

# **SURVEY OF RUSSIAN ELITES 2020**

## **NEW PERSPECTIVES ON FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY**

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Sharon Werning Rivera, Professor and Chair of Government  
Sterling Bray '20  
James Cho '22  
Max Gersch '23  
Marykate McNeil '20  
Alexander Nemeth '22  
Spencer Royal '22  
John Rutecki '22  
Huzefah Umer '21  
(Hamilton College, Clinton, NY)

With Jack Benjamin (Northwestern University '20)

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Questions and comments should be directed to Prof. Sharon Rivera at [srivera@hamilton.edu](mailto:srivera@hamilton.edu). Media inquiries can be directed to Vige Barrie at [ybarrie@hamilton.edu](mailto:ybarrie@hamilton.edu).

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the end of the “reset” in US-Russian relations in 2012, the bilateral relationship has been marked by acrimony and mutual recriminations. At the same time, Russia under President Vladimir Putin has pursued a more muscular foreign policy around the globe, whether in Syria, Africa, or the post-Soviet region. Russia and the West are often at odds over the scope and purpose of these interventions.

New data from the Survey of Russian Elites (SRE) suggest that US-Russian relations will not improve any time soon, at least insofar as they depend on the foreign policy attitudes of high-ranking Russians. Collected between February and March 2020, the data show that although the percentage of Russian elites who view the US as a threat is down considerably from the last survey in 2016, respondents are also more inclined to worry about both the growth of US military power and the possibility of information warfare emanating from the West. They are also significantly more favorably disposed toward sending Russian troops abroad to assist foreign countries and to provide security for Russia’s international friends than in all previous waves of the survey. In addition, Russian elites blame the US more than Russia for the deterioration of bilateral relations.

The data also point to some important differences between elites’ foreign policy attitudes and their views about domestic politics. The Putin era is characterized by an increasingly closed political system, Kremlin control of major media outlets, and clear messaging about the need to create a multipolar world in which Western power and aggression can be checked. All of these conditions are conducive to “cueing”—a process by which highly placed individuals carefully read Kremlin signals and adopt policies that mirror those of the top leadership. In fact, our data show evidence of possible cueing effects in several important foreign policy arenas, such as Syria and China. These effects are not visible, however, in attitudes toward several crucial domestic issues. Specifically, our respondents’ views on the threat of a “color” revolution in Russia, the need for either a foreign agent law or strong Internet regulation, and the occurrence of Western interference in the 2011-12 election cycle diverge noticeably from Putin’s statements. In short, the elite stratum does not share the Kremlin’s preoccupation with insulating the polity from foreign meddling.

Elites’ views on foreign and domestic policy diverge in yet another aspect. Although foreign policy issues are on the respondents’ minds, the need to address Russia’s domestic problems is clearly their top priority. Concern about Russia’s inability to solve its internal problems has grown in the past four years, such that 70 percent think it either represents or is close to constituting an “utmost danger” to the security of Russia. Only concerns about further NATO expansion to the “Near Abroad” are at the same threat level. And in sharp contrast to elites’ satisfaction with Putin’s foreign policy achievements and efforts to restore Russia’s standing on the world stage, Putin’s marks for most domestic policy achievements are much lower. Assessments of the economic progress made over the past twenty years are particularly dim. At the same time, there is

little appetite for a return to Soviet political institutions, even though support for state control of heavy industry remains substantial.

Finally, in some arenas, the 2020 data reveal the continuation of trends detected in previous waves of the SRE. For instance, the rank order of desirable partnerships for Russia has remained stable for the past eight years, with the European Union remaining the most favored option, followed closely by China. Similarly, support for the unification of Russia and Ukraine has consistently declined since 1995 and is now at an all-time low.

The 2020 wave of the SRE was directed by Sharon Werning Rivera of Hamilton College (Principal Investigator) and William Zimmerman of the University of Michigan (Co-Principal Investigator), in consultation with the survey's international advisory board. Funding for the survey was provided by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. SES-1742798); the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center and Office of the Dean of Faculty at Hamilton College; and the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies, Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia, Center for Political Studies, and Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan.

The 2020 survey consists of 245 interviews conducted in February and March 2020 with high-ranking individuals working in Russia's federal bureaucracy, parliament, military and security agencies, private businesses, state-owned enterprises, academic research institutes, and media outlets. In each wave, between 180 and 320 individuals were interviewed. For more on the survey methodology, see Section 11.1

The analyses in this report were conducted by Hamilton College students Sterling Bray '20, James Cho '22, Max Gersch '23, Marykate McNeil '20, Alexander Nemeth '22, Spencer Royal '22, John Rutecki '22, and Huzefah Umer '21 under the direction of Professor and Chair of Government Sharon Werning Rivera. Chicago Council of Global Affairs intern and Northwestern University senior Jack Benjamin also participated in the preparation of the report.

We are grateful to James Bryan, Kirill Kalinin, and especially David Rivera for their helpful comments and suggestions, and to Hà Trần'22 for research assistance. All remaining errors are our own.

1 The history of the project is described in Sharon Werning Rivera and William Zimmerman, "Introduction: New Directions in Survey Research on Russian Elites," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, nos. 5-6 (2019): 359-64. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1660482>

## 2. THREAT PERCEPTIONS

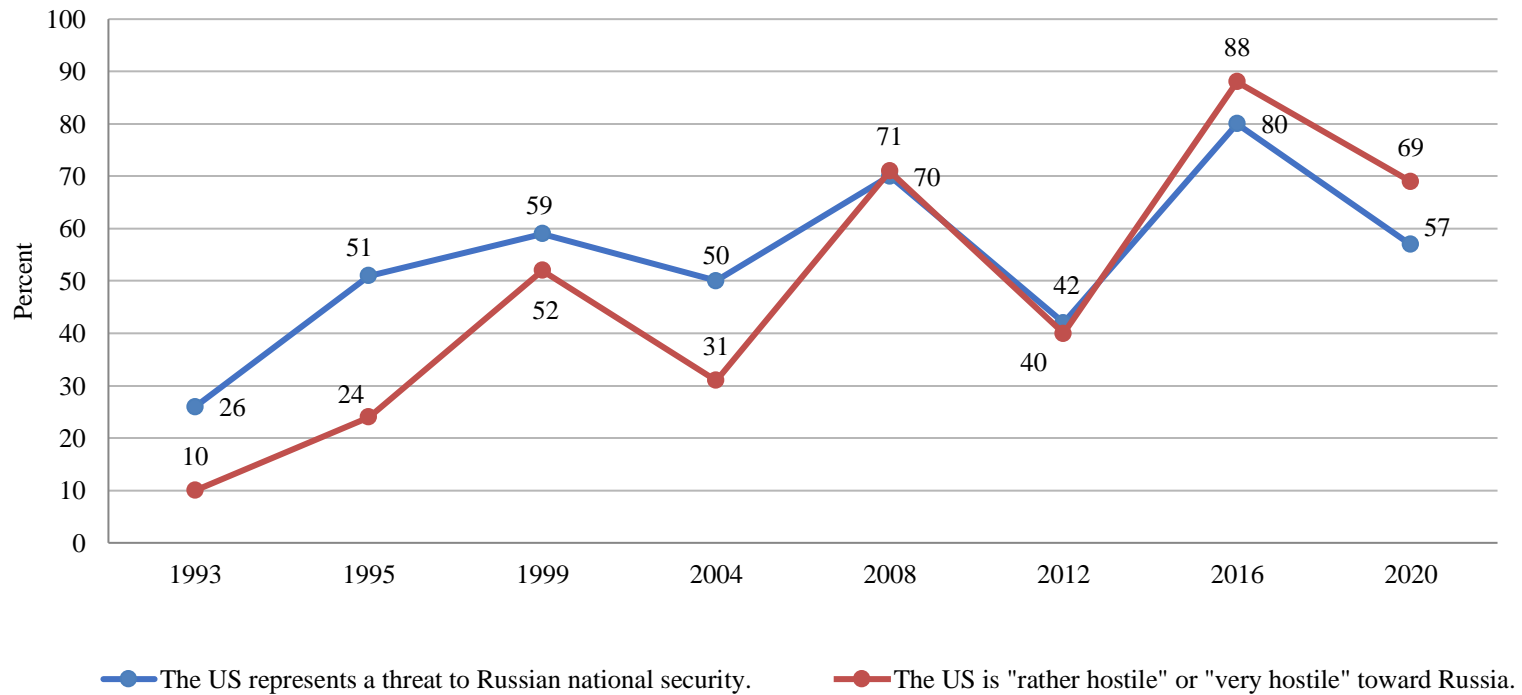
### **Elites' perceptions of the United States as a threat have declined since 2016.**

Since the launch of the Survey of Russian Elites in 1993, the percentage of elites who agree that “the US represents a threat to Russian national security” has generally ebbed and flowed in tandem with events important to the bilateral relationship. Threat perceptions rose as the Russian-Georgian conflict was unfolding in the spring of 2008, dropped at the midpoint of the Obama administration (during which a “reset” of US-Russian relations had been attempted), and reached their highest point two years after Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea.

As the blue line in Figure 2.1 shows, fully 80 percent of elites in 2016 agreed that the US was a threat to national security.<sup>2</sup> However, this percentage dropped by more than twenty percentage points—to 57 percent—in 2020. A similar decline is evident in the percentage of elites assessing the US as either “rather hostile” or “very hostile” toward Russia, as seen in the red line in the figure. In 2020, 69 percent of respondents perceive the United States as hostile, which is down 19 percentage points from its high of 88 percent just four years ago.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Werning Rivera, et al., “The Russian Elite 2016: Perspectives on Foreign and Domestic Policy,” May 11, 2016. <https://www.hamilton.edu/documents/russianelite2016final1.pdf>.

**Figure 2.1**  
**Views of the US**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Note:* The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wordings:* “Do you think that the US represents a threat to Russian national security? 1. Yes, 2. No”; “For each country or international organization that I will name, please tell me how friendly or hostile you think it is toward Russia today: very friendly, rather friendly, neutral, rather hostile, or very hostile [US].”

**Internal problems are perceived to be Russia’s biggest threat, but worries about Western information warfare and the growth of US military power are on the rise.**

The survey asked respondents to rate a number of threats facing Russia on a scale of one to five, with one corresponding to the “absence of danger” and five to the “utmost danger.” Figure 2.2 displays the percentage of elites who assigned various threats either a four or five. As the red line shows, elites’ concerns about Russia’s domestic problems have grown in the past four years. In 2016, 54 percent rated Russia’s “inability to resolve its internal problems” as either a four or five, compared to almost three-quarters of all elites (70%) today.

The share of high-ranking Russians expressing concern about “the growth of US military power compared to that of Russia” has risen even more sharply since 2016. Between 2008 and 2016, the percentage rating the growth of US military power as a four or five declined in consecutive surveys, reaching a twenty-year low of 42 percent in 2016. But in 2020 it rose sharply—by twenty percentage points—to settle in at exactly the same percentage observed in 2008 (62%).

Given the decline in overall threat perceptions regarding the US since 2016, respondents’ elevated concerns about US military power are somewhat surprising. Perhaps the answer lies in their differing perceptions of the American president and his entourage, on the one hand, and the foreign policy and military establishment, on the other. The list of ways in which Trump’s actions and words have benefited Russia is long—ranging from publicly siding with Putin over US intelligence reports about Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election to abruptly deciding to withdraw US troops from northeastern Syria. As former ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul writes in *Foreign Affairs*, as a result of President Donald Trump’s foreign policy decisions, “U.S. adversaries have gained—none more so than Russian President Vladimir Putin.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, signals emanating from the US Department of Defense (DOD) may have simultaneously generated concern about the intentions and capabilities of the US military. For instance, the public summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy published by DOD identifies the “reemergence of long-term strategic competition by...revisionist powers,” i.e., China and Russia, as the “central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security.” It furthermore recommends building “a more lethal Joint Force” as one of

<sup>3</sup> Michael McFaul, “Trump’s Gift to Putin: The President’s Privatized Foreign Policy Is a Boon for Russia,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 23, 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2019-10-23/trumps-gift-putin>

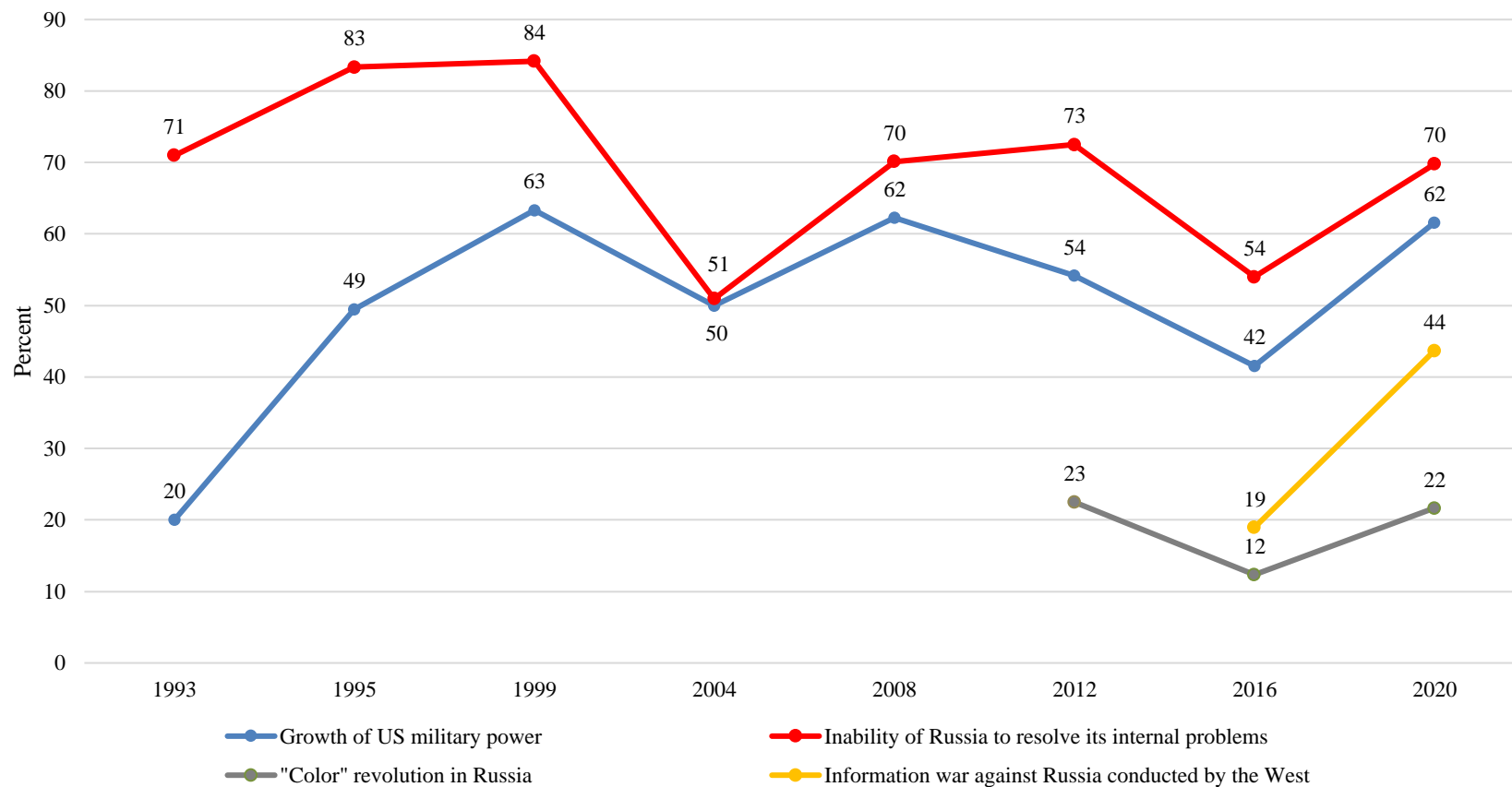
“three distinct lines of effort” in response.<sup>4</sup> Although Putin confidently discusses Russia’s development of hypersonic weapons, he also warns that “for all intents and purposes, a new arms race has begun in the world.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the growth of US military power, the sense of danger from the West has risen in other areas, although the overall levels are not particularly high. As the yellow line indicates, the percentage of elites who rated an information war conducted by the West as a four or five on the threat scale increased from 19 percent in 2016 to 44 percent in 2020. Fears of a “color” revolution are also higher than four years ago: more than one-fifth of the sample now worries about this threat.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*. <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. See also Eric Schmitt, “American Commandos Gear Up for New Shadow War with Russia,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/us/politics/us-russia-hungary.html>

<sup>5</sup> *Moskva. Kreml. Putin*. October 13, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8nZ9MHqgcY>

**Figure 2.2**  
**Selected Threats to Russian Security**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

Note: The figure displays the percentage of all respondents (including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer) who assessed the threat as either a four or five.

