public opinion into line with a substantially altered message, or does the dissonance undermine its influence?

In 2012, in the wake of a presidential election and a series of large anti-regime protests, the Russian state launched an aggressive, conservative, and nationalistic media strategy to consolidate its base (Smyth and Soboleva, 2014). Although risky for a country so reliant on labor inflows from neighboring countries, an anti-immigration campaign served as one of its pillars. Reviewing daily programming on the leading federal television channels, Tolz and Harding (2015) describe a sustained effort lasting from May 2012 through the fall of 2013 in which the nature and tone of coverage changed “systematically... [and] often radically.” Relative to the periods before and after the campaign, more benign representations of immigration and immigrants systematically gave way to more ominous and xenophobic coverage. Whether this campaign and its reversal affected popular attitudes has not been the subject of prior research.

In more democratic settings, framing, priming, and agenda setting have been recognized as effective tools for influencing voter opinions, generally (Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), Strömberg (2015)), and on immigration issues, specifically. Increased coverage of immigration has been shown to increase polarization (Knoll et al. (2011), Rucker et al. (2019), Schneider-Strawczynski and Valette (2025)) and negative perceptions of immigrants (Merolla et al. (2013), McCabe et al. (2021), Alesina et al. (2023)), while decreased negative coverage has been shown to weaken voter support for restrictive immigration policies in the United States (Djourelouva (2023)).

Although some recent studies confirm that authoritarian regime media messaging can shape popular beliefs (Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011; Szostek, 2017; Peisakhin and Rozenas, 2018), other work raises doubts by noting the possibility that state-controlled media may not be regarded as credible (Mickiewicz, 2008; Huang, 2018).¹ Pan et al. (2022) highlight the particular challenge of shaping opinion when the messenger appears inconsistent: “[W]e know little about what happens to the effectiveness of government-controlled media when authoritarian regimes change or flip positions on issues and alter media output accordingly to try to shift public attitudes.” In a survey experiment embedded with clips resembling state television broadcasts, the researchers demonstrate that the attitudes of Chinese respondents do indeed change in response to the quasi-news videos, even though their issue frames are at odds with positions previously staked out by the government.

Authoritarian governments attempting to alter their stance on significant issues face a particular challenge as monopolists (or semi-monopolists) of information. We examine whether, through state-owned media,

¹Shirikov (2024) explores the possibility that authoritarian media is used not to shape public opinion so much as to build trust through “identity-consistent messages.”

issues can be re-framed to reverse public opinion. The answer is not obvious. When a government abandons one message for another at odds with the original, confusion or distrust may cause the audience to tune out or double down on previous messaging. This challenge is unique to authoritarian regimes since they are more likely to comprehensively influence domestic media and assert control over access to alternative sources of information relative to non-authoritarian governments. We find that in the case of Russia, state-backed campaigns can substantially alter public opinion- even when it requires reversing prevailing sentiment fostered by the state. This effect is consistent with the framing model described in [Scheufele and Tewksbury \(2007\)](#): The way “an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences.” Further, we find that the change in attitudes dissipates once the campaign is over, consistent with the models in [Mullainathan \(2002\)](#) and [Strömberg \(2015\)](#) where salience lessens over time unless messaging persists.

Building on [Pan et al. \(2022\)](#), we address the challenge posed by inconsistent messaging. But we do so in a real-world setting. In the following, we present evidence consistent with the 2012-2013 campaign on Russian state television making Russians more hostile to immigrants and immigration. Exploiting several waves of the European Social Survey and applying a difference-in-difference estimator, we show that more intense consumers of television news express elevated anti-immigration sentiment during the campaign. Moreover, consistent with the regime’s more nationalist rhetoric, the pattern holds most strikingly among ethnic Russians asked to consider the immigration of non-co-ethnics.

In what follows, we first provide context for and describe in more detail the anti-immigrant media campaign on Russian state television. This includes adding to the descriptive work of [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) by analyzing news transcripts from Russia’s two leading state-owned channels to confirm the campaign’s existence and timing. Section 3 presents our analysis of the data from the European Social Survey before, during, and after the campaign. Section 4 offers concluding thoughts.

2 The Russian Context

2.1 Immigration flows and attitudes

During the past generation, Russia has been one of the most popular destination countries for international migrants. In the 1990s, much of the inflow was made up of ethnic Russians, many of whose families had moved away from the Russian SFSR in Soviet times ([Chudinovskikh and Dinisenko, 2017](#)). After the turn of the century, the ethnic profile shifted. A growing economy, in conjunction with an increasingly accommodating policy environment, attracted a more diverse population, with substantial representation of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Azeris, Armenians, and Ukrainians ([Bessudnov, 2016](#); [Gerber and Zavisca, 2020](#)). Between 2006 and 2009, more than a million immigrants arrived in Russia, approximately half of them from former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus ([Gorodzeisky and Glikman, 2018](#)).² In 2010, Russia’s foreign born population stood at nearly twelve million, ranking it second in the world after the United States ([Koser and Laczko, 2010](#)).

²We note that as discussed in [Gorodzeisky and Leykin \(2022\)](#) and [Gorodzeisky and Glikman \(2018\)](#) a substantial proportion of “international” migrants were from former Soviet Republics.

In the twenty-first century, the attitudes of Russian citizens toward immigrants have been justifiably described as “far from welcoming” (Gorodzeisky, 2019). Often associating migrant workers with negative attributes, such as “low qualifications” and “unpleasant appearance” (Pipiya, 2016), the majority have consistently supported policies to limit their presence. In 2004, a nationally representative poll found 54 percent of respondents in agreement that Russia should “limit the flow of immigrants... (rather than) remove the administrative barriers in their way...” Support for this proposition peaked at 78 percent in late 2013, before falling and then peaking again at 80 percent in 2016 (Levada, 2017). These trends are part of a longer trajectory of xenophobia and ethnic exclusionism in post-Soviet Russia. Pain (2007) documents the growth of ethnopolitical extremism across the 1990s and 2000s, emphasizing how nationalist actors capitalized on economic instability and the erosion of Soviet-era civic identities.

Although anti-immigrant sentiment generally intensified across the first two decades of the twenty-first century, most survey-based studies of Russian attitudes have eschewed a focus on dynamics. Instead, they draw on cross-sectional evidence to test hypotheses inspired by studies of attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in other settings.³ For instance, Gorodzeisky et al. (2015) and Bahry (2016) use the 2006 and 2010 waves of the European Social Survey (ESS), respectively, to reach different conclusions as to the importance of one’s embrace of socially conservative attitudes and vulnerability to labor market competition. Multiple studies highlight the role of racial prejudice.⁴ Bessudnov (2016) uses a 2011 survey from the Public Opinion Foundation to demonstrate that while ethnic Russians may have relatively welcoming attitudes toward immigrants from Ukraine or Moldova, they harbor greater hostility toward those from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Gorodzeisky (2019) similarly draws attention to ethnic Russian “racial exclusionism” based on immigration-related questions from the 2016 wave of the ESS. In the same article, she does briefly discuss attitudinal trends, presenting summary data from multiple waves of the ESS. Noting the rise in opposition to immigration of “racially or ethnically different immigrants” after 2010, she cites the emphasis placed by Kingsbury et al. (2017) on changing state propaganda. That shift in public discourse corresponds with state-sponsored narratives that link immigration to national vulnerability. Alexseev (2014) emphasizes that the Russian government has often refused to condemn xenophobic incidents and instead framed immigration as a problem of “weak border controls” and declining social cohesion—an approach that has helped deflect dissatisfaction away from the state. At the local level, anti-migrant mobilization has taken on different forms. Markowitz and Peshkova (2016) document how grassroots movements in regions such as Sverdlovsk and Krasnodar use culturally resonant frames to galvanize opposition to immigration. These frames blend security concerns with notions of moral and economic decay, reinforcing support for restrictive policies. Ethnographic evidence likewise supports the idea that anti-immigrant sentiment is woven into daily life. O’Brien (2017) and others note that in cities

³Outside the Russian context, a large empirical literature finds support for the hypothesis that native opposition to immigration derives from a fear of labor market competition (Scheve and Slaughter, 2001; Mayda, 2006; O’Rourke and Sinnott, 2006; Ortega and Polavieja, 2012; Huber and Oberdabernig, 2016; Lergetporer et al., 2021; Margaryan et al., 2021). Another strand of research turns up evidence that concern over immigration’s effects on social welfare policies drives attitudes (Facchini and Mayda, 2009; Dustmann and Preston, 2007; York, 2022; Bearce and Connell, 2023). Non-economic, identity-related factors have also been shown to be important (O’Rourke and Sinnott, 2006; Dustmann and Preston, 2007; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Hatton, 2021).

⁴A related, Russia-focused literature explores the correlates of xenophobia without specific reference to immigrants or immigration policy (Gerber, 2014; Herrera and Butkovich Kraus, 2016; Chapman et al., 2018).

with high in-migration, informal hierarchies and symbolic boundaries structure interactions between locals and migrants. [Laruelle \(2013\)](#), analyzing the 2013 Biryulyovo riots, shows how incidents of public violence become flashpoints for anti-migrant sentiment, and are often followed by state crackdowns that reinforce nationalist narratives.

Pooling data from four ESS waves between 2006 and 2012, [Gorodzeisky and Glikman \(2018\)](#) argue that while one’s socioeconomic position strongly predicts attitudes of non-ethnic-Russian Russian citizens, ethnic Russians’ attitudes correlate more with their sense of “collective (state) vulnerability” and their beliefs about how immigrants will affect Russia as a whole. These findings resonate with broader arguments that the Russian state has instrumentalized xenophobia—alternately tolerating or repressing anti-migrant mobilization depending on political expediency ([Alexseev \(2014\)](#); [Laruelle \(2013\)](#)).

2.2 The reach of state-controlled television

During the period covered by our analysis, state-owned television was far and away Russians’ leading source of information about national and global developments. Although online numbers were increasing, state-owned television remained the most important news source for 85 percent of Russians in 2014 ([Volkov and Goncharov, 2014](#)). [Volkov and Goncharov \(2014\)](#) identify four different types of Russians with respect to media consumption. For the “television viewers,” who make up the majority of adult Russians, television is effectively their only source of news. They live primarily in smaller cities, tend to be older in age, and are not very well off economically. The “old guard,” representing about one-fifth of the adult population, get their news from a mix of traditional sources: TV, radio, and newspapers. They also tend to be older and live outside the biggest cities, but are better educated and better off than those in the first group. In addition to television, the similar in size “word-of-mouth” group gets their information from their social networks. Many in this group are younger, better educated, and relatively well off. They tend to be less interested in current events than others. The final group, the “most informed,” constitute 7 percent of the adult population. They live in the largest cities and are well educated and well informed. They rely on a mix of news sources.

Representatives from the largest state-controlled broadcasters, such as Channel 1 and Rossiia, regularly meet with Kremlin officials to discuss how to frame sensitive topics and matters important to the government’s agenda ([Gehlbach, 2010](#); [Becker, 2014](#)).⁵ In an apparent confirmation of such coordination, [Rozenas and Stukal \(2019\)](#) document how Channel 1 frames economics news to highlight the Russian government’s competence; bad economic news gets blamed on external factors, whereas good news gets attributed to domestic leaders, particularly during politically sensitive times.

Despite their dominant position in the media landscape, Russia’s state-owned broadcasters’ ability to

⁵Outside of state-owned television, a hybrid media environment prevailed. Although state control over print media was less than that of television, careful self-censorship limited the range of coverage, whereas the online environment remained relatively free-wheeling ([Lipman and Akhrarkhodjaeva, 2017](#)). One might wonder whether the availability of alternative, independent news sources decreases the influence of the state-controlled media. [Toepfl \(2013\)](#), finds, in a study of students, that even those more inclined to trust an anti-regime website than messages from the state media still operate within the frame used by state-controlled television.

shape public opinion in a manner advantageous to the regime is not preordained. In fact, conclusions about their persuasive power have been mixed. [Szostek \(2017\)](#) presents survey-based evidence consistent with state-owned channels driving anti-western sentiment among the Russian public, and [Peisakhin and Rozenas \(2018\)](#) demonstrate that they boost support for pro-Russian parties in Ukraine. However, other experts have been more circumspect as to their influence. Based on focus groups, [Mickiewicz \(2008\)](#) argues that Russians often discount the credibility of state-crafted one-sided messages. And using regionally representative survey data, [Rosenfeld \(2018\)](#) concludes that Russians are far from “passive consumers of propaganda,” particularly when state messaging is in conflict with their lived experiences.

2.3 The challenge of a changed message

[Pan et al. \(2022\)](#) highlight the challenge confronted by an authoritarian government seeking to alter its stance on a significant issue, questioning whether through state-owned media it can reframe the matter to re-align public opinion. The answer is not obvious. Media consumers, after all, have memories. And when a government abandons one message for another at odds with the original, confusion or distrust may cause the public to tune out.

To investigate an autocratic government’s ability to use television to change public attitudes when staking out a new position at odds with a prior position, [Pan et al. \(2022\)](#) conducted a survey experiment with a diverse group of 830 Chinese citizens. Before recruiting respondents, the researchers worked with Chinese media professionals to produce six news clips in the style of the country’s most watched state television broadcast. With half addressing policy toward state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and the other half touching on the South China Sea territorial dispute with the Philippines, the researchers selected high-profile policy issues on which the government had changed its position over time. With respect to both issues, the clips adopted three distinct frames: market-friendly, statist, and neutral in the videos about SOEs; dovish, hawkish, and neutral in those about the territorial dispute. Each of the survey respondents was then randomly assigned to watch two videos, one on SOEs and one on the South China Sea. With respect to both issues, the researchers show that respondent attitudes align with the frames adopted in the videos they watched. These effects are observed in both single-question and “composite” multi-question measures of attitudes and, in some cases, 48 hours after exposure to the videos.

Since [Pan et al. \(2022\)](#) conducted their study in a controlled setting, more research is needed to evaluate the ability of authoritarian regimes to realign public opinion when changing the frame used to discuss a particular issue. The Russian state media campaign chronicled by [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) presents the opportunity to explore a similar question to [Pan et al. \(2022\)](#) in the context of a quasi-natural experiment.

2.4 The 2012-2013 campaign on state television

Analyzing almost four years worth of daily news reports from Russia’s two main state-controlled television channels, Channel 1 and Rossiia, [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) identify a dramatic re-orientation of the media frame of immigrants and immigration.⁶ In the months leading up to Vladimir Putin’s presidential

⁶In addition to reading through news reports, the researchers examined non-news content with an “interethnic dimension” and conducted interviews with sixteen television journalists.

re-election in 2012, coverage of immigrants and immigration was relatively rare and, in line with the regime's stance since at least 2005, largely benign: "the two main federal television channels tended to follow the Kremlin's general view of migration as essential to the Russian economy." Occasional stories touched on social challenges linked to urban immigrant populations, but these were balanced by others that "reiterated the pronouncements of Russia's leaders to the effect that Central Asian migrants were 'our former countrymen'..." Stories about inter-ethnic tensions were infrequent, and immigration was generally framed as contributing to Russia's multicultural strength. References to immigrants' religious beliefs, if Islamic, were finessed.

However, after the May 2012 election, as Putin and the ruling party United Russia attempted to shore up their right flank (Smyth and Soboleva, 2014), television news changed. According to Tolz and Harding (2015), stories portrayed migrants less as former compatriots and more as "aliens," and featured more frequently their associations with social ills. For instance, in a Rossiia news story entitled "Ethnic Criminality Is Suffocating the Capital," the reporter claimed that Central Asian migrants committed most of Moscow's robberies and rapes, concluding with a harrowing scenario: "Imagine that you [an Uzbek] attacked an old woman not in Moscow but in your own place, in Samarkand? They would kill you there for that. But because we will not kill you here, you allow yourself to behave in such a way." The altered characterization of immigrants and immigration was introduced across television genres. For instance, over three episodes broadcast between May 2012 and October 2013, Arkadii Mamontov's "Special Correspondent" talk show on Rossiia highlighted incidents depicting Central Asians working in Russia as culturally backward, crime-prone, and threatening to Russian values.

Throughout the campaign, "othering" of migrants became commonplace. According to Tolz and Harding (2015):

Islam, which almost never had been referred to in connection with migration, now emerged alongside ethnicity as the main frame for explaining migrants' attitudes and actions. The migrant, identified as a Muslim, was now systematically contrasted and represented as a threat to the "indigenous European" citizen, identified as a Christian... [C]overage portrayed Christianity and its values as under mortal threat from migrant customs and beliefs that they represented as being influenced by Islam.