Question Wording: “Which of the following represent the greatest threat to the security of Russia and which do not represent any threat whatsoever? Rate the level of threat on a five-point scale, where 1 means the ‘absence of danger’ and 5 means ‘the utmost danger.’ [The growth of US military power compared to that of Russia, The inability of Russia to resolve its internal problems, A “color” revolution (2020: in Russia), An information war against Russia conducted by the West].”



Figure 2.3 displays the entire range of threats that respondents were asked to evaluate in 2020, showing only the percentage of potential dangers assessed as either a four or five. Exactly 70 percent view the danger of further NATO expansion as either close to or constituting an “utmost danger,” and 50 percent say the same about the possibility of Western cyberattacks on Russia’s critical infrastructure.

Yet elites do not express the level of concern that one might expect with respect to two domestic threats regarded by Putin as serious (information warfare and especially a color revolution). In the area of information warfare, Putin has sounded the alarm in this way: “Due to the accelerating development of electronic media, this realm has acquired huge significance and has become, one could say, a powerful weapon that allows for the manipulation of public consciousness. Brutal information wars and attempts by certain countries to establish a monopoly on truth and utilize it to advance their own interests have become a sign of the times.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, his comments about the West trying to import a color revolution to Russia through NGOs are frequent and alarmist.<sup>7</sup>

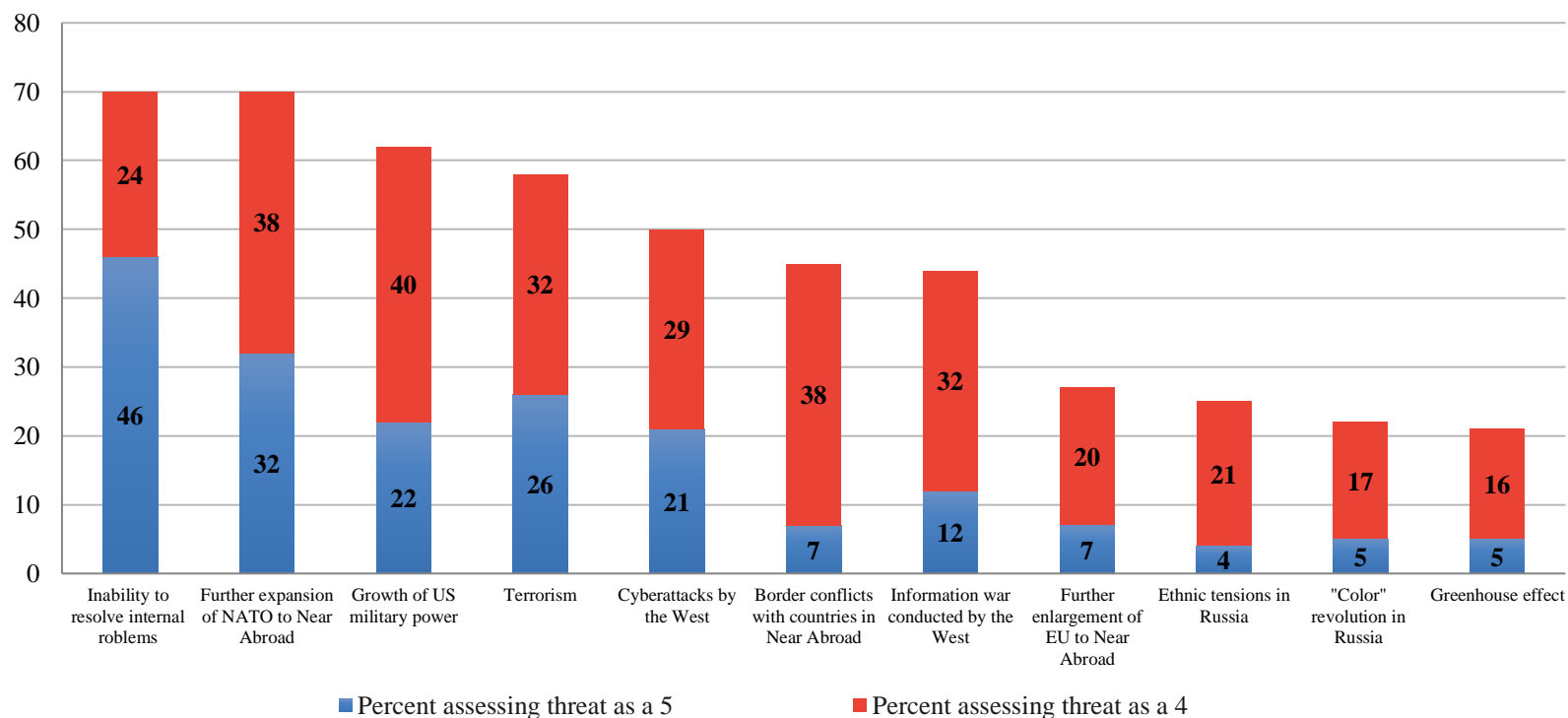
But in the SRE, less than half of all respondents (44%) assess the threat of Western information warfare as a 4 or 5 (with 5 meaning “the utmost danger”), and only 22 percent are worried about the possibility of a color revolution in Russia. The latter figure is roughly the same as in the 2012 survey (see Figure 2.2), which took place on the heels of protests surrounding the 2011-12 election cycle in Russia. In response to the protests, “opposition activists were accused of carrying out the instructions of foreign enemies, especially the U.S. State Department or, more broadly and metaphorically, the ‘Washington *Obkom*,’ which sought to ‘rock the boat’ and destabilize Russia.”<sup>8</sup> That fears of the West supporting the anti-government opposition and seeking to destabilize Russia were low in 2012 and have not risen higher since then suggests that most elites are unconvinced by the Kremlin’s messaging on this issue.

6 “Telekanal Russia Today nachal veshchanie v Argentine,” October 9, 2014.  
<http://news.kremlin.ru/transcript/46762>

7 Brian D. Taylor discusses Putin’s worries about color revolutions in *The Code of Putinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. ch. 6.

8 Serghei Golunov, “The ‘Hidden Hand’ of External Enemies: The Use of Conspiracy Theories by Putin’s Regime,” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 192, June 2012, p. 4.  
<http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm192.pdf>

**Figure 2.3**  
**Threats to Russian Security, 2020**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

Note: The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered "don't know" or refused to answer.

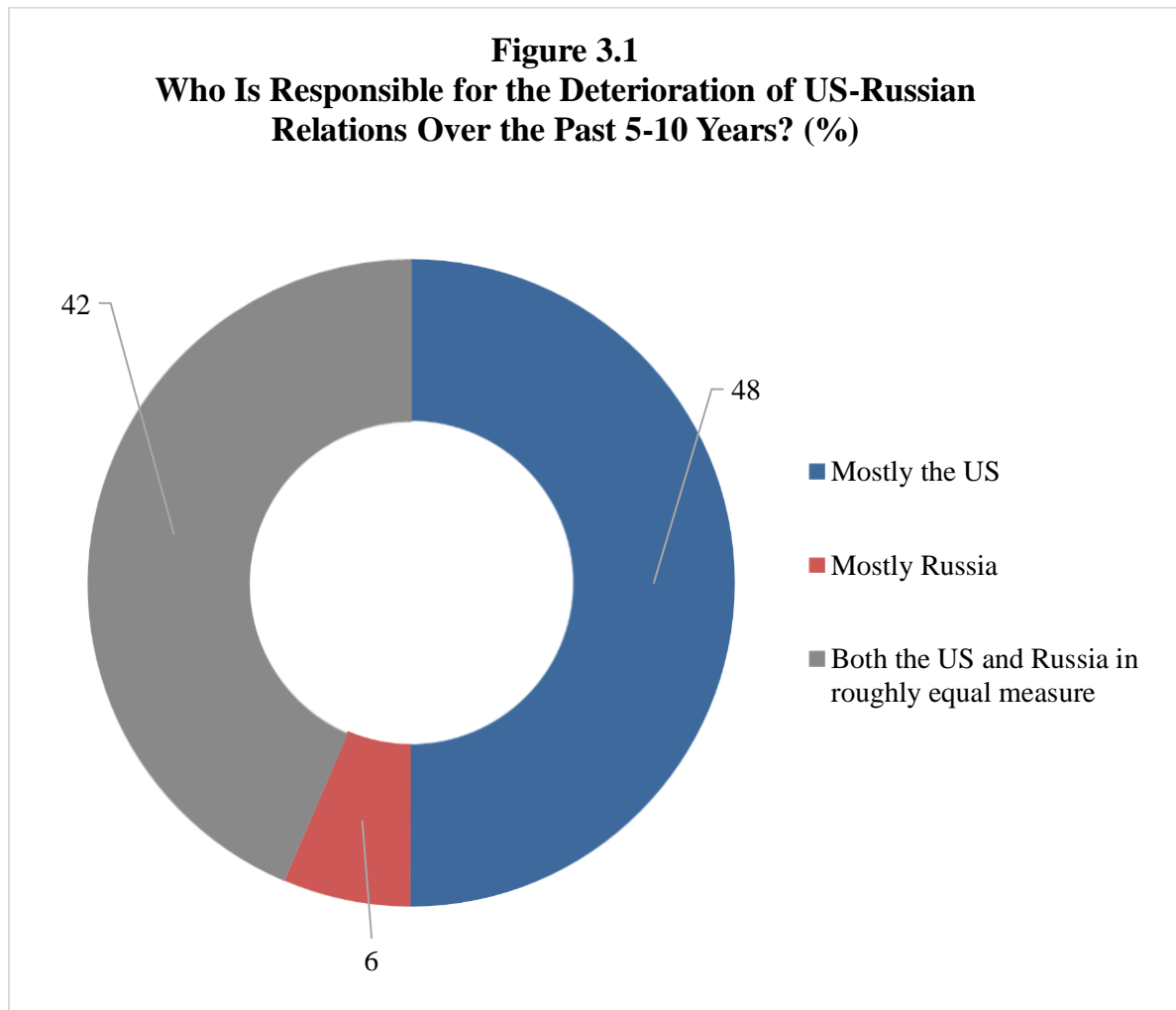
Question Wording: "Which of the following represent the greatest threat to the security of Russia and which do not represent any threat whatsoever? Rate the level of threat on a five-point scale, where 1 means the 'absence of danger' and 5 means 'the utmost danger.' 1. The growth of US military power compared to that of Russia, 2. The inability of Russia to resolve its internal problems, 3. Terrorism, 4. Border conflicts between Russia and countries in the Near Abroad, 5. A rise in ethnic tensions between Russians and other nationalities in Russia, 6. A 'color' revolution in Russia, 7. An information war against Russia conducted by the West, 8. Further expansion of NATO to countries in the Near Abroad, 9. Further enlargement of the EU to countries in the Near Abroad, 10. Cyberattacks on Russia's critical infrastructure launched by the West, 11. The greenhouse effect and other negative influences on the global climate."

## US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

### Russian elites blame the US more than Russia for the deterioration of bilateral relations.

US-Russian relations have deteriorated significantly over the past decade. According to Figure 3.1, Russian elites assign more of the blame to the US for this outcome. A plurality (48%) agree that “mostly the US” is to blame, compared to just 6 percent who state that it is mostly Russia’s fault. A full 42 percent assert that “[b]oth the US and Russia [are to blame] in roughly equal measure.”

**Figure 3.1**  
**Who Is Responsible for the Deterioration of US-Russian Relations Over the Past 5-10 Years? (%)**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

*Note:* The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wording:* “In your view, who is responsible for the deterioration of US-Russian relations over the past 5 to 10 years? 1. Mostly the US, 2. Mostly Russia, 3. Both the US and Russia in roughly equal measure.”

**Elites think that Russian foreign policy has harmed US-Russian relations, but are less likely than the mass public to hold this view.**

The SRE asked respondents about the impact of Russia’s foreign policy in recent years on Russia’s relationship with the US. As Table 3.1 shows, almost twice as many elites assert that Russia’s foreign policy has had a negative—as opposed to positive—impact on its relationship with the US (47% vs. 25%).

**Table 3.1  
Impact of Russia’s Foreign Policy**

	Positive impact on Russia’s relationship with the US	No impact on Russia’s relationship with the US	Negative impact on Russia’s relationship with the US
<b>Percent</b>	25	28	47

*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

*Notes:* “Positive impact” includes “definitely positive” and “rather positive” responses. “Negative impact” includes “definitely negative” and “rather negative” responses. The table displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer. This question has only one nonresponse.

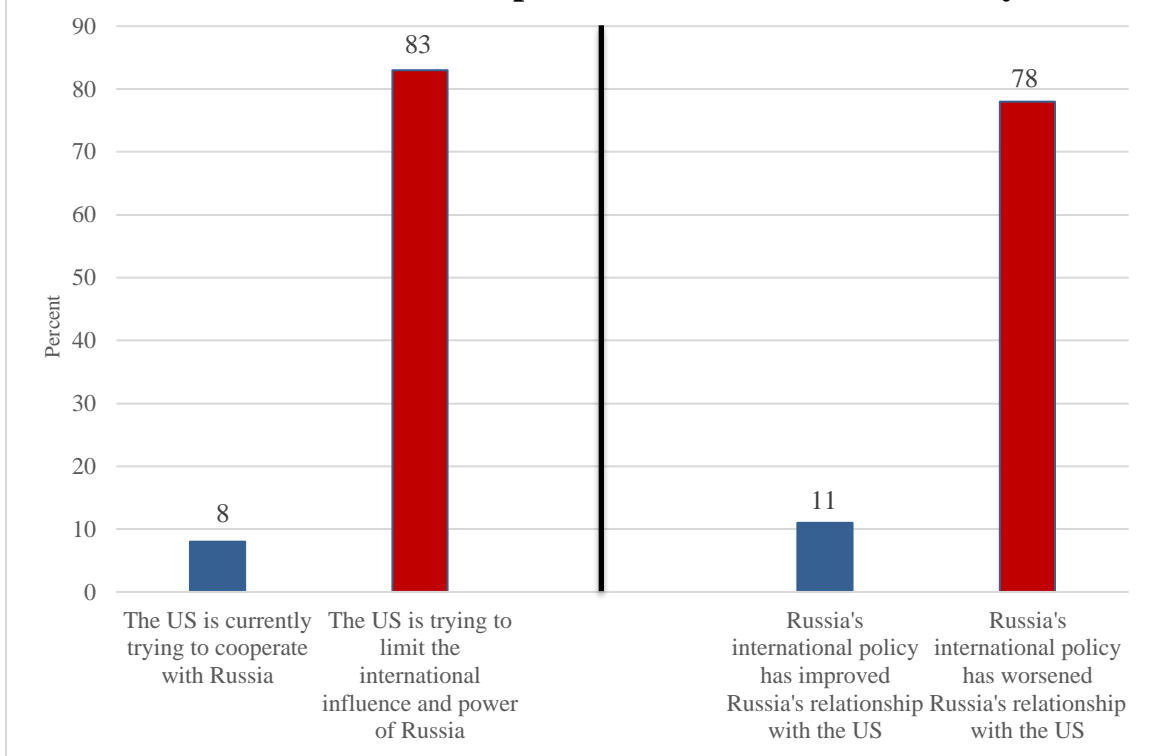
*Question Wording:* “What impact do you think that Russia’s foreign policy in recent years has had on...[Russia’s relationship with the US]? 1. Definitely positive, 2. Rather positive, 3. No impact, 4. Rather negative, 5. Definitely negative.”

Survey data collected by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Center just one year earlier shed light on whether the mass public in Russia is of the same opinion.<sup>9</sup> Displayed in Figure 3.2, one question probes whether respondents think that the US is trying to cooperate with Russia, or conversely, limit Russia’s international influence and power. The second question centers on whether Russia’s international policy in recent years has improved or worsened Russia’s relationship with the US.

As the figure shows, most of the general public sees both Russia and the US as taking actions detrimental to US-Russian relations. Specifically, 83 percent see the US as “trying to limit the international influence and power of Russia,” compared to only 8 percent who contend that “the US is currently trying to cooperate with Russia.” Likewise, 78 percent state that Russia’s international policy in recent years has worsened its relationship with the US, compared to only 11 percent who believe it has improved it.

<sup>9</sup> For complete survey results, see Dina Smeltz and Lily Wojtowicz, “Russians Say Their Country Is a Rising Military Power,” The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, March 2019, pp. 17, 20.  
<https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/lcc/russians-say-their-country-is-rising-military-power>

**Figure 3.2**  
**Russian Mass Perceptions of US and Russian Policy**



Source: Data from joint Chicago Council on Global Affairs-Levada Center Survey on Russian and American Attitudes, February 2019 (n=1,613).