In this sense, both Channel 1 and Rossiia used their coverage of the Stockholm May 2013 riots to emphasize the inability of Muslim immigrants to integrate into Swedish society, with one report concluding: "Here in Russia, we need to carefully follow these events. We live in a single world and, unfortunately, we share common problems." Relatedly, Tolz and Harding (2015) flag how news stories highlighting "[t]he building of mosques in Moscow and other Russian cities with large concentrations of migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus [also] began to be framed with reference to the conflict of cultures and values."

The anti-immigration campaign was brought to an end after a series of ethnic conflicts broke out across Russia in the second half of 2013. Responding to the threat to public order, the authorities looked to ease

inter-ethnic tensions. As a consequence, television reporting became more restrained. Drawing on their close reading of news reports, [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) conclude that “[r]ather than using the frames which would present as incompatible the values and norms of Russians and the migrant Other... [the leading, state-owned broadcasters] purged from their reports all references to conflicts of culture, ethnic criminality, and Islam ... [T]he broad anti-immigration campaign on Channel 1 and Rossiia subsided.”

[Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) restrict themselves to documenting and contextualizing the short-lived campaign, choosing not to speculate as to its effect on the attitudes of the viewing public. They do not address whether the dramatic re-framing of immigration in fact increased Russians’ opposition to immigration. There are reasons to suppose that it might not. In 2012, after all, most Russians were already supportive of a more restrictive immigration policy. Moreover, the dissonance of the 2012-13 message and the more benign frame that preceded it may well have undermined the anti-immigration campaign’s impact on public attitudes. Inconsistency in messaging may have been cause for confusion or it may have made the government appear to be a less trustworthy messenger. In section 3, below, we explore this question more directly.

But before looking for evidence of the effect of the media campaign, we add to the material in [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) by formally documenting the change in the coverage of immigrants and immigration that they describe. We review news transcripts from the two main state-aligned television stations, Channel 1 and Rossiia, comparing the 20-month period from May 2012 through the fall of 2013, which [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) identify as bracketing the campaign, with the 20-month periods that precede and follow it. Across these three, equally-lengthed periods, we compare the number and tone of stories that include the term “migrant” or a grammatical variant thereof (for example, “migrants” or “immigration”), filtering out stories not about Russia. For Channel 1, we rely on its website, which archives transcripts of stories from its main evening news program, *Vremya*. Searching for “migrant” and its grammatical variants, we identify 167 stories centered on Russia. Following a similar process for Rossiia, and using Integrum World Wide (an online, fee-based service), we generate a list of 2802 stories.

In Figures 1 and 2, we apply a min-max normalization to track values for four variables across the two state-owned channels. Figure 1 displays series based on the number of Russia-specific “migrant” stories as well as the subset that includes the word “illegal.”⁷ Figure 2 tracks changes in sentiment scores based

⁷Using “illegal” as a one-word signifier of a negative frame mirrors the approach taken by [Djourelouva \(2023\)](#) in her study of the media coverage of immigration in the United States.

on both the per-story average and the sum total of all stories within each of the three 20-month periods.⁸ The series in Figure 2 all reflect changes in the valence of the language used to discuss migrants and migrant issues; the “sum total” series also account for changes in story numbers.

Insofar as they point to greater focus on and more negative coverage of immigrants and immigration between May 2012 and the winter of 2013, Figures 1 and 2 add support to Tolz and Harding’s (2015) description of the campaign on state-owned television. In Figure 1, we observe that both the overall number of Russia-related “immigrant” stories and the subset including the word “illegal” peak during the period they associate with the anti-immigrant campaign. Figure 2, moreover, shows that the tone of coverage, whether taken as the average sentiment score per story or as the sum of all stories, is most negative during the same period.

Figures 1 and 2 obscure the magnitude of changes within a given series over time in the interest of preserving a common vertical axis scale. It is thus also worth noting that both the total number of stories on Rossiia and the subset including “illegal” roughly triple between the first and second 20-month periods, while there is a doubling of stories over the same period on Channel 1’s *Vremya*. In the period after the fall of 2013, the volume of coverage falls back to roughly the initial period level. For *Vremya*, the tone per story, already negative in the twenty months leading up to the period highlighted by Tolz and Harding (2015), becomes even more negative after May 2012, before turning positive in 2014-15. For Rossiia, the mean sentiment score is negative in all three periods but is substantially more negative in the middle period. For both channels, the sum sentiment score is markedly more negative in the middle period, reflecting the combined effect of a greater number of stories and a more negative tone per story.⁹

⁸We conducted sentiment analysis in R using the UDPipe package for natural language processing, specifically the Russian-GSD model. The UDPipe function provides tokenization, parts of speech tagging, lemmatization, and dependency parsing of the text, after which various types of text analysis are possible, including sentiment analysis with the function `txt_sentiment`. This function quantitatively assesses the tone of a document sentence by sentence, scoring the positive or negative tone of each word and taking into account the presence of “valence shifters”: negators, amplifiers, and deamplifiers that alter the overall tone (e.g. “not”, “very”, “somewhat”). The scores for the sentences are summed to determine the overall sentiment of the document. Multiple “dictionaries” are available that provide the sentiment score for each word. Figure 2 presents the results using the AFINN-111 dictionary, created by Finn Arup Nielsen by manually coding words in English with scores ranging from -5 to 5. Roman Yudin’s translation of the dictionary into Russian is available as part of the Rulexicon package in R. We chose to present results using AFINN-111 because it is widely used and well regarded by scholars conducting sentiment analysis. (Al-Shabi (2020), Koto and Adriani (2015)). Analysis using the other dictionaries in the Rulexicon package yields broadly similar results to the AFINN-111 analysis, but there are some potentially significant differences. For example, some dictionaries showed positive mean sentiment scores throughout the study period, although these still showed that the tone of coverage was less positive during the campaign period. Furthermore, the trends in sentiment score appear less consistent across dictionaries when more granular periods are used (e.g., average monthly scores as opposed to the 20-month periods we use). The sentiment analysis should therefore be treated with some caution, but it provides useful quantitative support for the findings of Tolz and Harding (2015).

⁹As noted above, with some of the other sentiment dictionaries, the mean scores were positive throughout the five-year period. For these dictionaries, the increase in the volume of stories during the campaign period results in a *higher* sum score during the campaign period, despite the tone in each story being more negative on average during the campaign. The results with these dictionaries reflect the same two trends as shown by the AFINN-111 results and suggested by Tolz and Harding (2015), although they appear contradictory when viewed in isolation.

3 Evidence from the European Social Survey

Having described and provided additional evidence confirming the existence of the short-lived media campaign, we now explore whether we observe any evidence for whether, one, the campaign shifted public attitudes in the intended direction, and, two, its conclusion resulted in Russians becoming more accepting of immigrants and immigration. Like [Pan et al. \(2022\)](#), we find that authoritarian media can successfully align public attitudes with a new and different position on a significant issue.

3.1 Key variables

We draw on multiple rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS), which has been conducted roughly every other year since 2001. Repeated cross-sectional samples in all countries, including Russia, have been designed to be representative of the population over the age of fifteen. Individuals are selected for face-to-face interviews using strict random probability methods at every stage. Importantly for our analysis, the 2012 round was conducted between October and December, more than a half year after the start of the campaign described by [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#).¹⁰ In Russia, the 2014 wave was conducted by the CESSI Institute for Comparative Social Research.

Respondents have consistently been asked three related questions with respect to their attitudes towards immigrants and immigration policy.

- To what extent do you think Russia ought to allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most of the Russian Federation’s people to come and live here?
- How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most of the Russian Federation’s people?
- How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe?

The answers ranged from 1 (“allow many to come and live here”), to 2 (“allow some”) to 3 (“allow few”), to 4 (“allow none”).

Although none of the questions are explicit about ethnicities or countries, the first would clearly be taken to include ethnic Russians, while the second would not.¹¹ Furthermore, the third question, considering the Russian context, would probably be interpreted as including (or perhaps even referring exclusively to) migrants from the states of post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus.¹²

Figure 3 breaks down the average responses for these three questions in ESS Waves 4 (2008) through 7 (2014), highlighting two notable points. First, over the entire time window, relative to ethnic Russian migrants, respondents express less tolerance for non-Russians and those coming from poorer, non-European

¹⁰The previous round had been conducted between December 2010 and May 2011.

¹¹According to the 2010 census, 81 percent of Russian citizens were ethnically Russian; the second and third largest groups were Tatars (3.9 percent) and Ukrainians (1.4 percent). Within our ESS sample of Russian citizens, 85 percent report being a member of the ethnic majority.

¹²In 2015, the largest immigrant populations in Russia were citizens of Ukraine (2.5 million), Uzbekistan (2.1 million), Tajikistan (.96 million), Kazakhstan (.63 million), and Azerbaijan (.56 million).

countries. For these two less-preferred groups, that is, average responses are closer to 3.0 (“allow few”) than 2.0 (“allow some”).¹³ A second takeaway from Figure 3 is that anti-immigration sentiment, which had moderated between Waves 4 and 5, increased between Wave 5 (2010) and Wave 6 (2012)—that is, from the period before to the period during the one identified by Tolz and Harding (2015) as coincident with the campaign on state television.

Our independent variable of interest captures the intensity of watching television. Respondents were specifically asked about average weekday consumption of news and/or current affairs programming. Although it is not our main explanatory variable, the survey also includes a more general question about total TV viewing on an average weekday.¹⁴ Both questions are coded as categorical variables that could take on one of eight values (from 0 to 7): none, less than 0.5 hour, 0.5 to 1 hour, 1 to 1.5 hours, 1.5 to 2 hours, 2 to 2.5 hours, 2.5 to 3 hours and more than 3 hours. As can be seen in Figures 4 and 5, modal responses for political television and total TV consumption were less than half an hour and more than three hours, respectively. Clearly, most of the respondents watched a lot of television that was neither news nor current events focused.¹⁵ However, roughly 85 percent report watching at least some news and / or current affairs shows on TV.

The ESS also collects data on people’s sex, age, educational background, religious affiliation, and employment status. These variables, which are entered as controls in the regressions below, appear in Table 1. The average age is slightly less than 46; 30 percent have at least some higher education; and 59 percent of respondents are women.

3.2 Methodology

Our empirical strategy relies on a difference-in-differences design applied to repeated cross-sectional survey data. We exploit the temporal variation introduced by the short-lived television campaign discussed above and heterogeneity in the intensity of television news consumption of the respondents. Although this approach allows us to explore whether attitudes shifted disproportionately among heavier news consumers during the campaign, it does not allow for strong causal inference. Individuals self-select into media consumption, and although we control for a range of observable covariates, unobserved factors may also influence both media exposure and attitude formation. As such, our findings should be interpreted as indicative of associations consistent with an exposure effect rather than as estimates of causal treatment effects. Nevertheless, the presence of pre- and post-campaign periods enhances our ability to rule out simple pre-trend explanations and to assess the temporal scope of any observed effects.

¹³These results match the findings of other surveys. In a 2017 Levada Center poll, for example, two-thirds of the respondents supported limiting immigration; moreover, their attitudes changed depending on the country of origin of the immigrants (Arnold and Markowitz, 2018).

¹⁴The 2010 wave of the ESS asked about time devoted to internet usage, newspaper, and radio for political news consumption. Unfortunately, these questions were dropped in the 2012 wave.

¹⁵A small number of observations indicated more political TV watching than total TV watching; for these, we re-coded total TV watching to equal political TV watching.

Our difference-in-difference estimator is as follows:

$$y_{irt} = \delta_1 \text{politicalTV} \times 2008_{irt} + \delta_2 \text{politicalTV} \times 2012_{irt} + \delta_3 \text{politicalTV} \times 2014_{irt} \\ + \beta_1 \text{politicalTV}_{irt} + \beta_2 2008_t + \beta_3 2012_t + \beta_4 2014_t + \gamma X_{irt} + \alpha_r + u_{irt} \quad (1)$$

The dependent variable, y_{irt} , measures attitudes on a 1-to-4 scale of individual i in region r in year t toward immigration policy; higher values correspond to stronger anti-immigration sentiment. Also a categorical variable, politicalTV_{irt} describes on a 0-to-7 scale the individual’s intensity of watching television news and/or current affairs programming; it controls for possible time-invariant differences between more and less intensive “political TV” viewers. To control for time-specific factors that influence attitudes, time dummies 2008, 2012 and 2014, are included to capture observations made, respectively, before, during and after the anti-immigration campaign on state-aligned television; the base year for comparison purposes is 2010.

The coefficients of interest, δ_2 and δ_3 , measure the effect of watching news on television during and after the campaign. If the campaign influences attitudes towards immigrants, we would expect $\delta_2 > 0$ since higher values of politicalTV_{irt} correspond to greater support for stricter anti-immigration policies. Relative to 2010 (the omitted year), in other words, the difference in anti-immigrant attitudes between more and less intensive TV viewers should be greater in 2012. Given the racial basis for attitudes identified by earlier research (Bessudnov, 2016; Gorodzeisky and Glikman, 2018; Gorodzeisky, 2019), we would expect the effect of the campaign to be particularly strong among ethnic Russians.

We do not have a strong prior belief as to the value of δ_3 . As outlined in Mullainathan (2002) and Strömberg (2015), when messaging ceases, its impact analogously dissipates, so we would expect beliefs to be similar in the pre and post periods. Although the campaign had ended in 2014, it is possible that its influence lasted. Academic literature is mixed on whether messaging can have persistent impacts. For example, Roth et al. (2017) finds messaging on immigration influences beliefs lasting up to around four weeks while Cattaneo and Grieco (2021) suggests impacts can be more persistent. And if television viewing patterns remain stable over time, we might expect that those influenced in 2012 continue to be more hostile to a liberal immigration policy in 2014, which would tend to push δ_3 in a positive direction even if there were no anti-migrant messaging in the post-campaign period. It is also possible that the campaign’s influence has spilled over through social interaction into the population that does not watch television news as intensively, in which case the value of δ_3 is more difficult to predict. It is also possible that the attitudes of television viewers change quickly with the media coverage, in which case we do not expect δ_2 to equal δ_3 . In fact, if the post-campaign media environment was even less hostile to immigration than the one prevailing before the campaign, a possibility for which the series for *Vremya* coverage in Figures 1 and 2 offer some support, it is possible that δ_3 is negative.

X_{irt} is a vector of individual-specific controls that may be related to attitudes: age, sex, educational achievement, employment status, Russian ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Using the presumption that the media campaign was aimed at ethnic Russians, in one version of (1), we exclude the Russian ethnicity dummy and only run the model on ethnic Russians (reported in columns 4-6 of Table 2). We also account for regional fixed effects α_r . In all specifications, unless otherwise noted, we apply an ordered

probit estimator.¹⁶

We modify the baseline model by accounting for the total TV viewing reported by the respondent, giving us greater confidence that the δ 's detect the time-varying effects associated with political content on television as opposed to other types of programming. Since [Tolz and Harding \(2015\)](#) make the point that the campaign spilled over into non-news programming, we expect that conditioning on total television viewing might diminish the apparent influence of more intensive television news consumption.

3.3 Results

In Table 2, columns 1 through 3, the interaction between political TV viewing and the year 2012 is positive across all specifications, a pattern consistent with the expectation that the state-owned media campaign increased the support of viewers for more restrictive immigration policies. However, it is only statistically significant in the case in which respondents are asked to consider ethnic groups different “from most of the Russian Federation’s people.”^{17,18}

In columns 4 through 6, with the analysis restricted to respondents who describe themselves as ethnically Russian, the evidence consistent with the campaign producing an effect is more robust. In the midst of the campaign, that is, ethnic Russians who watch more television news express greater opposition to all three groups. This evidence strongly supports the proposition that the short-lived campaign had an effect, particularly when ethnic Russian respondents think about non-co-ethnics and citizens of poorer, non-European countries.¹⁹

Although the magnitude and statistical significance are weaker than for non-co-ethnics or immigrants from poor, non-European countries, ethnic Russians’ opposition to the immigration of co-ethnics – which they might understand as Russians coming from former Soviet republics or, possibly, fellow Slavs such as Ukrainians from Ukraine – also increases in 2012 as a function of political TV consumption. Interpreting this finding presents a challenge since the television campaign targeted migrants from Muslim-majority countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus ([Tolz and Harding, 2015](#)). What is to be made of this? For one, it is not inconceivable that the TV campaign was a rather blunt instrument whose imprecision may have unintentionally soured ethnic Russians’ attitudes toward immigrants of all ethnicities, their own

¹⁶Our results of interest are robust to OLS estimation.