Notes: Responses to two separate questions are displayed. The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

Question Wordings: “Do you think the USA is currently trying to cooperate with Russia or that the USA is trying to limit the international influence and power of Russia?”; “What impact do you think Russia’s international policy in recent years has had on the following factors: [Russia’s relationship with the US]? 1. Improved, 2. Worsened.”

Interestingly, however, the mass public holds the latter view even more strongly than do elites. As displayed on the right side of Figure 3.2, mass respondents are *seven* times more likely to believe that Russia’s international policy has worsened US-Russian relations than that it has improved them (78% vs. 11%). But according to the SRE, only about *twice* as many elites assert that Russia’s foreign policy has had a negative—as opposed to positive—impact on its relationship with the US (see Table 3.1).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> However, it is possible that at least some of this divergence stems from a difference in the question wordings. The question in the Survey of Russian Elites uses the following answer key: “1. Definitely positive, 2. Rather positive, 3. No impact, 4. Rather negative, and 5. Definitely negative.” The Chicago Council-Levada Center survey offers only two possible responses: “1. Improved, and 2. Worsened.” The neutral “No impact” option—selected by 28% of elites in the SRE—was not available in the Chicago Council-Levada Center poll.

**Russian elites are skeptical that the US and Russia meddled in each other’s electoral processes.**

SRE respondents were asked about the likelihood of foreign meddling in two high-profile events—the anti-government protests that emerged during Russia’s 2011-12 election cycle and the 2016 US presidential election. Putin said that with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s negative assessment of the December 2011 parliamentary elections, “[s]he set the tone for some of our political figures within the country, she sent a signal. They heard the signal and with the support of the State Department, they began their active work.”<sup>11</sup> According to Putin, even afterward, Western nations continued their plans to influence and disrupt Russian elections.<sup>12</sup> On the other side of the Atlantic, the US intelligence community has confirmed Russia’s sustained and deliberate interference in the 2016 US election.<sup>13</sup>

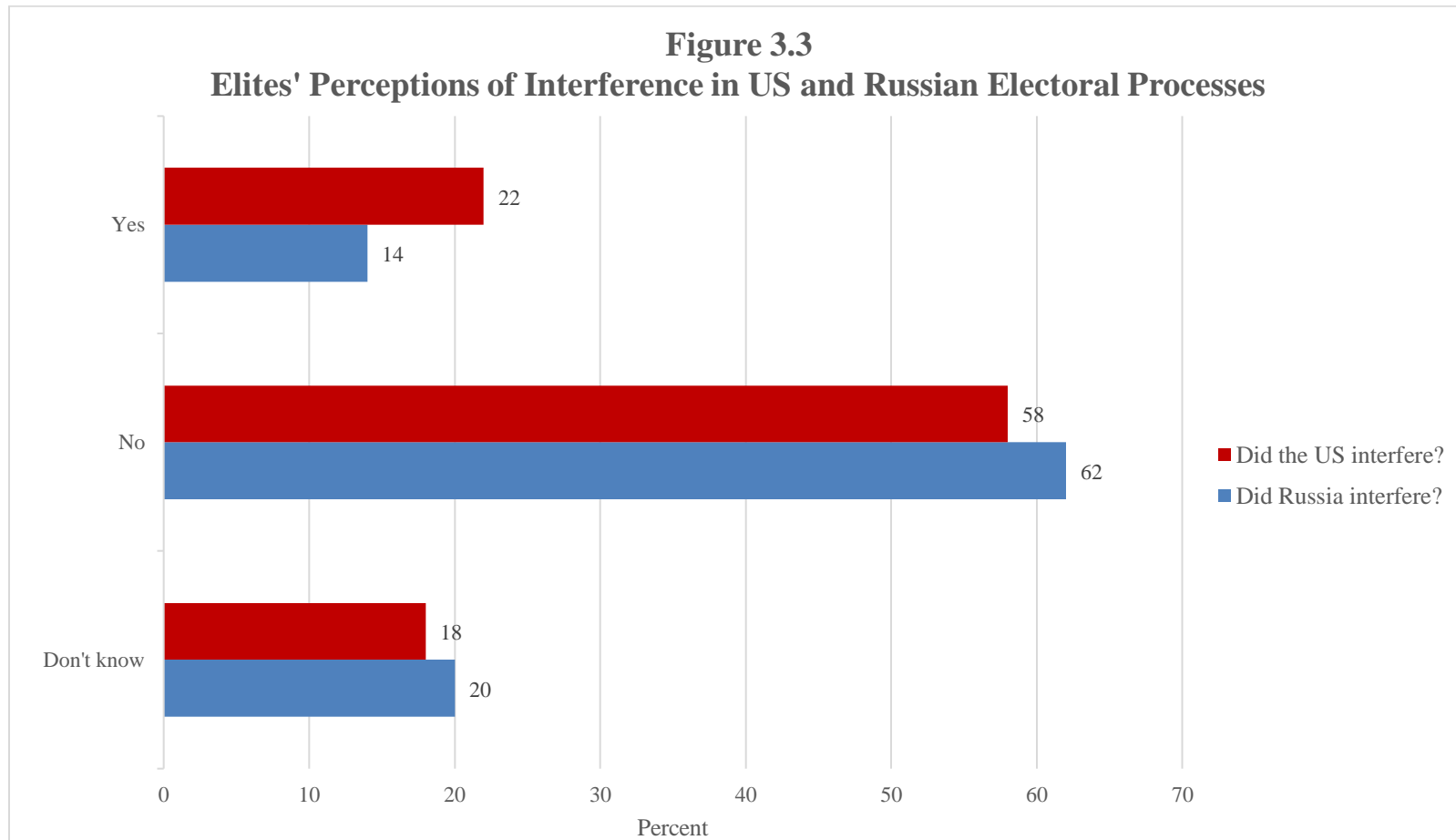
Overall, most Russian elites doubt that interference occurred in either country. As the blue bars in Figure 3.3 indicate, almost two-thirds (62%) do not agree that Russia interfered in the 2016 US presidential election, while 14 percent state the opposite and 20 percent are unsure. What is striking, however, is that about the same percentage hold the same view about US interference in Russian elections, which represents a sharp contrast with Putin’s words. As the red bars show, almost three-fifths (58%) assert that the US did *not* interfere in the 2011-12 electoral cycle in Russia, compared to 22 percent who say the opposite and 18 percent who do not know.

11 “Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Chairs a Meeting of the Russian Popular Front’s Coordinating Council,” December 8, 2011. <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17330/>

12 “Putin Accuses West of Anti-Russian Plots,” RFE/RL, March 26, 2015. <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-accuses-west-of-anti-russian-plots/26922017.html>

13 Nicholas Fandos and Julian E. Barnes, “Republican-Led Review Backs Intelligence Findings on Russian Interference,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/us/politics/russian-interference-senate-intelligence-report.html>. For an overview, see Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin’s Russia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), Epilogue.

**Figure 3.3**  
**Elites' Perceptions of Interference in US and Russian Electoral Processes**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

*Notes:* Responses to two separate questions are displayed. “Yes” includes “Definitely yes” and “Probably yes” responses. “No” includes “Definitely not” and “Probably not” responses. Refusals are not shown.

*Question Wordings:* “Do you think that the US interfered in Russian politics during the 2011-12 electoral cycle? 1. Definitely yes, 2. Probably yes, 3. Probably not, 4. Definitely not”; “Do you think that Russia interfered in the 2016 US presidential election? 1. Definitely yes, 2. Probably yes, 3. Probably not, 4. Definitely not.”

#### 4. PARTNERSHIPS

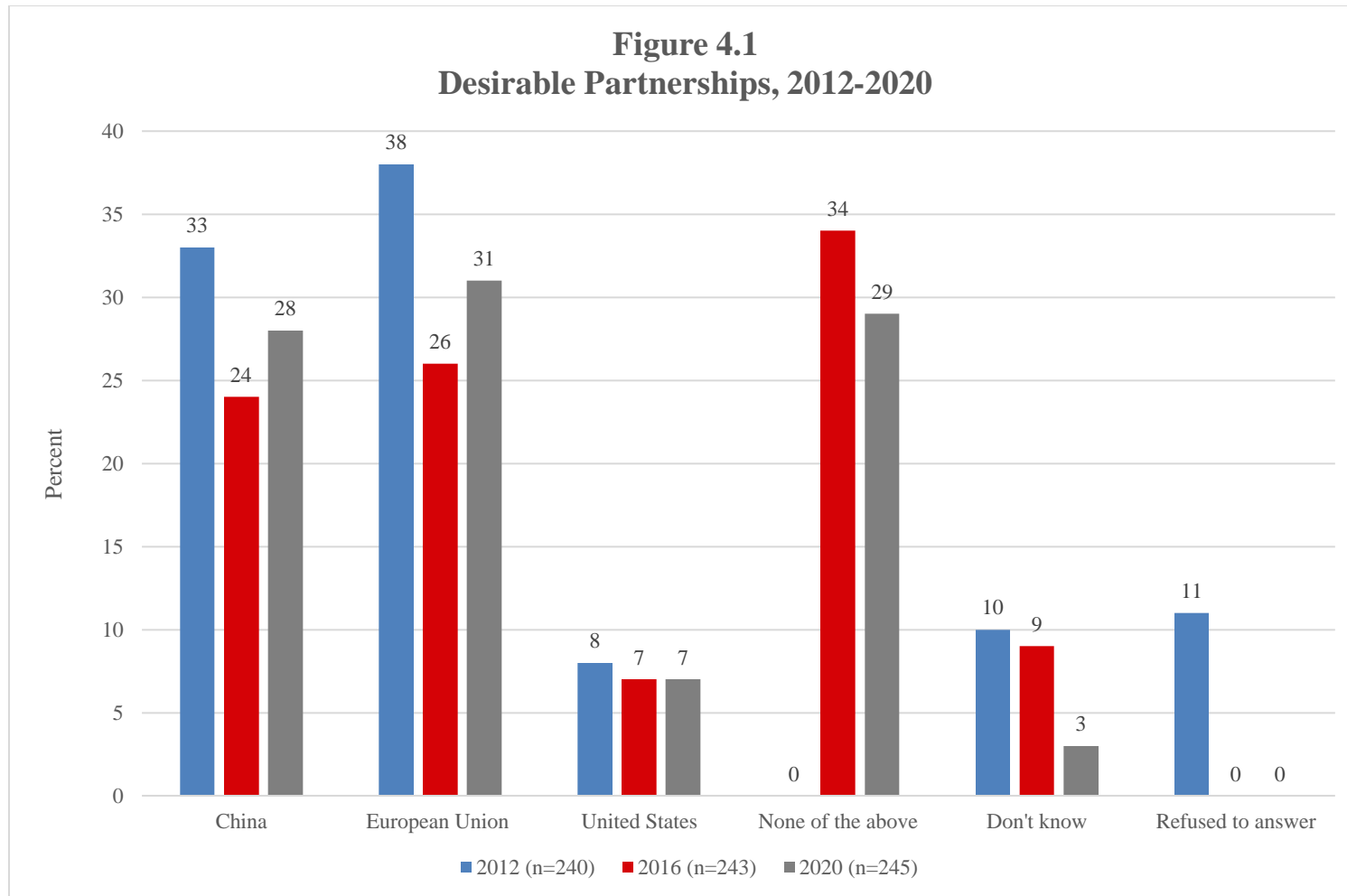
**The rank order of desirable partnerships for Russia has remained stable among high-ranking Russians for the past eight years, with the European Union remaining the most favored partner, followed closely by China.**

Over the last three waves of the SRE, respondents were asked the following question: “As one of the most powerful actors in international politics, Russia develops relationships with all other actors in world politics. However, if you had to choose, with which of these would you prefer to form a coalition? 1. China, 2. European Union, 3. US, or 4. None of the above.” As Figure 4.1 shows, 31 percent would prefer to enter into a partnership with the European Union (EU), 29 percent would not align with any of the entities mentioned, 28 percent would choose to partner with China, and only 7 percent would select the United States.

As the figure also shows, the 2020 results are generally similar to those from 2016. The percentage of elites in 2020 who would like to align with each of the three entities remains within five percentage points of what was recorded four years ago, and this represents markedly less variation than that observed between 2012 and 2016. Between those four years, the percentage of elites who chose China dropped by nine percentage points, and with the EU, by twelve percentage points, though much of this variation can likely be attributed to the addition of a “None of the above” option in the 2016 survey wave. Yet even accounting for this question wording change, the rank order of the three options has remained the same since 2012, with the EU being the most desired partner, China a close second, and the United States a distant third.



**Figure 4.1**  
**Desirable Partnerships, 2012-2020**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Note:* In the 2012 survey, “None of the above” was not an option.

*Question Wording:* “As one of the most powerful actors in international politics, Russia develops relationships with all other actors in world politics. However, if you had to choose, with which of these would you prefer to form a coalition? 1. China, 2. European Union, 3. US, 4. None of the above.”

Interestingly, the stability in the percentage of elites favoring a partnership with China contrasts with another question in the SRE: “Do you think that China represents a threat to Russian national security?” In 2016, 55 percent of respondents answered yes, but in 2020 this declined by 31 percentage points to 24 percent, the lowest since this question was introduced in the 2012 survey.

One potential explanation for this divergence might be “Moscow’s pivot to China,” which has been marked by a “plethora of trade, investment, and infrastructure deals announced since 2014.”<sup>14</sup> It is possible that increasing economic cooperation has contributed to a decline in the percentage of elites who see China as a security threat, but it is not yet sufficient to erase the long history of hostility between the two countries during the Cold War era. Thus, when given the option, many Russian elites gravitate toward other partners besides China.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Stronski and Nicole Ng, “Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 28, 2018. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/28/cooperation-and-competition-russia-and-china-in-central-asia-russian-far-east-and-arctic-pub-75673>

**Elites' desired partnerships are linked to their status as "core" or "non-core" elites. Moreover, employment in the military or security agencies is a very strong predictor of attitudes.**

One useful approach to analyzing attitudes toward Russia's possible partners is by classifying respondents according to their relationship to the Kremlin. In his essay on Russian anti-Americanism, Vladimir Shlapentokh argues that "the elite take their cues from those at the Kremlin" and that "[f]or the Kremlin, one's attitude toward this [anti-American ideology] is the primary test of loyalty toward the regime."<sup>15</sup>

Following this line of thought, we used categories developed by Noah Buckley and Joshua Tucker to identify respondents who may be particularly sensitive to Kremlin cues because of their "proximity to the center of state power." Specifically, those working in the executive or legislative branches, the military, or security agencies are classified as "core" elites, whereas those employed in the media, science and education fields, state-owned enterprises, or private business are "non-core" elites. Core elites "generally face greater pressure to conform to the party line than non-core elites,"<sup>16</sup> and, as such, might be expected to choose coalition partners more in line with the Kremlin's stated preferences.<sup>17</sup>

Putin has expressed a clear desire to partner with China. During a concert and gala at the Bolshoi Theater during President Xi Jinping's three-day state visit to Russia in June 2019, Putin remarked that bilateral trade reached a record level in 2018 and that China had become firmly established as Russia's largest trading partner. "On the whole," he concluded, "we can confidently state that Russian-Chinese relations have reached a level that is unprecedented.... We are planning to expand our cooperation in all directions."<sup>18</sup> So we might expect core elites in our study to agree more heartily with the Kremlin about the merits of closer cooperation with China and the threats posed by the US.

Indeed, the responses of core and non-core elites reveal noticeable differences. As the first three sets of bars in Figure 4.2 show, core elites are ten percentage points more favorable toward China than their non-core elite counterparts and eight percentage points less desirous of partnering with both the European Union and the United States.

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Puzzle of Russian Anti-Americanism: From 'Below' or from 'Above.'" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 5 (2011): 875–89, at pp. 875 and 887.

<sup>16</sup> Noah Buckley and Joshua A. Tucker, "Staring at the West through Kremlin-Tinted Glasses: Russian Mass and Elite Divergence in Attitudes toward the United States, European Union, and Ukraine before and after Crimea," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, nos. 5-6 (2019): 365–75, at pp. 368-69.