¹⁷To convey a better sense of the magnitude of this effect, we ran a linear probability model with the dependent variable being a dummy equal to one if the response was “allow few” or “allow none” and the main independent variable of interest being a dummy equal to one if the respondent reported watching at least some positive amount of television news on an average weekday. Watching any positive amount of television news increases the probability of being more hostile to the immigration of non-coethnics by 5.2 percentage points.

¹⁸Results are qualitatively similar when restricting the sample to 2010 and 2012. See Appendix Table 4 for these estimates. In Appendix Table 5, we rerun the models in Table 2 but substitute for the three dependent variables two collapsed measures: the simple average of the three indicators and their first principal component. Results are, again, substantively similar.

¹⁹For the coefficient to be interpreted as representing a causal effect, the parallel trends assumption must hold. Figures 6, 7, and 8 in the Appendix present evidence consistent with this being the case. Across the three questions, the trend in opposition to immigration expressed by responding “allow none” or “allow few” between waves 4 and 5 (that is, prior to the campaign) is similar for those who do not watch political television and those who report watching some.

included. For another, the magnitude of the campaign’s effect on ethnic Russians’ attitudes towards non-co-ethnics may have been diminished by a kind of ceiling effect. As we can see in Figure 3, pre-campaign attitudes toward non-co-ethnics were already relatively hostile so they had less room, as it were, than attitudes toward co-ethnic migrants, to become more hostile.

In addition to providing evidence that the campaign was effective in changing opinion, additional results in Table 2 suggest that its conclusion may also have had an abrupt impact. As the coefficient on the time dummy suggests, anti-immigrant attitudes were much more intense across the board in 2014 relative to 2010, but less so for those who watched more television news, as indicated by the negative coefficient on the interaction term “political TV X 2014.” If post-campaign television coverage *vis a vis* immigrants and immigration was more positive than pre-campaign coverage in 2010, this result could be further testimony to public opinion being quite malleable and susceptible to quick changes in the way in which an important policy issue is framed on state television.

Table 3 modifies the baseline model by including a control for total TV consumption. Although we do observe that those who watch more television, generally, report being more hostile to immigrants and immigration, the important results of Table 2 continue to hold in a way that gives us greater confidence as to the effect of the anti-immigration campaign. For ethnic Russians considering the immigration of different ethnicities and those from poorer, non-European countries, the primary coefficients of interest remain positive and statistically significant.²⁰

4 Conclusion

This study documents the impact of a brief campaign on Russian state television aimed at reorienting public attitudes toward immigration. Drawing on historical context provided by Tolz and Harding (2015), we demonstrate that authoritarian regimes can successfully deploy state-controlled media to shift public opinion on a politically significant issue even when doing so entails a stark departure from previous narratives. Using repeated cross-sectional survey data collected before, during, and after the campaign, we show that viewers who consumed more television news during the campaign, particularly ethnic Russians, were more likely to oppose liberal immigration policies. The effect was especially pronounced in views toward immigrants from non-European, low-income countries, consistent with the campaign’s racialized targeting.

By capturing a real-world example of a media-driven shift in public opinion, our findings substantiate and add nuance to the results of previous experimental research (Pan et al., 2022). Specifically, we demonstrate that the Russian state’s information apparatus is not only capable of reinforcing existing attitudes but also can disrupt and reverse them, at least temporarily, when politically expedient. This

²⁰To rule out the possibility that the association between television news consumption and attitudes is being driven by something that might be happening in the world outside of Russia, we investigate whether we observe a similar pattern in the ESS data from Ukraine. With only 2010 and 2012 data at our disposal for this exercise, we present the results in Table 6. Unlike in Russia, more intensive television news consumption in Ukraine does not explain an increase in hostility toward immigrants in 2012.

supports the growing view of authoritarian media systems as adaptive instruments of governance, capable of recalibrating public sentiment in response to shifting strategic goals.

Our results thus speak to broader debates about the role of propaganda in “informational autocracies” (Guriev and Treisman, 2022), where media manipulation is central to political control but subject to audience skepticism, competing sources of information, and the constraints of credibility. We show that even when the state’s message departs from earlier frames and therefore risks being seen as inconsistent or opportunistic, it can still produce observable attitudinal effects, particularly when the campaign is coordinated, intense and targeted.

Future work might explore the durability of such shifts or test whether similar patterns emerge in response to messaging on other politically important issues. More broadly, our findings suggest that state-controlled television remains a potent tool of political persuasion in Russia, but one whose effects are contingent and possibly ephemeral, less a blunt instrument of ideological indoctrination than a flexible, adaptive mechanism of political management.

References

- Al-Shabi, M. A. (2020). Evaluating the performance of the most important lexicons used to sentiment analysis and opinions mining. *IJCSNS International Journal of Computer Science and Network Security*, 20(1):1–7.
- Alesina, A., Miano, A., and Stantcheva, S. (2023). Immigration and redistribution. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 90(1):1–39.
- Alexseev, M. A. (2014). Strength without kindness: Russia’s persistent xenophobia and the state. PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 310. Available at <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/strength-without-kindness-russia-s-persistent-xenophobia-and-the-state/>.
- Arnold, R. and Markowitz, L. P. (2018). The evolution of violence within far-right mobilization: evidence from Russia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(9):1558–1573.
- Bahry, D. (2016). Opposition to Immigration, Economic Insecurity and Individual Values: Evidence from Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(5):893–916.
- Bearce, D. H. and Connell, B. J. (2023). Government compensation and citizen support for immigration openness. *Economics & Politics*, 35(1):5–27.
- Becker, J. (2014). Russia and the New Authoritarians. *Demokratizatskya*, 22(2):191–206.
- Bessudnov, A. (2016). Ethnic Hierarchy and Public Attitudes towards Immigrants in Russia. *European Sociological Review*, 32(5):567–580.
- Cattaneo, C. and Grieco, D. (2021). Turning opposition into support to immigration: The role of narratives. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 190:785–801.
- Chapman, H. S., Marquardt, K. L., Herrera, Y. M., and Gerber, T. P. (2018). Xenophobia on the rise? temporal and regional trends in xenophobic attitudes in russia. *Comparative Politics*, 50(3):381–394.
- Chudinovskikh, O. and Dinisenko, M. (2017). Russia: A Migration System with Soviet Roots. URL: www.migrationpolicy.org/print/15920.
- Djourelouva, M. (2023). Persuasion through slanted language: Evidence from the media coverage of immigration. *American economic review*, 113(3):800–835.
- Dustmann, C. and Preston, I. P. (2007). Racial and Economic Factors in Attitudes to Immigration. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 7(1). Publisher: De Gruyter Section: The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy.
- Facchini, G. and Mayda, A. M. (2009). Does the welfare state affect individual attitudes toward immigrants? evidence across countries. *The review of economics and statistics*, 91(2):295–314.
- Gehlbach, S. (2010). Reflections on Putin and the Media. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 26(1):77–87.

- Gerber, T. P. (2014). Beyond putin? nationalism and xenophobia in russian public opinion. *The Washington Quarterly*, 37(3):113–134.
- Gerber, T. P. and Zavisca, J. (2020). Experiences in russia of kyrgyz and ukrainian labor migrants: ethnic hierarchies, geopolitical remittances, and the relevance of migration theory. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 36(1):61–82.
- Gorodzeisky, A. (2019). Opposition to immigration in contemporary russia. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 35(3):205–222.
- Gorodzeisky, A. and Glikman, A. (2018). Two Peoples – Two Stories: Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in Post-Socialist Russia. *Social Problems*, 65(4):543–563.
- Gorodzeisky, A., Glikman, A., and Maskileyson, D. (2015). The nature of anti-immigrant sentiment in post-socialist Russia. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 31(2):115–135.
- Gorodzeisky, A. and Leykin, I. (2022). On the west–east methodological bias in measuring international migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(13):3160–3183.
- Guriev, S. and Treisman, D. (2022). *Spin dictators: The changing face of tyranny in the 21st century*. Princeton University Press.
- Hainmueller, J. and Hopkins, D. J. (2014). Public attitudes toward immigration. *Annual review of political science*, 17(1):225–249.
- Hatton, T. J. (2021). Public opinion on immigration in europe: Preference and salience. *European journal of political economy*, 66:101969.
- Herrera, Y. M. and Butkovich Kraus, N. M. (2016). Pride versus prejudice: Ethnicity, national identity, and xenophobia in russia. *Comparative Politics*, 48(3):293–315.
- Huang, H. (2018). The pathology of hard propaganda. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(3):1034–1038.
- Huber, P. and Oberdabernig, D. A. (2016). The impact of welfare benefits on natives’ and immigrants’ attitudes toward immigration. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 44:53–78.
- Kingsbury, M. A., Pikulicka-Wilczewska, A., and Uehling, G. (2017). Beyond attitudes: Russian xenophobia as a political legitimation tool. *E-International Relations*, 30.
- Knoll, B. R., Redlawsk, D. P., and Sanborn, H. (2011). Framing labels and immigration policy attitudes in the iowa caucuses: “trying to out-tancredo tancredo”. *Political Behavior*, 33:433–454.
- Koser, K. and Laczko, F. (2010). World migration report 2010. Technical report, United Nations.
- Koto, F. and Adriani, M. (2015). A comparative study on twitter sentiment analysis: Which features are good? In *Springer in The 20th International Conference on Applications of Natural Language To Information Systems (NLDB 2015)*, volume 453–457.

- Laruelle, M. (2013). Anti-migrant riots in russia: The mobilizing potential of xenophobia. *Russian Analytical Digest*, (141):2–5.
- Lergetporer, P., Piopiunik, M., and Simon, L. (2021). Does the education level of refugees affect natives’ attitudes? *European Economic Review*, 134:103710.
- Levada (2017). Otnosheniye k trodovym migrantam.
- Lipman, M. and Akhrarkhodjaeva, N. (2017). Media. *Russian Analytical Digest (RAD)*, 197.
- Margaryan, S., Paul, A., and Siedler, T. (2021). Does education affect attitudes towards immigration?: Evidence from germany. *Journal of Human Resources*, 56(2):446–479.
- Markowitz, L. and Peshkova, V. (2016). Anti-immigrant mobilization in russia’s regions: Local movements and framing processes. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32(3):272–298.
- Mayda, A. M. (2006). Who Is Against Immigration? A Cross-Country Investigation of Individual Attitudes toward Immigrants. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 88(3):510–530.
- McCabe, K. T., Matos, Y., and Walker, H. (2021). Priming legality: Perceptions of latino and undocumented latino immigrants. *American Politics Research*, 49(1):106–113.
- Merolla, J., Ramakrishnan, S. K., and Haynes, C. (2013). “illegal,” “undocumented,” or “unauthorized”: Equivalency frames, issue frames, and public opinion on immigration. *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(3):789–807.
- Mickiewicz, E. P. (2008). *Television, power, and the public in Russia*. Cambridge university press,.
- Mullainathan, S. (2002). A memory-based model of bounded rationality. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(3):735–774.
- O’Brien, M. L. (2017). Migration as an adaptive response to ethnic nationalism in russia. *Migration Studies*, 6(2):187–204.
- O’Rourke, K. H. and Sinnott, R. (2006). The determinants of individual attitudes towards immigration. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 22(4):838–861.
- Ortega, F. and Polavieja, J. G. (2012). Labor-market exposure as a determinant of attitudes toward immigration. *Labour Economics*, 19(3):298–311.
- Pain, E. (2007). Xenophobia and ethnopolitical extremism in post-soviet russia: Dynamics and growth factors. *Nationalities Papers*, 35(5):895–911.
- Pan, J., Shao, Z., and Xu, Y. (2022). How government-controlled media shifts policy attitudes through framing. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 10(2):317–332.
- Peisakhin, L. and Rozenas, A. (2018). Electoral effects of biased media: Russian television in ukraine. *American journal of political science*, 62(3):535–550.

- Pipiya, K. (2016). Ekho yevropeyskogo migratsionnogo krizisa: ‘chuzhiye’ bezhentsy i ‘svoy’ migranty v predstavleniyakh rossiyan v 2015-2016. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya*, 122(3-4):160–169.
- Rosenfeld, B. (2018). The popularity costs of economic crisis under electoral authoritarianism: Evidence from russia. *American journal of political science*, 62(2):382–397.
- Rosenfeld, B. and Wallace, J. (2024). Information politics and propaganda in authoritarian societies. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 27.
- Roth, C., Ubfal, D., and Grigorieff, A. (2017). Information changes attitudes towards immigrants. Accessed: 2025-06-05.
- Rozenas, A. and Stukal, D. (2019). How autocrats manipulate economic news: Evidence from russia’s state-controlled television. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(3):982–996.
- Rucker, J. M., Murphy, M. C., and Quintanilla, V. D. (2019). The immigrant labeling effect: The role of immigrant group labels in prejudice against noncitizens. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 22(8):1139–1160.
- Scheufele, D. A. and Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of communication*, 57(1):9–20.
- Scheve, K. F. and Slaughter, M. J. (2001). Labor Market Competition and Individual Preferences Over Immigration Policy. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 83(1):133–145. Publisher: MIT Press.
- Schneider-Strawczynski, S. and Valette, J. (2025). Media coverage of immigration and the polarization of attitudes. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 17(1):337–368.
- Shirikov, A. (2024). Rethinking propaganda: How state media build trust through belief affirmation. *Journal of Politics*, 86(4):1319–1332.
- Smyth, R. and Soboleva, I. (2014). Looking beyond the economy: Pussy Riot and the Kremlin’s voting coalition. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30(4):257–275.
- Stockmann, D. and Gallagher, M. E. (2011). Remote control: How the media sustain authoritarian rule in china. *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(4):436–467.
- Strömberg, D. (2015). Media and politics. *Annual Review of Economics*, 7(1):173–205.
- Szostek, J. (2017). News consumption and anti-western narratives in russia: A case study of university students. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69(2):284–302.
- Toepfl, F. (2013). Making Sense of the News in a Hybrid Regime: How Young Russians Decode State TV and an Oppositional Blog. *Journal of Communication*, 63(2):244–265.
- Tolz, V. and Harding, S.-A. (2015). From “Compatriots” to “Aliens”: The Changing Coverage of Migration on Russian Television. *The Russian Review*, 74(3):452–477.

- Volkov, D. and Goncharov, S. (2014). Rossiiskii media-landshaft: televidenie, pressa, internet. Technical report, Levada Centre.
- York, E. A. (2022). Preferences over foreign migration: testing existing explanations in the gulf. *World Politics*, 74(3):443–475.

Table 1: Summary statistics

	mean	sd
political TV	1.74	1.40
total TV	4.62	2.14
female	0.59	0.49
age (years)	45.89	18.15
vocational education	0.40	0.49
higher education	0.30	0.46
orthodox	0.50	0.50
islam	0.06	0.23
employed	0.56	0.50
unemployed	0.03	0.17
ethnic majority	0.85	0.36

Table 2: Opposition to immigration and political-TV-watching intensity in Russia, 2008 - 2014

VARIABLES	(1) different ethnicities	(2) poorer countries	(3) same ethnicity	(4) different ethnicities	(5) poorer countries	(6) same ethnicity
political TV X 2008	0.012 (0.030)	-0.019 (0.026)	-0.010 (0.009)	0.005 (0.031)	-0.031 (0.024)	0.003 (0.011)
political TV X 2012	0.049** (0.024)	0.037 (0.023)	0.041 (0.030)	0.071** (0.029)	0.068*** (0.024)	0.064** (0.030)
political TV X 2014	-0.024 (0.022)	-0.043** (0.021)	-0.022 (0.021)	-0.031** (0.015)	-0.051*** (0.016)	-0.003 (0.019)
political TV	-0.014 (0.017)	0.006 (0.014)	-0.005 (0.016)	-0.014 (0.018)	0.006 (0.015)	-0.017 (0.016)
2008	0.076 (0.096)	0.037 (0.085)	0.127** (0.053)	0.101 (0.089)	0.072 (0.075)	0.119** (0.050)
2012	0.129 (0.097)	0.092 (0.082)	0.163*** (0.045)	0.118 (0.120)	0.069 (0.108)	0.148*** (0.050)
2014	0.199*** (0.057)	0.204*** (0.058)	0.313*** (0.080)	0.205*** (0.056)	0.224*** (0.051)	0.285*** (0.077)
ethnic majority	0.196*** (0.067)	0.193*** (0.059)	0.045 (0.032)			
Observations	8,624	8,624	8,624	7,405	7,405	7,405
other individual controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
region fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
just ethnic majority	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