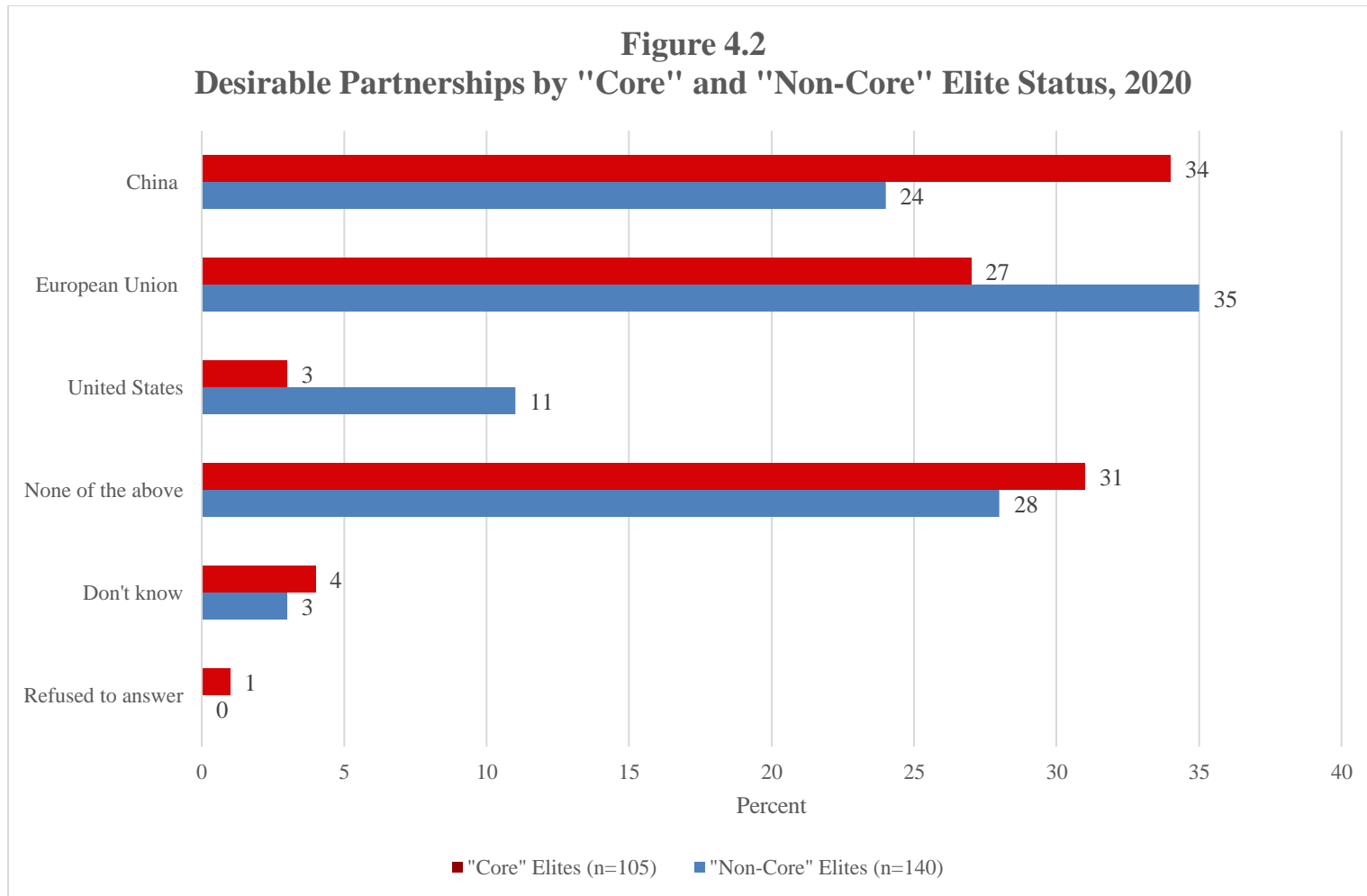
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1660491>

<sup>17</sup> Rivera and Bryan use a similar variable, which they call "Kremlin-Dependent," in their study of elite attitudes. Sharon Werning Rivera and James D. Bryan, "Understanding the Sources of Anti-Americanism in the Russian Elite," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, nos. 5-6 (2019): 376-92.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1662194>

<sup>18</sup> "Vecher, posvyashchennyi 70-letiyu ustanovleniya diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii mezhdru Rossiei i Kitaem," Moscow, June 5, 2019. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60674>

**Figure 4.2**  
**Desirable Partnerships by "Core" and "Non-Core" Elite Status, 2020**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

Notes: "Core" elites as defined by Noah Buckley and Joshua Tucker include respondents who work in the executive or legislative branches, the military, or security agencies." "Non-core" elites are those in the media, science and education fields, state-owned enterprises, or private business.

Question Wording: As in Figure 4.1.

A closer examination of the data reveals that a key source of this attitudinal divide between core and non-core elites is the military-security agencies subgroup: if all 35 military and security officers are removed from the core elite category, the differences between core and non-core elites are much less pronounced. And if we compare just the military and security officers to all other elites in the sample combined, we find that those from the force structures support an alignment with the European Union a full 27 percentage points less, and with China, 21 percentage points more, than all others. No military officers would join forces with the US, compared to 9 percent of the rest of the sample.

These differences in outlook are particularly noteworthy given the degree of influence that former and active military and security personnel are widely held to exert on Russia's policymaking apparatus.<sup>19</sup> As a matter of fact, SRE respondents perceive an outsized influence of military and security institutions on Russian foreign policy. We asked them to rate the degree to which ten organizations, governmental institutions, and individuals "can influence current Russian foreign policy" (where 1 means that they exert "very little influence" and 5 means "the greatest possible influence"). Not surprisingly, the president topped the list, with 98 percent of elites assigning him either a four or five. This was followed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at 82 percent, the Ministry of Defense at 81 percent, and the Federal Security Service (FSB) at 69 percent. In other words, two of the three governmental bodies at the top of the list (the president excluded) are military or security structures.

<sup>19</sup> David W. Rivera and Sharon Werning Rivera, "The Militarization of the Russian Elite under Putin: What We Know, What We Think We Know (but Don't), and What We Need to Know," *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 4 (2018): 221-32.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10758216.2017.1295812>

## 5. INTERVENTION ABROAD

### **Compared to four years ago, high-ranking Russians now see more reasons for Russia's military involvement in Syria besides eliminating terrorism.**

Over the last decade, Russia has intervened in conflicts either directly by using its own military or indirectly through various proxy groups. This can be seen in Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, intervention in support of President Bashar al-Assad's regime in the Syrian civil war in 2015, and direct involvement in the Libyan civil war. In this section, we analyze elites' views regarding the goals that Russia's government hopes to achieve by participating in the Syrian conflict, as well as their willingness to use Russia's military abroad.

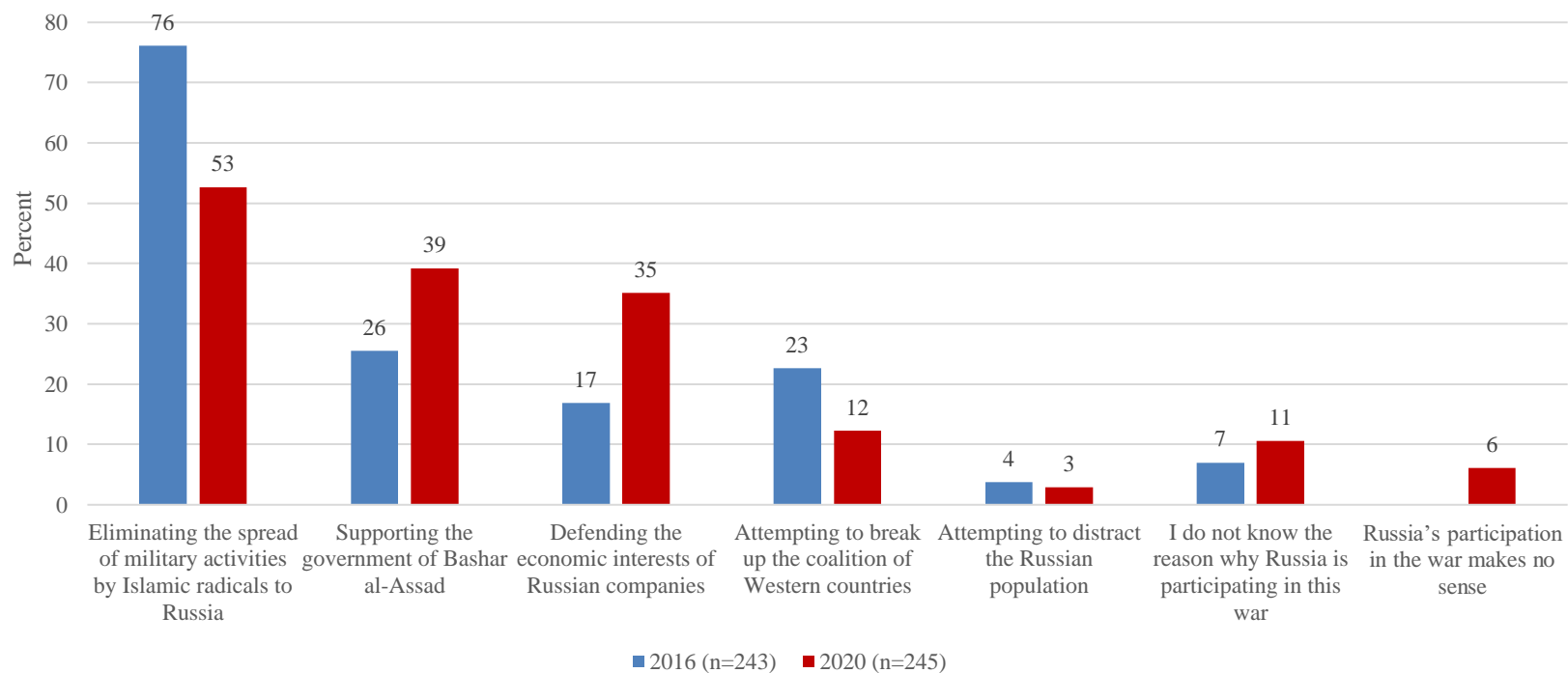
Figure 5.1 displays the views held in 2016 and 2020 regarding the Russian government's participation in the Syrian conflict. In 2016, over three-fourths of Russian elites (76%) stated that Russia was participating in the conflict to eliminate the spread of Islamic radicalism and terrorism to Russia. In the 2020 data, however, only 53 percent describe the government's goals in these terms. Indeed, Russia intervened in the Syrian conflict in September 2015 with air strikes that it said were targeted at the Islamic State (ISIS). By the time the survey was fielded in 2020, ISIS-controlled territory in Syria had been recaptured and the organization's reach severely curtailed.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps as a result, we observe an increase in two other perceived reasons for Russia's participation: to support the government of President Bashar al-Assad and to defend the economic interests of Russian companies in the Middle East (which grew from 26 percent to 39 percent and from 17 to 35 percent, respectively). The percentage of elites who do not understand why Russia is participating in this conflict also rose over the past four years, from 7 to 11 percent.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Zachary Laub, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror," Council on Foreign Relations, February 19, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

<sup>21</sup> If a new response category in 2020 ("Russia's participation in the war makes no sense") is combined with this one, the percentage of respondents who do not see a concrete reason for Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict now totals 17%.

**Figure 5.1**  
**Russian Government's Goals for Participating in the Syrian Conflict**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Notes:* Multiple responses are possible. “Supporting the government of Bashar al-Assad” includes the second and fourth response options listed below. The figure displays the percentage of all respondents (including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer) who selected each option.

*Question Wording:* “In your opinion, what are the Russian government’s goals for participating in the Syrian conflict? 1. Attempting to neutralize and eliminate the spread of military activities by Islamic radicals and terrorists to Russia, 2. Protecting the government of Bashar al-Assad in order to prevent a series of US-inspired ‘color’ revolutions around the world, 3. Defending the economic interests of Russian companies in the Middle East, 4. Supporting Bashar al-Assad’s regime and his struggle against the opposition, since it itself fears mass anti-government protests, 5. Attempting to break up the coalition of Western countries (2016: Attempting to break up the coalition of Western countries in order to eliminate the threat of the complete isolation of Russia and the further tightening of sanctions), 6. Attempting to distract the Russian population from economic and domestic problems (2016: Attempting to distract the Russian population from the economic crisis and the authorities’ inability to deal with the declining quality of life, corruption, and governmental incompetence), 7. Russia’s participation in the war makes no sense (in 2016: not included), and 8. I do not know the reason why Russia is participating in this war (2016: I do not understand why Russia is participating in this war).”

**Russian elites are more favorably disposed toward both sending Russian troops abroad to assist foreign countries and providing security for Russia’s international friends than in all the waves of the survey.**

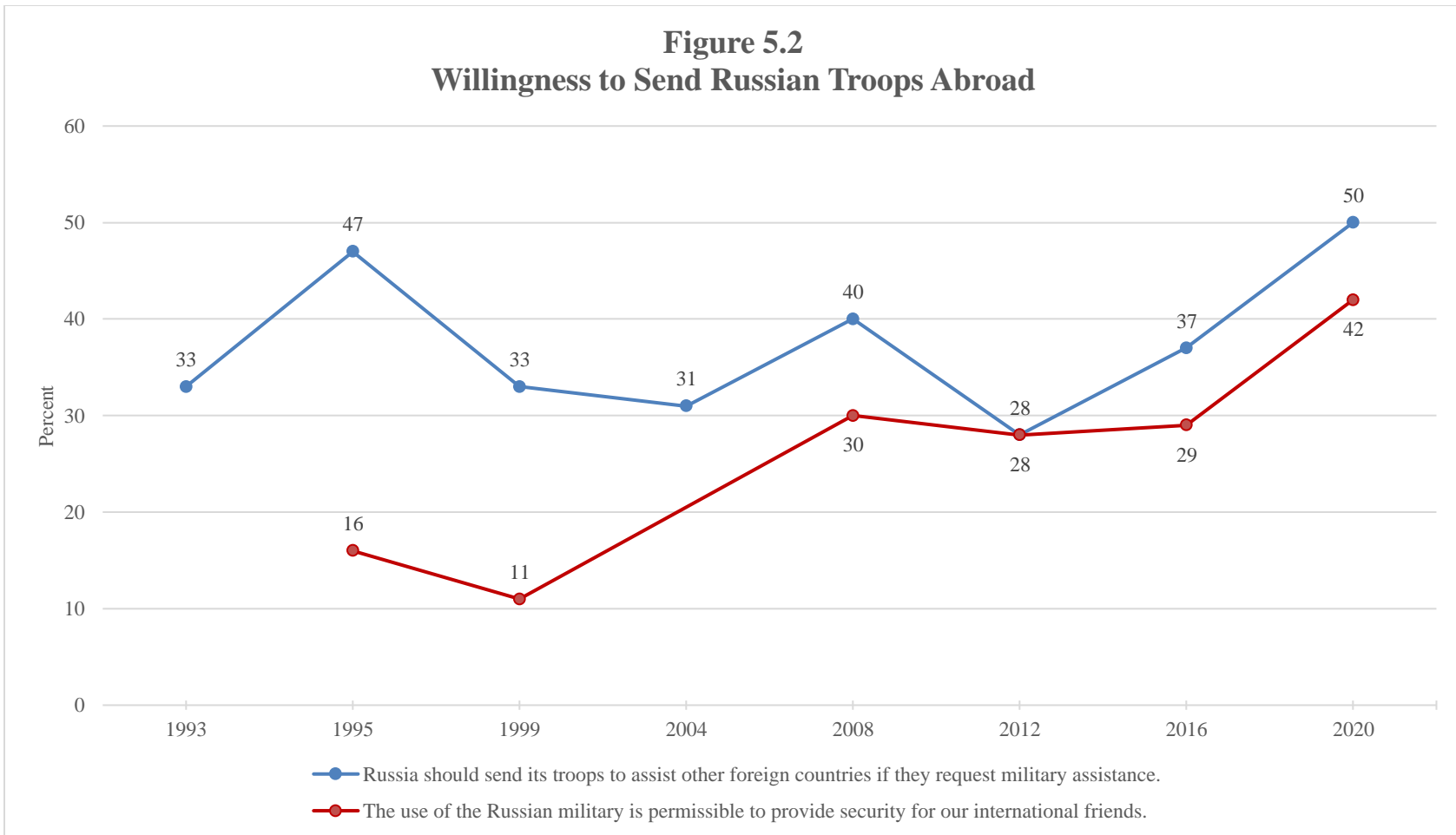
As is evident in Figure 5.2, a higher percentage of Russian elites (50%) now favor sending troops to assist foreign countries than in all previous waves of the survey. In addition, the percentage willing to dispatch troops to aid “international friends” has increased by thirteen percentage points since 2016, from 29 to 42 percent. This is the highest level of support ever recorded in the survey.

Elites seem to have accepted the Kremlin’s narrative that focuses on Russia’s successful intervention in Syria and victory over ISIS. For instance, in April 2018 Putin said that ISIS had been defeated in Syria, but he also warned that it “retains a significant destructive potential, and the ability to change its tactics quickly and attack countries and regions around the world.”<sup>22</sup> Although the costs of this and other foreign involvements are undoubtedly registering both inside and outside the Kremlin, for the moment elites appear to support Russia’s increasingly assertive global posture and intervention in international conflicts.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in “Russia’s Putin Says ISIS Has Been Defeated in Syria,” Reuters, April 4, 2018.



**Figure 5.2**  
**Willingness to Send Russian Troops Abroad**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Note:* The question regarding providing security for international friends was not asked in the 1993 and 2004 waves of the survey. The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wordings:* “Should Russia send its troops to assist other foreign countries if they request military assistance? 1. It should, 2. It should not”; “In your opinion, for which of the following purposes is the use of the Russian military permissible? [Providing security for our international friends] 1. Yes, 2. No.”

**The vast majority of Russian elites believe that Russia’s influence and respect in the world, as well as its military capabilities, have increased since Putin came to power in 2000.**

Putin came to power in Russia just over twenty years ago, serving two presidential terms and then four years as prime minister before returning to the presidency in 2012. Since then, Russia has pursued a more muscular foreign policy around the globe, whether in Syria, Africa, or the post-Soviet region. Putin also oversaw a dramatic economic recovery and boom after a deep economic contraction in the 1990s. Both Russia’s enhanced international status and economic growth have been important pillars of the president’s popularity.<sup>23</sup>

In the 2020 wave of the SRE, Russian elites were asked about these and other of Putin’s accomplishments over this twenty-year period. As Figure 5.3 shows, 87 percent assert that Russia’s military readiness and strength have grown during this period. Another 80 percent state that Russia’s influence in the world has increased. Furthermore, more than two-thirds (68%) give credit to Putin for increasing Russia’s respect in the world.

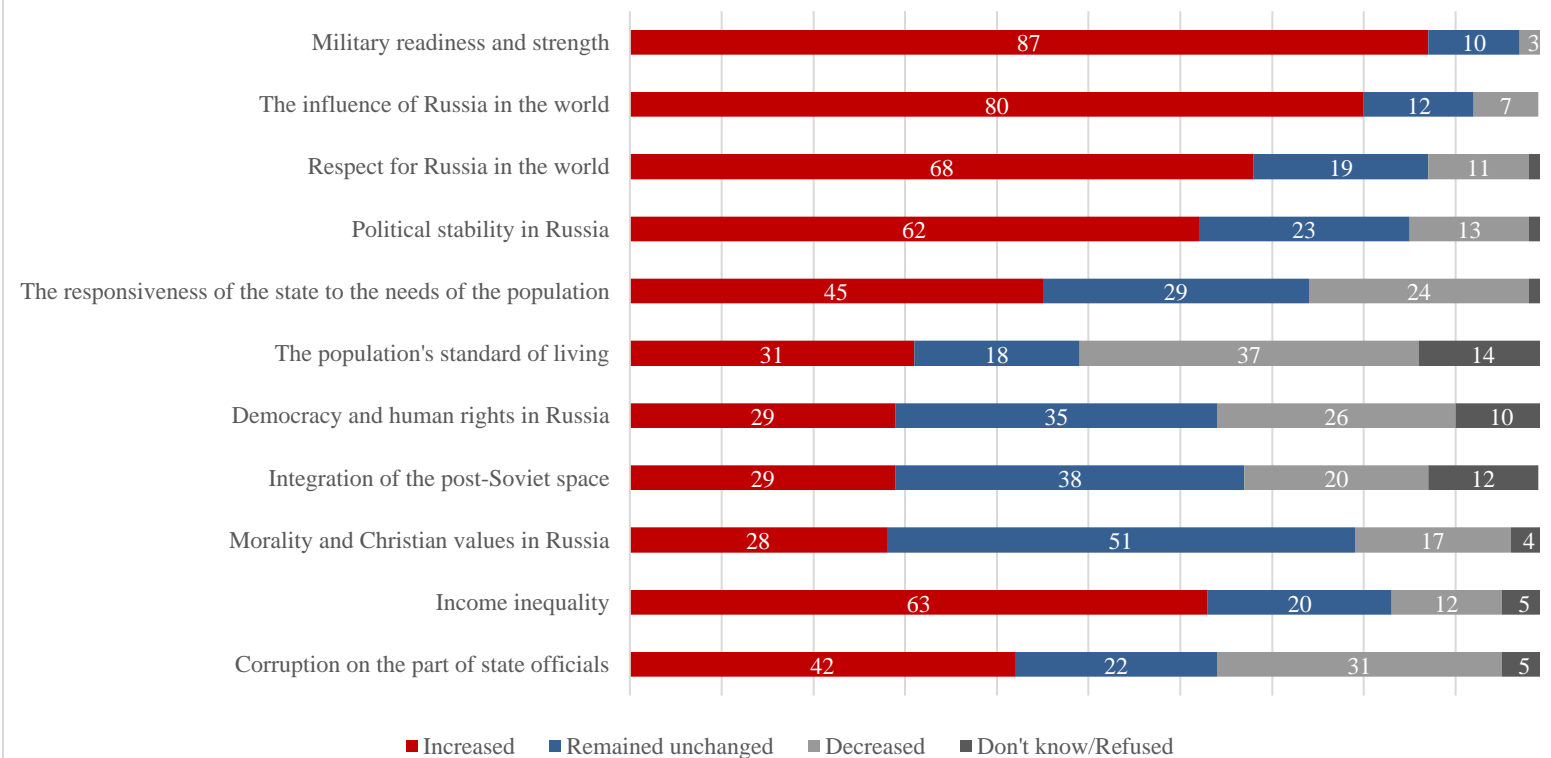
The president’s achievements on the international stage (represented by the top three bars) are markedly different from assessments of his domestic performance. Respondents were asked about a variety of domestic issues, including official corruption, income inequality, and democracy and human rights in Russia. Elites notice marked improvement in only one of these measures—political stability—with 62 percent saying that it has grown and 23 percent perceiving it as unchanged. On all other domestic indicators, less than half of the sample sees improvement over the past two decades. Respondents reserve their sharpest criticism for the economy: 37 percent think that the standard of living has fallen since 2000 and only 12 percent believe that Putin has been able to reduce income inequality.

It is worth bearing in mind that these low marks on the economic front were recorded before oil prices collapsed in April 2020 and the coronavirus health crisis really took hold in Russia. Many observers have highlighted the negative impact of these twin events on Russia’s economy, and potentially on the legitimacy of the Putin regime itself.<sup>24</sup> Future assessments of the president’s economic performance are likely to be lower still.

<sup>23</sup> Mass survey data from Russia show that certain events—such as the annexation of Crimea—can generate a “rally-‘round-the-flag” effect, increasing levels of trust in Putin. Henry E. Hale, “How Crimea Pays,” *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 3 (April 2018), pp. 369-380.

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Maria Snegovaya, Denis Volkov, and Stepan Goncharov, “The Coronavirus Could Hit Putin Most of All,” *Foreign Policy*, June 5, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/05/coronavirus-vladimir-putin-russia/>; Yaroslav Trofimov and Thomas Grove, “Putin’s Global Ambitions Are Upended by Coronavirus’s Heavy Toll in Russia,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2020; Joshua Yaffa, “How the Coronavirus Revealed the Hollowness of Putin’s ‘Vertical of Power,’” *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/how-the-coronavirus-revealed-the-hollowness-of-putins-vertical-of-power>

**Figure 5.3**  
**Putin's Performance Over the Past Twenty Years (%)**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Question Wording: "In the last 20 years since the year 2000, when Putin first became president, do you think the following things have increased, decreased, or remained unchanged? 1. Corruption on the part of state officials, 2. Income inequality, 3. Political stability in Russia, 4. The influence of Russia in the world, 5. Democracy and human rights in Russia, 6. The responsiveness of the state to the needs of the population, 7. The population's standard of living, 8. Respect for Russia in the world, 9. Morality and Christian values in Russia, 10. Military readiness and strength, 11. Integration of the post-Soviet space."

## 6. UKRAINE

### **Support for the unification of Russia and Ukraine is at an all-time low.**

In late February 2014, Russian special forces entered and secured the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine. The Crimean Peninsula houses both Russia's Black Sea Fleet and a majority Russian population,<sup>25</sup> and threats to both—especially the latter—were cited by Putin as justifications for his decision. Weeks later, on March 18, 2014, the Russian government officially incorporated Crimea into the Russian Federation. In April of the same year, separatist groups in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine initiated pro-Russian protests and seized government buildings. The protests quickly devolved into a violent separatist movement sponsored by Russia (though Moscow denies this), sparking a civil war in Ukraine that continues to this day.

Each wave of the SRE since 1995 has asked elites to state their preferences regarding the territorial status of Ukraine in regard to Russia. Specifically, respondents were asked about their preferred status for the two countries, using a five-point scale, with 1 signifying that they should remain “completely independent countries” and 5 that they be “united into a single country.”<sup>26</sup> For this analysis, we grouped respondents into two categories: those on the lower half of the scale were coded as preferring independence, and those on the upper half as favoring unification.

Figure 6.1 shows that support for merging Ukraine and Russia into one country was at its highest level in 1995 (65%). Thereafter, the desire for unification steadily declined and is now at its lowest level ever, with only 5 percent of all respondents in 2020 favoring this option. In contrast, support for maintaining the current status of Ukraine and Russia as independent countries is at an all-time high, at 67 percent. In other words, Russian elites have steadily come to terms with the independence of the two states over time.

What this means is that in contrast to other foreign policy domains like Syria and China in the “Far Abroad,” elites are out of sync with Putin on this aspect of Russia's relations with the “Near Abroad.” Putin has repeatedly stated that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people”; for instance, he said the following in July 2013: “We, Russia and Ukraine, have always been united and our future lies in this unity. The Baptism of Rus was a great event that defined Russia's and Ukraine's spiritual and cultural development for the centuries to come. We must remember this brotherhood and preserve our ancestors' traditions.”<sup>27</sup>

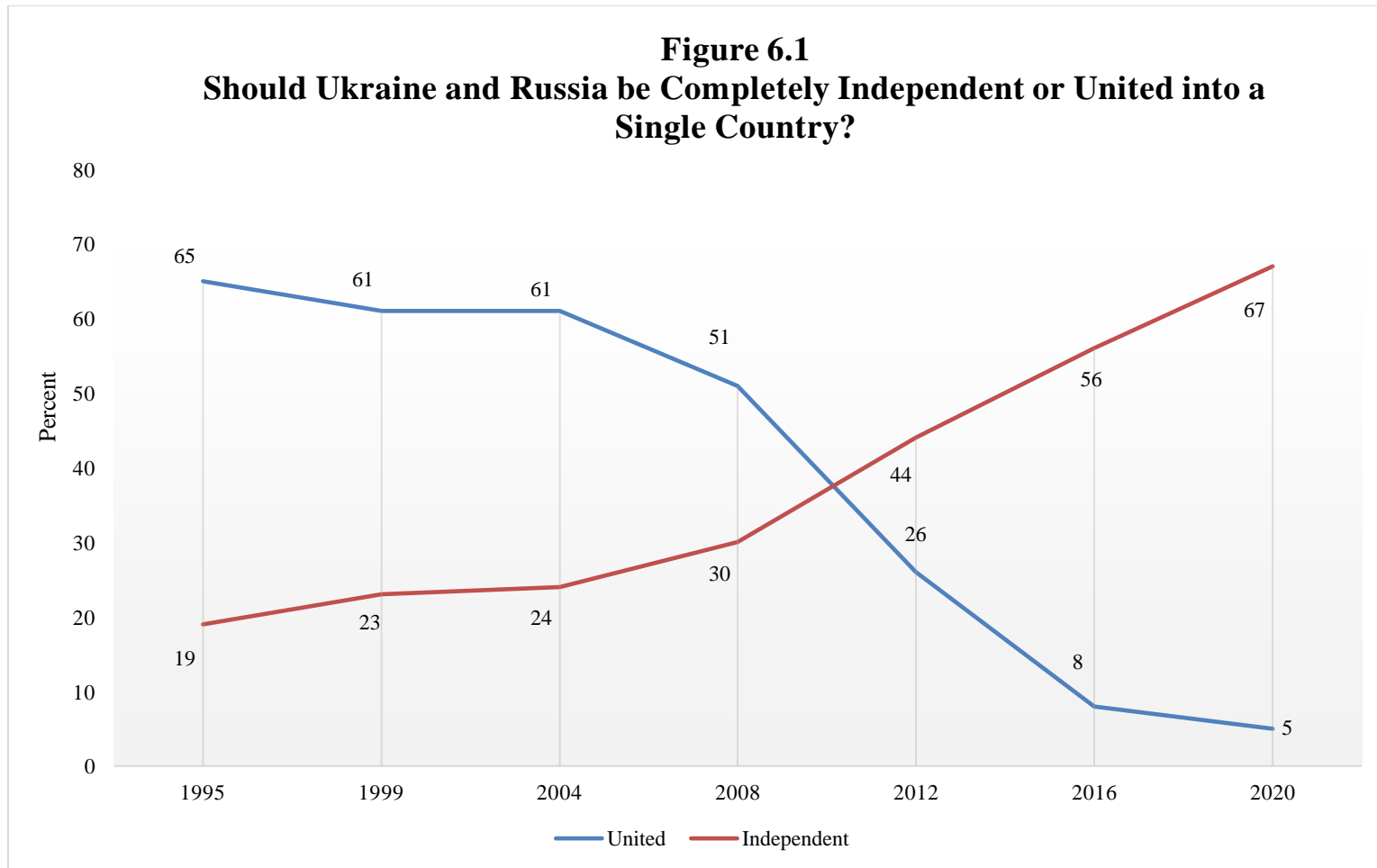
<sup>25</sup> As of the last census taken in 2001, ethnic Russians constituted 58.5% of Crimea's population. State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001.

<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>

<sup>26</sup> The 2020 survey included a separate option that was only to be recorded if the respondent offered it spontaneously, i.e., unprompted by the interviewer: “Russia should unite with only part of Ukraine.” Only two respondents mentioned this; they were not included in the figure.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), p. 258.

**Figure 6.1**  
**Should Ukraine and Russia be Completely Independent or United into a Single Country?**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Notes:* “United” includes responses ranging from 4 to 5 (1995-1999: 5-7). “Independent” includes responses ranging from 1 to 2 (1995-1999: 1 to 3). The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wording:* “There are also various opinions concerning the relations that Russia should have with Ukraine. Using a five-point (1995-1999: seven-point) scale (where 1 means that Russia and Ukraine should be completely independent countries and 5 means that they should be united into a single country), please indicate which position is closer to your point of view.”