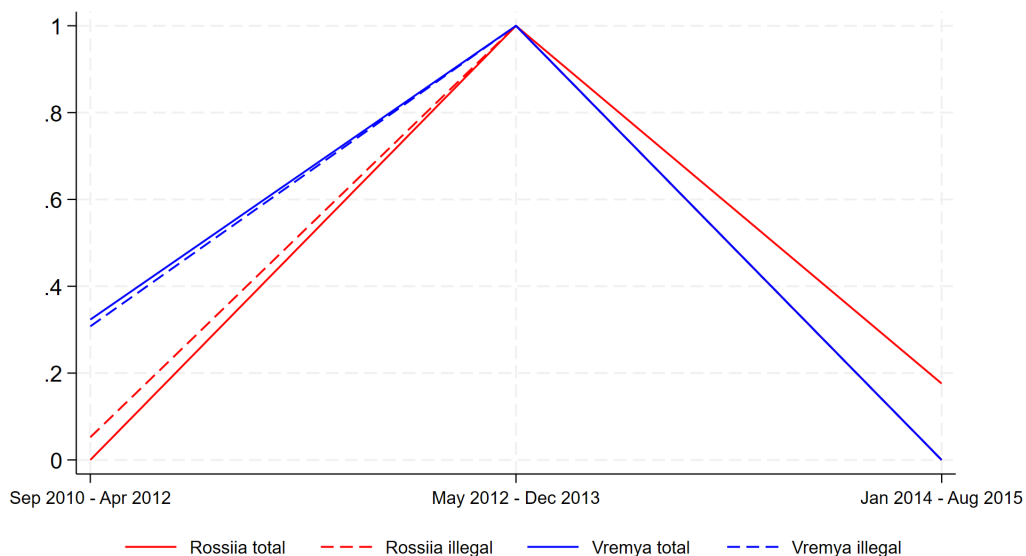
Table 3: Baseline with control for total TV

VARIABLES	(1) different ethnicities	(2) poorer countries	(3) same ethnicity	(4) different ethnicities	(5) poorer countries	(6) same ethnicity
political TV X 2008	0.015 (0.030)	-0.016 (0.025)	-0.009 (0.007)	0.011 (0.031)	-0.026 (0.023)	0.005 (0.008)
political TV X 2012	0.059** (0.025)	0.042 (0.026)	0.047 (0.032)	0.082*** (0.027)	0.073*** (0.025)	0.071** (0.032)
political TV X 2014	-0.022 (0.023)	-0.041** (0.021)	-0.022 (0.021)	-0.028* (0.015)	-0.050*** (0.015)	-0.003 (0.018)
political TV	-0.038** (0.016)	-0.015 (0.016)	-0.020 (0.021)	-0.040** (0.017)	-0.016 (0.016)	-0.032 (0.020)
total TV	0.035*** (0.009)	0.032*** (0.011)	0.025** (0.012)	0.040*** (0.009)	0.033*** (0.011)	0.026** (0.012)
2008	0.070 (0.093)	0.032 (0.084)	0.126** (0.051)	0.090 (0.087)	0.061 (0.074)	0.114** (0.046)
2012	0.120 (0.099)	0.087 (0.087)	0.157*** (0.047)	0.107 (0.125)	0.063 (0.115)	0.140** (0.057)
2014	0.209*** (0.060)	0.213*** (0.063)	0.326*** (0.076)	0.216*** (0.059)	0.232*** (0.055)	0.298*** (0.072)
ethnic majority	0.181*** (0.067)	0.177*** (0.057)	0.033 (0.032)			
observations	8,566	8,566	8,566	7,354	7,354	7,354
other individual controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
region fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
just ethnic majority	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

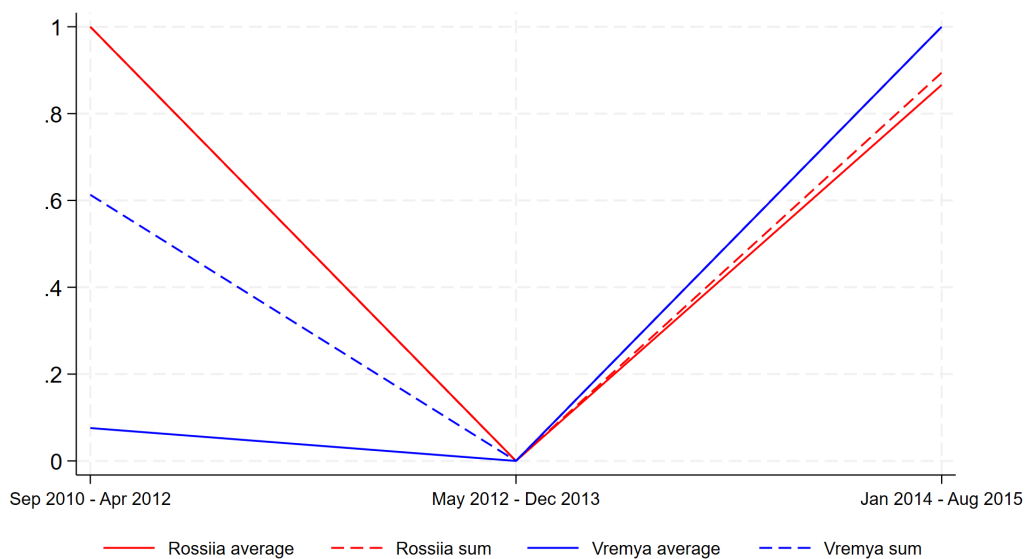
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 1: Counts of Russia-related immigrant/immigration stories



This figure shows the prevalence (count) of Russia-related immigrant/immigration stories for Rossiia and Vremya for Sept 2010-Aug 2015.

Figure 2: Sentiment of Russia-related immigrant/immigration stories



This figure shows the average and sum of sentiment scores of Russia-related immigrant/immigration stories for Rossiia and Vremya for Sept 2010-Aug 2015.

Figure 3: How many people ought be allowed to come and live in Russia?

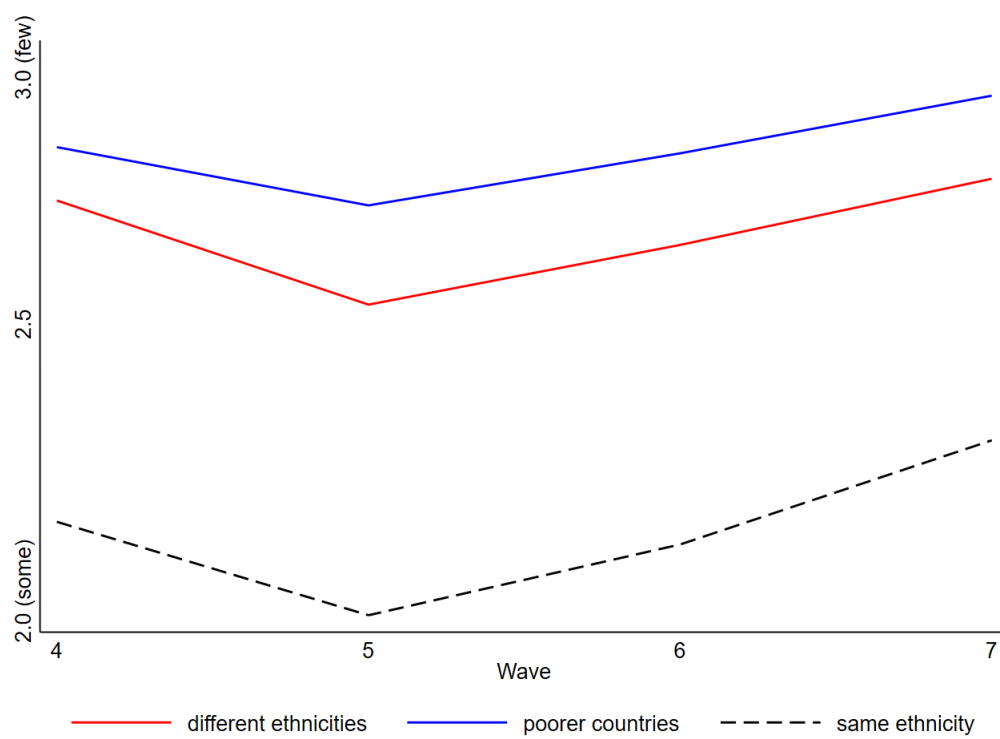


Figure 4: Hours of TV news and current affairs programming consumed on average weekday (combining waves 4-7)