**More elites who approve of sending Russian forces to former Soviet states prefer either that eastern Ukraine join Russia or become an independent state than those who do not endorse sending troops.**

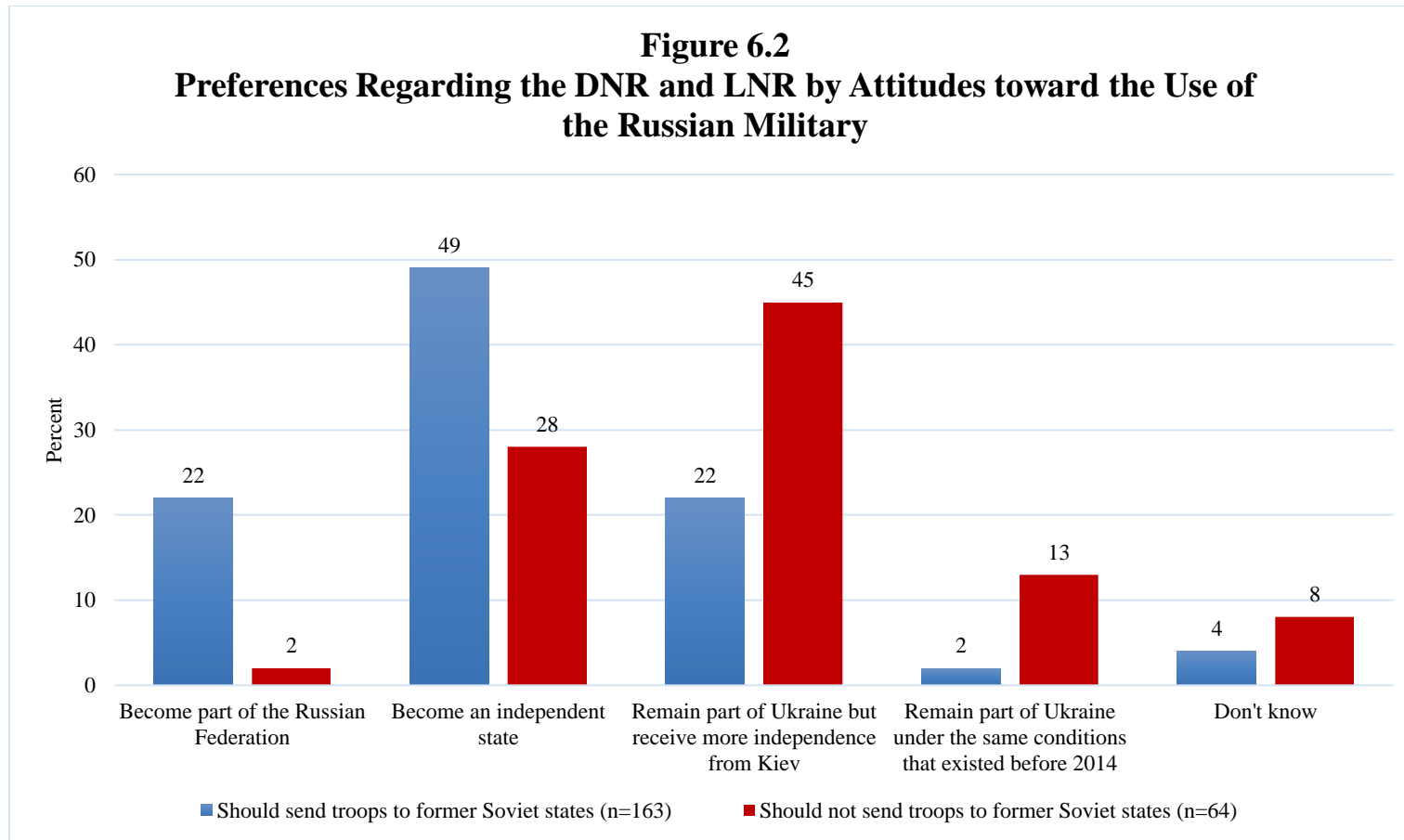
As the civil war in eastern Ukraine drags on, the debate continues in Russia over the desired future status of two Russian-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR). According to the SRE, elite preferences for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are as follows:

- 1) I would like the DNR and LNR to become part of the Russian Federation (15%).
- 2) I would like the DNR and LNR to become an independent state (43%).
- 3) I would like the DNR and LNR to remain part of Ukraine but receive more independence from Kiev (29%).
- 4) I would like the DNR and LNR to remain part of Ukraine under the same conditions that existed before 2014 (7%).
- 5) Don't know (5%).
- 6) Refused to answer (2%).

The survey allows us to explore how these views on the future of the region correlate with an overall willingness to use military force in the "Near Abroad." Respondents were asked, "Should Russia send its troops to assist countries that were formerly part of the USSR if they request military assistance?" As Figure 6.2 shows, elites who support sending Russian forces to former Soviet states if requested (the blue bars) are more likely to prefer that the DNR and LNR be distanced from Ukraine and drawn closer to Russia than those who reject the deployment of Russian troops (the red bars).

Specifically, among those who back the deployment of the Russian military, 71 percent favor either the outright incorporation of the DNR and LNR into the Russian Federation or its emergence as an independent state. In contrast, 58 percent of those who do not think that Russian forces should be dispatched to former Soviet states prefer a solution that more closely mirrors the situation in place before 2014 (either with or without more independence from Kiev). These results offer a cautionary note: most Russian elites who favor the permanent separation of the DNR and LNR from Ukraine are willing to expend military treasure for this purpose.

**Figure 6.2**  
**Preferences Regarding the DNR and LNR by Attitudes toward the Use of**  
**the Russian Military**



*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

*Notes:* The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer. For the question on the DNR and LNR, refusals are not shown.

*Question Wordings:* “Should Russia send its troops to assist countries that were formerly part of the USSR if they request military assistance? 1. It should, 2. It should not”; “Which of the following options would you prefer? 1. I would like the DNR and LNR to become part of the Russian Federation, 2. I would like the DNR and LNR to become an independent state, 3. I would like the DNR and LNR to remain part of Ukraine but receive more independence from Kiev, 4. I would like the DNR and LNR to remain part of Ukraine under the same conditions that existed before 2014 (2016: under the same arrangements that existed before the crisis).”

## 7. SOVIET NOSTALGIA

### **The lowest percentage of respondents since 2004 agree that Stalin is blamed for things he didn't do.**

Along with the popularity of remnants of the Soviet experience such as USSR-themed eateries in Moscow,<sup>28</sup> a romanticization of some of the darker aspects of the Soviet past has been apparent for some time. For instance, a 2005 survey found that 56 percent of young Russians thought that Stalin did more good than bad.<sup>29</sup>

We probed respondents in the SRE to see if they held the same views by asking them to register their level of agreement with the statement, “Stalin is blamed for things he didn't do.” As Table 7.1 shows, only 9 percent of all Russian elites in 2020 state that they “mostly agree” or “completely agree.” Moreover, the table reveals a generally steady decrease in the percentage of respondents who agreed with this sentiment in previous waves of the survey. The only outlier is 2016, when the percentage of respondents contending that Stalin is unfairly blamed spiked sharply to 34 percent.

**Table 7.1**  
**Stalin Is Blamed for Things He Didn't Do**

Year	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
<b>Agree (%)</b>	29	20	12	34	9
<b>(n)</b>	(320)	(241)	(240)	(243)	(245)

*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Note:* “Agree” includes “mostly agree” and “completely agree” responses. The table displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don't know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wording:* “I will read you some statements about which there are various points of view. To what degree do you agree or disagree with each of them? [Stalin is blamed for things he didn't do] 1. Completely agree, 2. Mostly agree, 3. Neither agree nor disagree, 4. Mostly disagree, 5. Completely disagree.”

### **Agreement that a variant of the Soviet political system would be the most appropriate for Russia is at its lowest level since 2004.**

As displayed in Table 7.2, a similar result is evident in the answers to a second question: “What type of political system, in your opinion, is most appropriate for Russia?” One-fifth of Russian elites in 2020 would prefer some form of the Soviet political system, either the one in existence before *perestroika* or a more democratic version of the Soviet system. This is a six percentage point decrease from the last wave of the survey in 2016, when 26 percent of respondents desired a return to some form of the Soviet political system. Overall, support for a Soviet-style political system has declined by almost half since 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Anastasia Miari, “On the Menu in Moscow, Soviet-Era Nostalgia,” *New York Times*, December 11, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/11/travel/moscow-restaurants-nostalgia.html>

<sup>29</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, “Soviet Nostalgia: An Impediment to Russian Democratization,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2005): 83-96, at p. 87.



**Table 7.2**  
**Soviet Political System Is Most Appropriate for Russia**

<b>Year</b>	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
<b>Agree (%)</b>	38	43	23	26	20
<b>(n)</b>	(320)	(241)	(240)	(243)	(245)

*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Notes:* “Agree” includes “mostly agree” and “completely agree” responses for respondents who selected either the first or second option listed below. The table displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wording:* “What type of political system, in your opinion, is most appropriate for Russia? 1. The Soviet system that existed before *perestroika*, 2. The Soviet system but in a different, more democratic form, 3. The current political system, 4. A Western-style democracy.”

**More elites in 2020 are in favor of state ownership of all heavy industry than in 2016, and support has remained generally high over time.**

As another measure of Soviet nostalgia, we also examined the percentage of elites who agree that “[a]ll heavy industry should belong to the state and not be privately owned.” As displayed in Table 7.3, the percentage in agreement climbed from 43 percent in 2016 to 55 percent in 2020. This figure still remains lower than in 2004 and especially 2012, when 68 percent of respondents selected “mostly agree” or “completely agree.” Notwithstanding a slightly downward trend over time, however, support for government ownership of heavy industry—a defining feature of the Soviet economic system—is still substantial in Russia’s elite stratum.

**Table 7.3**  
**All Heavy Industry Should Belong to the State**

<b>Year</b>	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
<b>Agree (%)</b>	62	58	68	43	55
<b>(n)</b>	(320)	(241)	(240)	(243)	(245)

*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

*Note:* “Agree” includes “mostly agree” and “completely agree” responses. The table displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

*Question Wording:* “I will read you some statements about which there are various points of view. To what degree do you agree or disagree with each of them? [All heavy industry should belong to the state and not be privately owned] 1. Completely agree, 2. Mostly agree, 3. Neither agree nor disagree, 4. Mostly disagree, 5. Completely disagree.”

**When the data are viewed as a whole, they suggest that nostalgia for the Soviet political system continues to decline, even as admiration for one important feature of the Soviet economy remains high.**

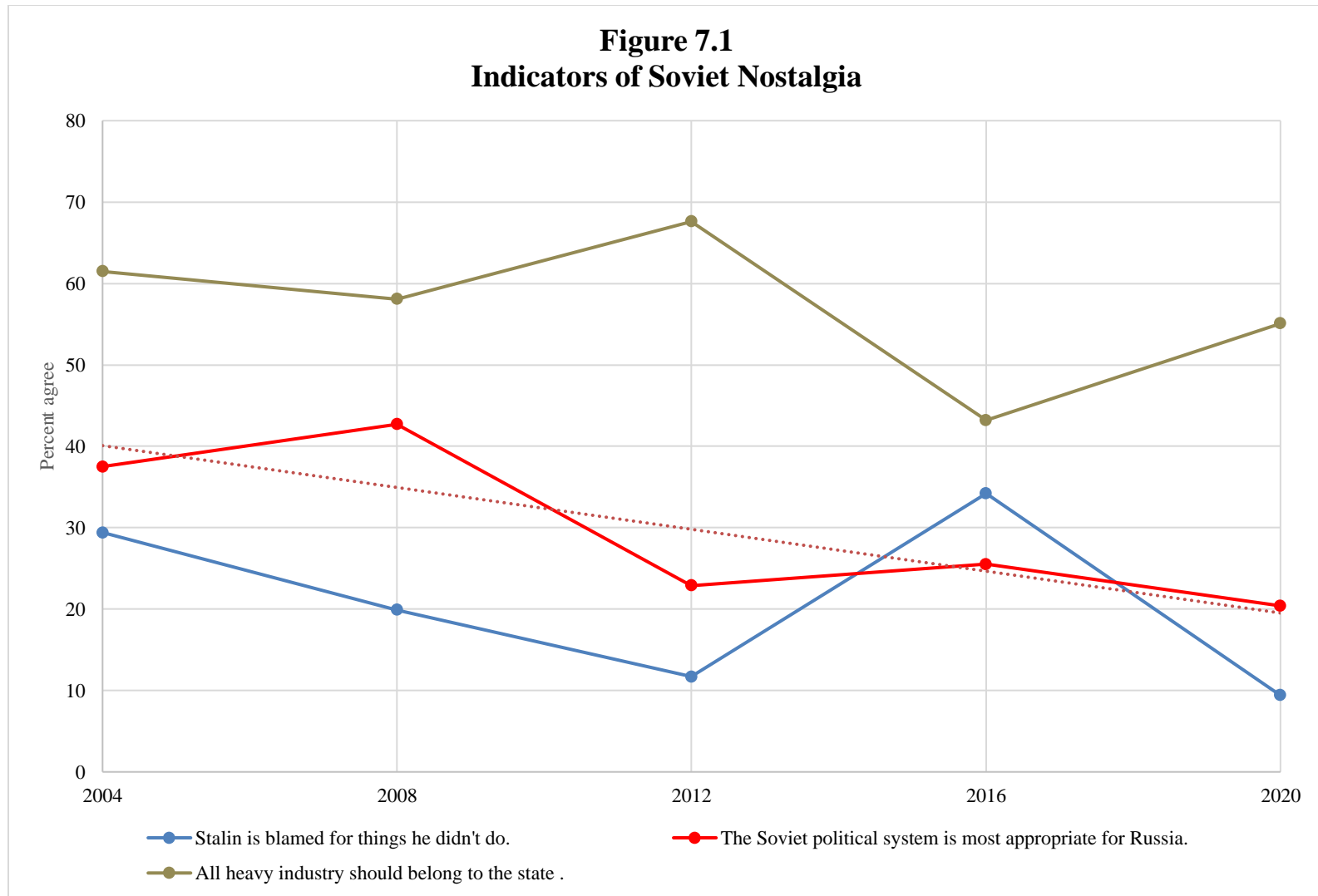
After comparing attitudes toward Stalin, the type of political system that is appropriate for Russia, and state ownership of heavy industry, a pattern emerges. As Figure 7.1 shows, two of the three indicators (represented by the red and blue lines) show a significant decline since 2004 in positive assessments of these aspects of the Soviet era. The downward sloping preference for a Soviet-style political system is the most dramatic; the diminishing favorability of Stalin is less so due to a surprising one-time uptick in 2016.

As noted, elites' appreciation of a sizeable role for the state in heavy industry departs somewhat from this trend, and there are hints in the data that still other aspects of the Soviet experience are held in high regard as well. In the 2020 wave of the SRE, for example, four in five respondents (81%) say that "the capability to influence areas that were formerly part of the USSR" is important for "Russia to be considered a great power."<sup>30</sup> It seems that the territorial reach of the USSR—or at least the exertion of influence over neighboring regions that once comprised the Soviet Union—still holds a certain allure for Russia's foreign policy elites. Mass-level polling is largely consistent with this interpretation. A recent Levada Center poll reports that 75 percent of Russians view the Soviet era as the best time in the history of their country, and more to the point, that 65 percent regret the breakup of the USSR.<sup>31</sup>

30 In the 2020 survey wave, respondents were asked, "For Russia to be considered a great power, how important is each of the following? Rate the level of importance on a five-point scale, where 1 means 'not at all important' and 5 means 'very important' [The capability to influence areas that were formerly part of the USSR]." Out of a subset of 102 respondents (extracted since they form a randomly-selected control group of an experiment embedded in the survey that uses this question), 40% responded "important" (4 on the scale) and 41% "very important" (5 on the scale).

31 "Tri chetverti rossiyan schitayut sovetzkuyu epokhu luchshei v istorii strany," Levada Center, March 24, 2020. <https://www.levada.ru/2020/03/24/tri-chetverti-rossiyan-schitayut-sovetzkuyu-epokhu-luchshej-v-istorii-strany/>

**Figure 7.1**  
**Indicators of Soviet Nostalgia**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites.  
Notes and Question Wordings: As in Tables 7.1-7.3.

## 8. PROTEST ACTIVITY

**With a few exceptions, elites are fairly uniform in their attitudes toward the justifiability of various types of protest. However, those under the age of 39 view participation in sanctioned demonstrations as somewhat more justifiable than do older elites.**

In August 2019, Moscow witnessed an authorized rally of up to 60,000 people—reportedly the largest since anti-government demonstrations in 2011-12. This event and other protests that summer were in response to the electoral commission’s refusal to register a significant number of opposition candidates in municipal elections. According to Levada Center polling, just over a third of all Muscovites (37%) had a positive view of these protests, 27 percent viewed them negatively, and 30 percent were neutral.<sup>32</sup>

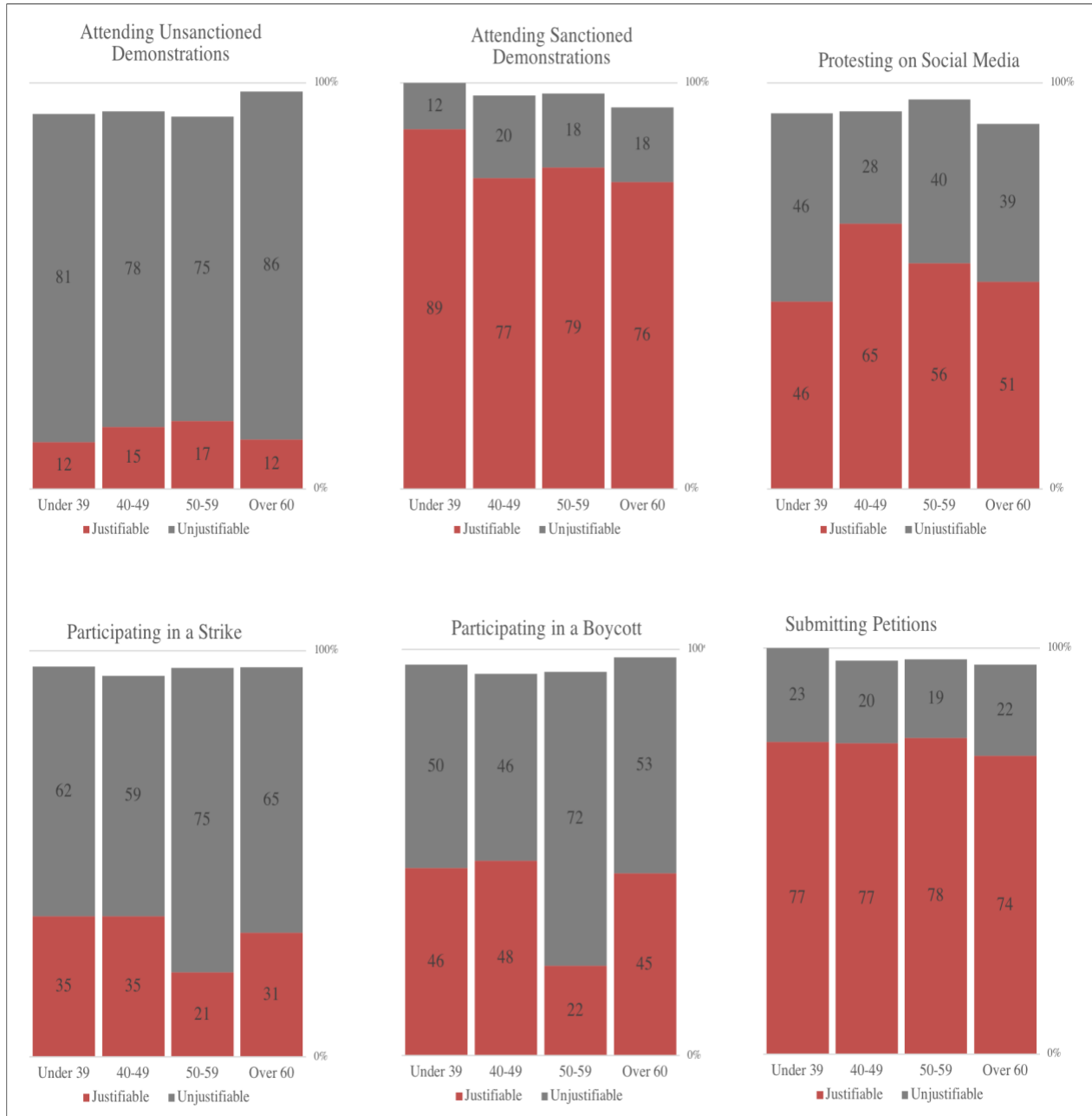
The 2020 SRE informs our understanding of how Russian elites are reacting to this growing, though episodic, uptick in political protest activity. We asked elites this question: “Please look at this card. It lists various types of political protest activity in which people can engage. Rate each of these activities on a ten-point scale according to how justifiable they are, where 10 means ‘completely justifiable’ and 1 means ‘completely unjustifiable.’” For these analyses, we grouped respondents into two categories: for those who selected 1-5 on the scale, the activity was coded as unjustifiable, and for those answering 6-10—justifiable.

Overall, with respect to four of the six arenas mentioned in the question (boycotts, strikes, protesting on social media, and unsanctioned demonstrations), a greater share of respondents approve of that form of protest in 2020 than 2016. Notably, the percentage saying that unsanctioned protests are justified almost doubled in four years—from 9 percent in 2016 to 15 percent in 2020.

As Figure 8.1 shows, we detect some age-related trends in these attitudes. In 2020, 89 percent of the youngest respondents classify sanctioned demonstrations as justifiable, compared to 76 percent of the oldest cohort. Thirty-five percent of all elites under the age of 49 find strikes to be justifiable, while only 21 percent and 31 percent of elites aged 50-59 and over the age of 60, respectively, say the same. Despite these age cohort differences, however, the overall 2020 divide in attitudes toward sanctioned versus unsanctioned protests across all age groups is striking, with almost four-fifths of all elites approving of the former but disapproving of the latter.

<sup>32</sup> Anastasiya Kornya and Polina Abrosimova, “Tsentribirkom proignoriroval argumenty oppozitsionerov,” *Vedomosti*, August 6, 2019.  
<https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2019/08/06/808244-tsentribirkom>

**Figure 8.1**  
**Elites' Attitudes Toward the Justifiability of Protests by Age Cohort,**  
**2020**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

Notes: “Unjustifiable” includes responses ranging from 1 to 5. “Justifiable” includes responses ranging from 6 to 10. For all questions, n=26 (under 39), n=98 (40-49), n=72 (50-59), and n=49 (over 60). The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

Question Wording: “Please look at this card. It lists various types of political protest activity in which people can engage. Rate each of these activities on a ten-point scale according to how justifiable they are, where 10 means ‘completely justifiable’ and 1 means ‘completely unjustifiable’ [Submitting petitions, Participating in a boycott, Attending demonstrations sanctioned by the government, Attending unsanctioned demonstrations, Participating in a strike, Protesting on social media].” Percentages may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

In what could be a response to the use of strikes during the *perestroika* era, respondents between the ages of 50 and 59 are actually the most apt to view participation in strikes as unjustifiable (with 75 percent disapproving of their use). Workers' protests became so common in 1989 that the government newspaper *Izvestiya* called strikes "the most popular form of communication with the authorities."<sup>33</sup> Elites between the ages of 50 and 59 would have been young adults during that time period, and thus may have particularly strong and even negative opinions about strikes as compared to other age groups.

Surprising age-related trends show up in opinions about protesting on social media, which could include publishing dissenting or critical blog posts, sharing content in solidarity with protest movements, or using online platforms to call attention to, organize, and mobilize support for demonstrations, etc. In fact, as the figure shows, 65 percent of elites aged 40-49 find protests on social media to be justified, compared to just 46 percent of those younger than 39. Moreover, 5 percent *more* elites over the age of 60 regard protesting on social media as justifiable than do their youngest counterparts.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Teague, "Perestroika and the Soviet Worker," *Government and Opposition* 25, no. 2 (1990): 191-211, at p. 195.

**Elites in all occupational groups except for the military and security agencies show a decline in support for the foreign agent law from 2016 to 2020.**

While political protests and grassroots activism have increased over the past decade,<sup>34</sup> so too have restrictions on many forms of political activity. In 2019, the Russian government updated the original law on foreign agents passed in 2012. In its original form, this law allowed the state to label NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in political activity as “foreign agents,” a classification that adds a number of restrictions to their operations.<sup>35</sup> This designation was later expanded to include certain media outlets, in response to the US requirement that the state-funded channel RT America register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). And the 2019 revision went even further: it “amended Russia’s legal code to require *individuals* to register as foreign agents if they publish ‘printed, audio, audiovisual, or other reports and materials’ and receive money from foreign governments, foreign organizations, or even simply from foreign citizens.”<sup>36</sup>

In 2016 and 2020, we asked respondents whether they thought the foreign agent law was “appropriate because some NGOs are indeed foreign agents” or rather, “repressive and...meant to prevent NGOs from having contacts with foreigners in general.” Overall, support for the law declined from 70 percent in 2016 to 57 percent in 2020, even as the Kremlin was making the law more restrictive.

All occupational groups but one registered a decline in support, as shown by the light blue bars in Figure 8.2. The largest decrease is among those holding high-level positions in state-owned enterprises (down 29 percentage points). Private business leaders and executive branch officials also show sharp declines in support, dropping over the last four years by twenty percentage points and by 26 percentage points, respectively. The two smallest drops over this time period are among elites working in the media (down two percentage points, from 31% to 29%) and in science and education (down twelve percentage points, from 69% to 57%).

34 Ann M. Simmons, “In a Big Shift, Russians Take to the Streets Over Everyday Complaints,” Wall Street Journal, December 24, 2019; Evgeniya Chirikova, “Russia Is a Land of Protests and Activism. Really,” Washington Post, September 12, 2019.

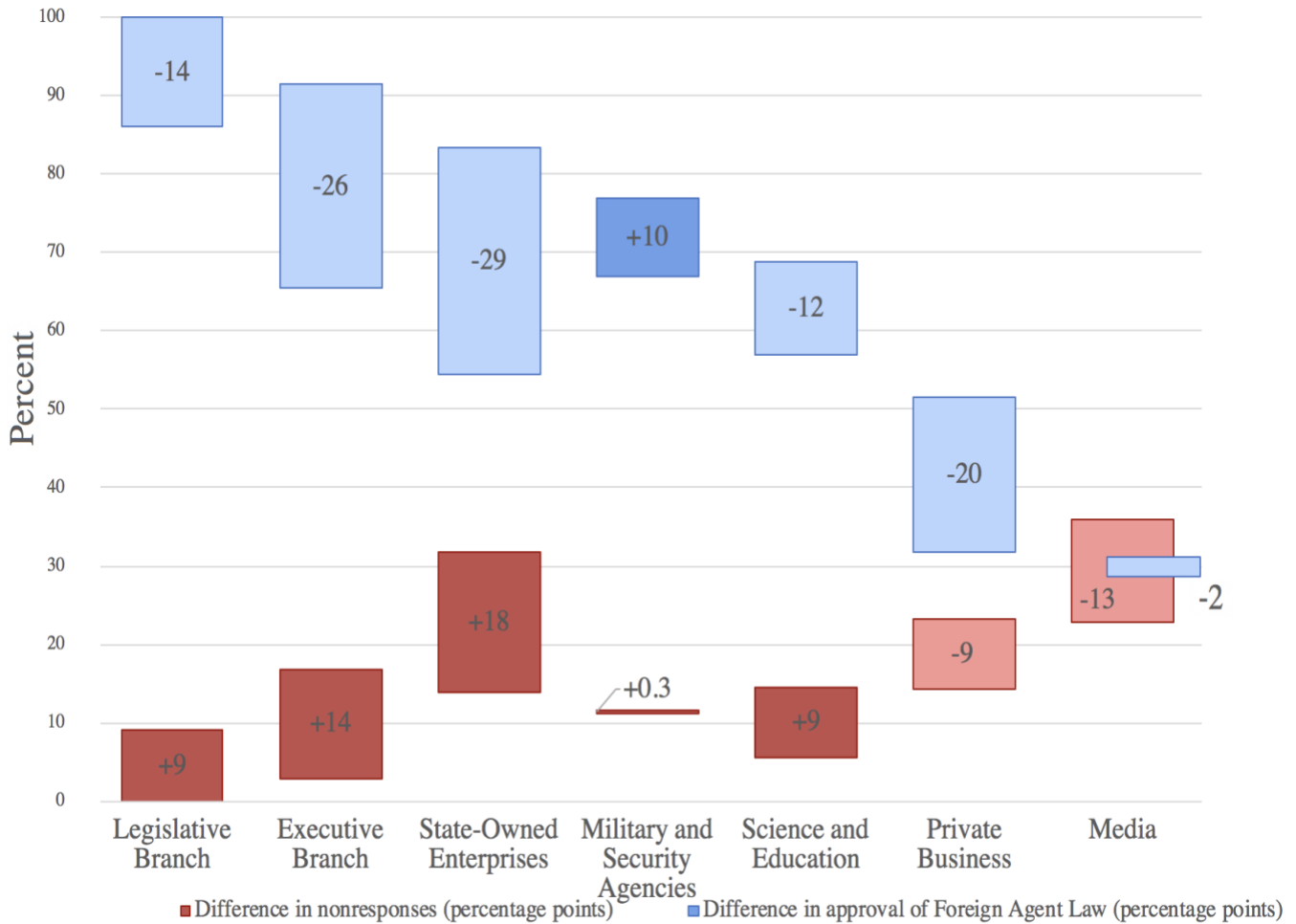
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/09/12/russia-is-land-protests-activism-really/>

35 Katherin Machalek, “Factsheet: Russia’s NGO Laws,” Freedom House.

[https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet\\_0.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet_0.pdf)

36 Anton Troianovski, “In Russia, An Updated Law with New Restrictions on Freedom of Speech,” New York Times, December 2, 2019 (italics added). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/world/europe/russia-foreign-agents-law.html>

**Figure 8.2**  
**Changes in Approval of Foreign Agent Law and Nonresponses**  
**between 2016 and 2020**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

Notes: “Difference in nonresponses” is the difference between 2016 and 2020 in the percentages of those who answered “Don’t know” or refused to answer. “Difference in approval of the Foreign Agent Law” is the change between the two time periods in the percentages of those who selected “the law is appropriate.”

Question Wording: “There is currently a law that requires NGOs that engage in political activity and receive funding from foreign sources to register as foreign agents. Some say that the law is appropriate because some NGOs are indeed foreign agents. Others say the law is repressive and is meant to prevent NGOs from having contacts with foreigners in general. What is your opinion about this matter? 1. The law is appropriate because some NGOs are indeed foreign agents, 2. The law is repressive and is meant to prevent NGOs from having contacts with foreigners in general.”



Note, however, that this survey question contains a comparatively high percentage of nonresponses.<sup>37</sup> The percentage of missing data overall is relatively constant between 2016 and 2020 (14% and 17%, respectively). To some extent, the change in nonresponses between the two survey periods varies by occupation. For instance, as the dark red bars in the figure show, the largest increase is in the state-owned enterprise sector (up 18 percentage points since 2016). Overall, in five of the seven subgroups, the percentage stating “Don’t know” or refusing to answer rose over the past four years, which may reflect some continuing discomfort with the way in which the survey question is phrased.

<sup>37</sup> In general, Bashkirova and Partners reported that many respondents in 2020 disliked the wording of this question, and in particular, considered the wording of the second response (“The law is repressive and is meant to prevent NGOs from having contacts with foreigners in general”) to be quite categorical and not corresponding to reality.

## 9. THE MEDIA

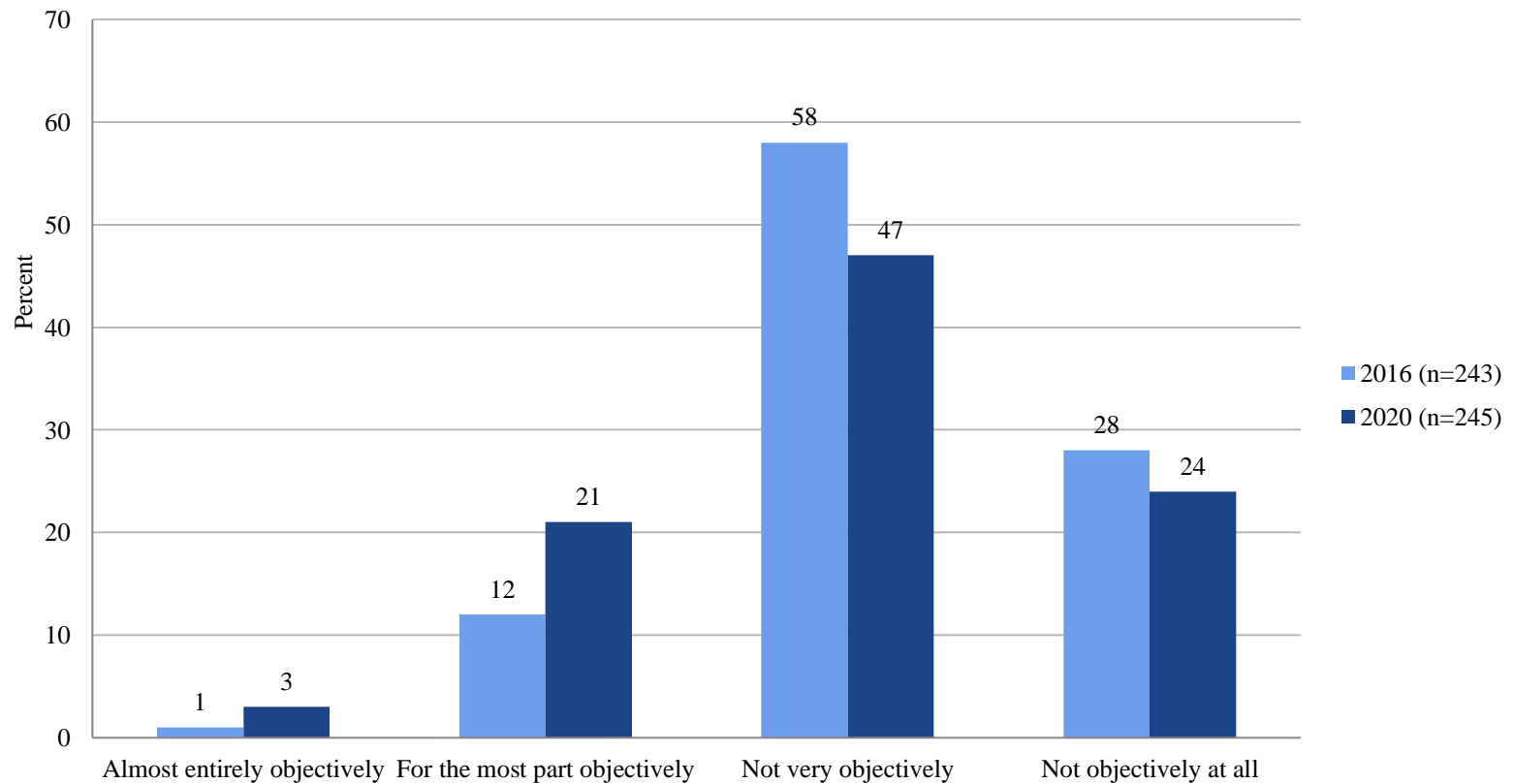
### **Almost three-quarters of all elites view the Western media as biased.**

Putin has been clear about the Western media's nefarious intentions. For instance, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in May 2014, Putin responded to a foreign journalist who asked about freedom of speech in Russia as follows: "You Americans have no right to lecture us! Your TV stations blatantly lied about the events in Kiev. You have no moral authority to breathe a word about freedom of speech."<sup>38</sup>

The SRE allows us to assess the degree to which respondents agree with Putin that media outlets based in the West are biased. Figure 9.1 shows that most high-ranking Russians believe that they lack objectivity. According to the dark blue bars on the right, a total of 71 percent of elites in 2020 assert that Western media sources cover events in Russia and in the world either "not very objectively" or "not objectively at all." Although the number is high, it is nevertheless down from a total of 86 percent in 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men*, p. 304.