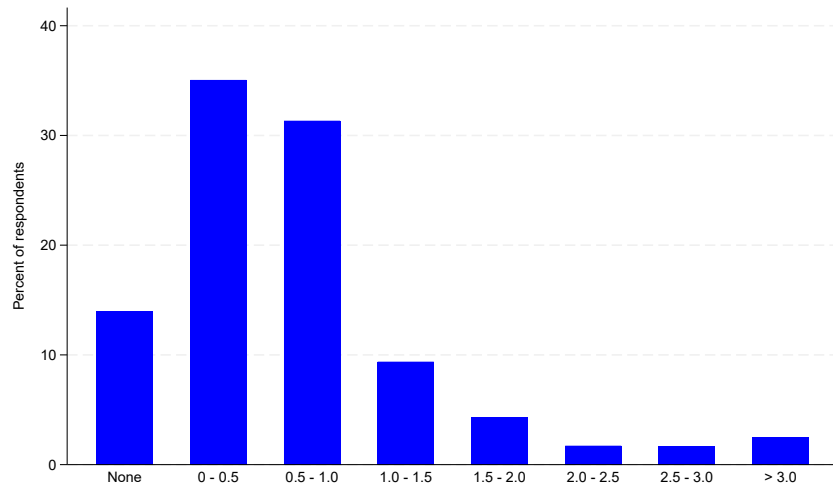
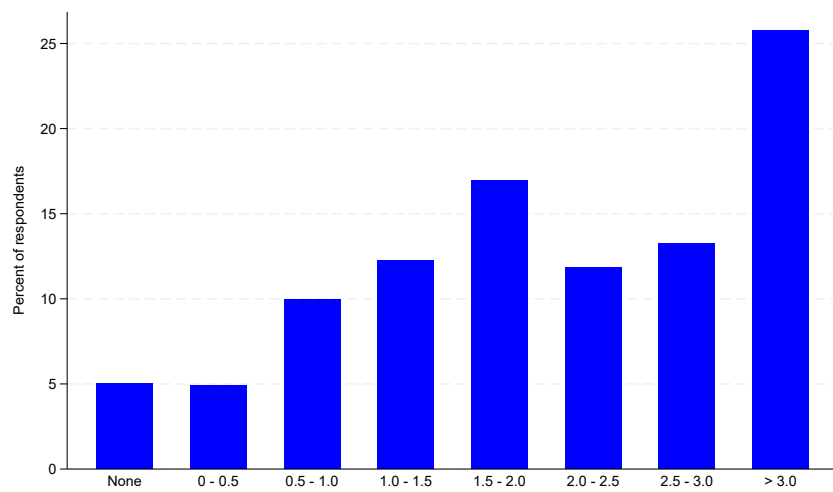


Figure 5: Hours of total TV programming consumed on average weekday (combining waves 4-7)



Appendix

Table 4: Opposition to immigration and political-TV-watching intensity in Russia, 2010 - 2012

VARIABLES	(1) different ethnicities	(2) poorer countries	(3) same ethnicity	(4) different ethnicities	(5) poorer countries	(6) same ethnicity
political TV X 2012	0.047** (0.024)	0.036 (0.022)	0.038 (0.030)	0.068** (0.029)	0.066*** (0.023)	0.060** (0.030)
political TV	-0.012 (0.016)	0.006 (0.014)	0.003 (0.013)	-0.013 (0.016)	0.005 (0.015)	-0.010 (0.013)
2012	0.128 (0.096)	0.090 (0.080)	0.169*** (0.044)	0.119 (0.117)	0.071 (0.104)	0.157*** (0.045)
ethnic majority	0.177*** (0.069)	0.152*** (0.059)	0.005 (0.038)			
Observations	4,381	4,381	4,381	3,712	3,712	3,712
other individual controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
region fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
just ethnic majority	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 5: Opposition to immigration and political-TV-watching intensity in Russia, 2008-2014

VARIABLES	(1) average against	(2) principal component	(3) average against	(4) principal component
political TV X 2008	-0.007 (0.019)	-0.003 (0.021)	-0.009 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.020)
political TV X 2012	0.046** (0.023)	0.048** (0.023)	0.074*** (0.025)	0.075*** (0.025)
political TV X 2014	-0.033* (0.019)	-0.034* (0.019)	-0.032** (0.013)	-0.035*** (0.013)
political TV	-0.005 (0.014)	-0.006 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.016)	-0.009 (0.016)
2008	0.088 (0.080)	0.078 (0.080)	0.107 (0.072)	0.101 (0.071)
2012	0.141* (0.075)	0.132* (0.078)	0.123 (0.097)	0.114 (0.100)
2014	0.266*** (0.064)	0.250*** (0.063)	0.265*** (0.062)	0.252*** (0.061)
ethnic majority	0.159*** (0.057)	0.171*** (0.059)		
Observations	8,624	8,624	7,405	7,405
other individual controls	yes	yes	yes	yes
region fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes
year fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes
just ethnic majority	no	no	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6: Opposition to immigration and political-TV-watching intensity in Ukraine, 2010 - 2012

VARIABLES	(1) different ethnicities	(2) poorer countries	(3) same ethnicity	(4) different ethnicities	(5) poorer countries	(6) same ethnicity
political TV X 2012	0.018 (0.031)	0.001 (0.031)	0.037 (0.030)	0.014 (0.032)	-0.000 (0.031)	0.041 (0.032)
political TV	-0.020 (0.022)	-0.010 (0.025)	-0.024 (0.025)	-0.019 (0.023)	-0.012 (0.025)	-0.029 (0.028)
2012	0.020 (0.107)	0.066 (0.097)	-0.014 (0.095)	0.041 (0.110)	0.087 (0.097)	-0.022 (0.099)
ethnic majority	0.165 (0.132)	0.197 (0.137)	0.236** (0.115)			
Observations	3,278	3,278	3,278	3,120	3,120	3,120
other individual controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
region fixed effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
just ethnic majority	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

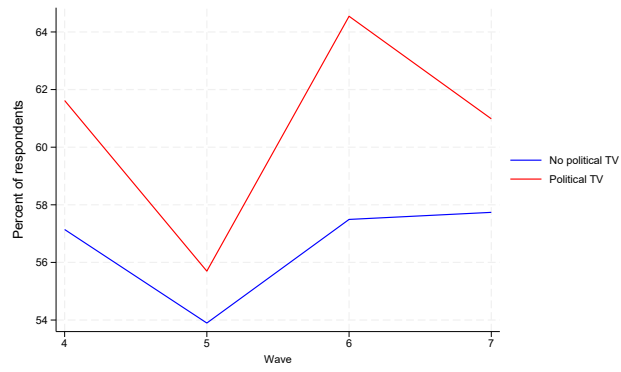


Figure 6: Opposition to immigration of different ethnicities

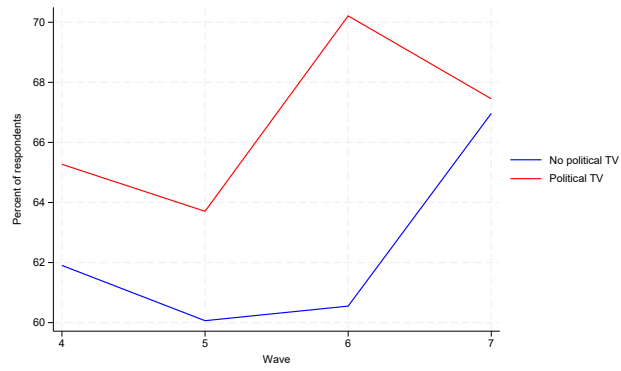


Figure 7: Opposition to immigration from poorer countries

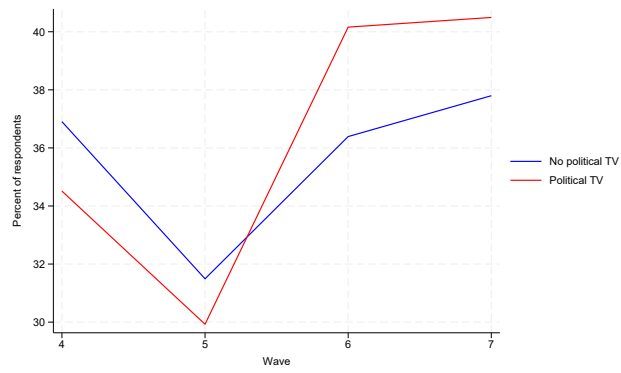


Figure 8: Opposition to immigration of co-ethnics