**Figure 9.1**  
**Perceptions of the Western Media's Coverage of World Events**



Source: Data from Survey of Russian Elites.

Note: The figure displays the percentage of all respondents, including those who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer.

Question Wording: “How objectively do you think that events in Russia and in the world as a whole are covered by...[Western media sources]?”  
1. Almost entirely objectively, 2. For the most part objectively, 3. Not very objectively, 4. Not objectively at all.”

**A plurality of elites do not approve of complete governmental control of Internet content, and these views are linked with their general political preferences.**

Over the past several years, the state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor has been authorized to regulate access to the Internet in Russia in new ways. For instance, the “sovereign Internet” law that went into effect in November 2019 “obliges internet service providers to install special equipment that can track, filter, and reroute internet traffic.”<sup>39</sup> Other actions of note include blocking the popular encrypted messaging service Telegram, restricting the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), and banning certain websites, among others.

In 2020, individuals in the sample were asked to evaluate these and other actions by responding to the following query, “There are various opinions about the extent to which the Internet should be regulated. Please think about the recent actions taken by Roskomnadzor [Federal Service for the Supervision of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Mass Communications] to regulate the Internet. Using a five-point scale (where 1 means that Internet content should be under the complete control of the government and 5 means that it should be completely free of governmental control), could you tell me which position on the scale is closer to your point of view?”

Elite support for a free Internet is relatively high even as governmental restrictions on it have grown. A plurality of elites support a free Internet (with 47 percent selecting a 4 or 5), and almost one-third of the sample (30%) favors the middle position, which stands for a balance between freedom and regulation. Only 22 percent would endorse complete control of the Internet by the government, or something close to it, having selected a 1 or 2 on the scale.

Table 9.2 offers some insight into how these views about Internet control are linked to preferences regarding the ideal political system for Russia. Not surprisingly, as the last row shows, 70 percent of elites who favor a Western-style democracy desire a hands-off approach by the government in the area of Internet regulation. This contrasts sharply with those who prefer other types of political systems.

<sup>39</sup> “Russia: New Law Expands Government Control Online,” Human Rights Watch, October 31, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/31/russia-new-law-expands-government-control-online>

**Table 9.2**  
**Elites' Views on Internet Control by Preferred Political System**

Preferred Political System	Support Internet Control (1 or 2)	Do Not Support Internet Control (4 or 5)
The Soviet system that existed before <i>perestroika</i> (n=4)	25%	0%
The Soviet system but in a different, more democratic form (n=46)	30%	39%
The current political system (n=107)	29%	38%
A Western-style democracy (n=54)	7%	70%

*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

*Notes:* Neutral responses to the Internet question are not shown. For both questions, “don’t know” responses and refusals are not shown.

*Question Wordings:* “What type of political system, in your opinion, is most appropriate for Russia? 1. The Soviet system that existed before *perestroika*, 2. The Soviet system but in a different, more democratic form, 3. The current political system, 4. A Western-style democracy; “There are various opinions about the extent to which the Internet should be regulated. Please think about the recent actions taken by Roskomnadzor [Federal Service for the Supervision of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Mass Communications] to regulate the Internet. Using a five-point scale (where 1 means that Internet content should be under the complete control of the government and 5 means that it should be completely free of governmental control), could you tell me which position on the scale is closer to your point of view?”

Another way to analyze views on this issue is to divide respondents according to their use of the Internet. Elites were asked, “People find out about events in the world and in their country from various sources: radio, television, newspapers, the Internet. In regard to the past week, how often did you learn about events in the world and in Russia from each of the following sources?” Various media sources were listed, including “online media” and “social media,” and respondents could choose any of five points on a scale ranging from “Not once” to “Every day.” Overall, 71 percent of Russian elites in the survey report turning to either online media or social networking sites for their news every day or almost every day.

Table 9.3 shows how attitudes toward Internet control are related to online media/social media usage. Not surprisingly, Russian elites who more frequently learn about events in the world and in Russia through online media or social networking sites are less likely to support extensive governmental control of the Internet. Only 17 percent of respondents who rely on *either* online media or social networking sites for their news every day or almost every day favor heavy government regulation of Internet content, whereas 35 percent of all others in the sample favor such control.

**Table 9.3**  
**Elites' Views on Internet Control by Internet Usage**

<b>Reliance on Either Online Media or Social Media for News</b>	<b>Support Internet Control (1 or 2)</b>	<b>Do Not Support Internet Control (4 or 5)</b>
Every day or almost every day (n=173)	17%	49%
All others (n=72)	35%	42%

*Source:* Data from Survey of Russian Elites, 2020 (n=245).

*Notes:* Respondents who answered “Every day” or “Almost every day” to *either* the “Online media” or “Social media” question are combined in a single category. All others are in the second category. For the Internet question, neutral responses, “don’t know” responses, and refusals are not shown.

*Question Wordings:* “People find out about events in the world and in their country from various sources: radio, television, newspapers, the Internet. In regard to the past week, how often did you learn about events in the world and in Russia from each of the following sources? [Online media, Social media] 1. Not once, 2. Once, 3. Several times, 4. Almost every day, 5. Every day”; “There are various opinions about the extent to which the Internet should be regulated. Please think about the recent actions taken by Roskomnadzor [Federal Service for the Supervision of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Mass Communications] to regulate the Internet. Using a five-point scale (where 1 means that Internet content should be under the complete control of the government and 5 means that it should be completely free of governmental control), could you tell me which position on the scale is closer to your point of view?”

**Russian elites say they use online media extensively for their news, but only a quarter rely heavily on social media.**

As mentioned earlier, almost three-quarters of those surveyed (71%) rely on what the survey terms “online media” or “social media” for their news every day or almost every day. Further analysis shows that most respondents are placed in this category due to their consumption of “online media.” A total of 69 percent of all respondents in the survey report using online media either every day or almost every day to get their news, compared to only 25 percent saying the same about social media.<sup>40</sup>

The survey also probes our respondents’ use of specific social media platforms. Although about two-fifths of all respondents turn to VKontakte, Facebook, and YouTube for their news at least occasionally during the week, very frequent users are relatively rare. Of all 245 respondents in the survey, only 12 percent report using VKontakte almost every day or every day for news. Facebook is used extensively by an equivalent 12 percent of the sample, followed by YouTube (11%) and Twitter (9%).

<sup>40</sup> Similar trends are reflected in the media consumption habits of the Russian mass public as well. As Lipman, Kachkaeva, and Poyker write, “[m]ost Russians who use the Internet do not use it to obtain news.” But when they do, they most often turn to Yandex Novosti, “the news aggregator of the Russian search engine Yandex.” Maria Lipman, Anna Kachkaeva, and Michael Poyker, “Media in Russia: Between Modernization and Monopoly,” in Daniel Treisman, ed., *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin’s Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), pp. 176-77. A 2019 survey reports that social networking sites like VKontakte and YouTube are less important than Yandex as sources of news obtained online. “Survey Looks at Russians’ Media Consumption Habits,” BBC Monitoring, December 23, 2019.



## 10. CONCLUSION

The Survey of Russian Elites is the only repeated cross-sectional survey of contemporary Russian foreign policy elites in existence. Once the 2020 wave is added, the combined data set will include 1,909 interviews with high-ranking Russians working in a broad range of occupations in Moscow. As such, the project is uniquely positioned to shed light on what highly placed Russians say about US-Russian relations, Russian foreign policy, and the domestic situation in Russia.

According to the 2020 wave conducted between February and March 2020, the attitudes of foreign policy elites in Moscow are not conducive to a thaw in the current chilly state of US-Russian relations. For instance, the exercise of Russian military power in places like Syria, Libya, and Ukraine constitutes a major point of contention in Russia's relationship with the West. According to the survey, elites are significantly more favorably disposed toward military interventionism of this nature than in all previous waves of the survey.

Moreover, elites exhibit high levels of satisfaction with Putin's foreign policy achievements and efforts to restore Russia's standing on the world stage. On specific international issues such as Russia's involvement with Syria and China, there are signs of receptivity to "cueing"—a process by which highly placed individuals such as those in our sample carefully read Kremlin signals and adopt policies that mirror those of the top leadership. Insofar as Putin can continue to enhance Russia's international reputation and prestige, particularly with minimal expenditures of blood and treasure, we can expect to see significant support for an assertive foreign policy on the part of Russia's elites.

At the same time, we have identified some important domestic areas in which elites are not as receptive to the Kremlin's cues as one might expect. Specifically, our respondents' views on the threat of a "color" revolution in Russia, the need for either a foreign agent law or strong Internet regulation, and the occurrence of Western interference in the 2011-12 election cycle diverge noticeably from Putin's statements. In short, the elite stratum does not share the Kremlin's preoccupation with insulating the polity from foreign meddling.

Most disconcerting for the Kremlin, perhaps, is the fact that satisfaction with Putin's domestic policy accomplishments is much lower than with his foreign policy achievements. Assessments of the economic progress made over the past twenty years are particularly dim. In addition, the survey data show that concern about Russia's inability to solve its internal problems has grown in the past four years, such that 70 percent think it either represents or is close to constituting an "utmost danger" to the security of Russia.

Finally, recall that these data were collected before oil prices collapsed in April 2020 and the coronavirus health crisis really took hold in Russia. We would expect, then, that elites' assessments of the president's economic performance and Russia's ability to solve its domestic problems are likely to be lower still in the future.

## 11. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The results are from a 2020 survey of 245 Moscow-based foreign policy elites funded by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. SES-1742798); the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center and Office of the Dean of Faculty at Hamilton College; and the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies, Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia, Center for Political Studies, and Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan.

The 2020 survey is the eighth wave in an existing series of interviews that is currently deposited with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan (Study #3724).<sup>41</sup> With the addition of the 2020 survey, the series spans 27 years and includes 1,909 individuals holding high-ranking positions in the Russian Federation during the post-communist period. The replication of most survey questions and the consistency of the survey methodology across all eight surveys facilitate comparisons across time. This series is the only repeated cross-sectional survey data of Russian elites, and as such, it constitutes a unique resource for the scholarly and policy communities.

Each sample includes elites from the following subgroups: the legislative and executive branches of government, the military and security agencies, state-owned enterprises, private businesses, scientific and educational institutions with strong international connections, and the media.<sup>42</sup> In each of the eight waves, between 30 and 40 persons were selected from each category.

The 2020 survey was directed by Sharon Werning Rivera, Professor and Chair of Government at Hamilton College (Principal Investigator as of 2016) and William Zimmerman, Emeritus Professor of Political Science and Emeritus Research Professor, Center for Political Studies, at the University of Michigan (Co-Principal Investigator). It was implemented by the Moscow-based firm Bashkirova and Partners (<http://www.bashkirova-partners.ru/en/>). Elena Bashkirova also carried out all of the previous elite surveys that form the basis of this series; those were conducted in 1993, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2008, and 2012 (under the direction of Zimmerman) and in 2016 (under the direction of Rivera and Zimmerman).

In all eight waves, individuals were selected on the basis of positional criteria using a quota sample, with an emphasis on identifying elites connected in some way with foreign

<sup>41</sup> See William Zimmerman, Sharon Werning Rivera, and Kirill Kalinin, *Survey of Russian Elites, Moscow, Russia, 1993-2016*, Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2019-09-11. <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/ICPSR/studies/3724/versions/V6>

<sup>42</sup> One exception is the 1993 survey, which includes only a single category of “economic elites.” In all subsequent years, economic elites were drawn from two separate sectors (state-owned enterprises and private businesses). In 1993 and 1995, elites from the legislative and executive branches were combined in one category. In 1999 and 2004, two legislative samples were selected—one from the foreign policy-relevant committees of the legislative branches and one from those national legislators who were not involved with foreign policy matters.

policy issues.<sup>43</sup> And across all waves, as Zimmerman writes, “those classified as elites had to have occupations that suggested a *prima facie* expectation that they would have substantial potential to affect policy.”<sup>44</sup>

In 2020, the occupational subgroups include the following numbers of respondents:

- 1) **Executive Branch** (ministers, deputy ministers, and heads of agencies, services, and departments in the federal bureaucracy, as well as members of the Presidential Administration employed at the rank of advisor or higher) - 35
- 2) **Legislative Branch** (deputies in the State Duma and Federation Council who are members of the committees and commissions on defense, security, relations with the CIS, foreign affairs, the environment, and finance) – 35
- 3) **Private Business** (owners and CEOs of major private firms in the banking sector; food production; electronics manufacturing, pharmacological, and construction industries; as well as trading companies, consulting firms, and companies engaged in outsourcing) – 35
- 4) **State-Owned Enterprises** (directors and deputy directors of firms that are at least 50 percent state-owned, including state corporations; industrial, defense, and petrochemical enterprises; airlines; and railroads) – 35
- 5) **Media** (editors-in-chief and deputy editors-in-chief of major media outlets) – 35
- 6) **Science and Education** (chancellors, vice-chancellors, directors, and deputy directors of universities and research institutes with strong international connections) – 35
- 7) **Military and Security Forces** (officers at the rank of colonel or higher serving in the military, including the Main Directorate of the General Staff, as well as the Federal Security Service, Federal Protective Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Guard, and Ministry for Emergency Situations) – 35

Demographic characteristics of the sample also include the following:

<i>Gender:</i>	Male	74.7%
	Female	25.3
<i>Age:</i>	30-39	10.6
	40-49	40.0
	50-59	29.4
	60+	20.0

<sup>43</sup> Total sample sizes for each survey year are as follows: 200 (1993), 180 (1995), 240 (1999), 320 (2004), 241 (2008), 240 (2012), 243 (2016), and 245 (2020). The surveys were conducted in December 1992-January 1993, October-November 1995, November 1999, March-April 2004, March-May 2008, July-August 2012, February-March 2016, and February-March 2020.

<sup>44</sup> William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy: Russian Elite and Mass Perspectives, 1993–2000* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 21.

All respondents are Moscow residents. Yet, as Zimmerman et al. argue, “[r]estricting the sample to Moscow [and thereby excluding regional elites] is unlikely to result in statistical bias, given Moscow’s disproportionate impact on national political decision-making. Moscow is the financial, political, intellectual and cultural hub of Russia, where the principal decision-making centers and individuals occupying key positions in different spheres of public life are concentrated.”<sup>45</sup>

The survey was completed between February 19, 2020, and March 19, 2020, in interviews that lasted an average of 52 minutes. Most were face-to-face interviews,<sup>46</sup> although this year, 13.9 percent of respondents completed the questionnaires themselves with CAWI (computer-assisted web interviewing). As in previous years, the interviews were conducted by experienced and highly-educated interviewers trained by Bashkirova and other members of her firm. Quality control was enhanced by careful interviewer monitoring: the firm contacted 10 percent of the respondents by phone to check that they had actually been interviewed and assessed 100 percent of the questionnaires for completion throughout the data collection phase. Of the initial pool of 300 respondents, 55 refused to participate in the survey, producing a response rate of 81.7 percent.<sup>47</sup>

The project was approved by the Hamilton College Institutional Review Board on February 10, 2020. All respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the data and were informed, in a manner that is consistent with the Hamilton College Institutional Review Board guidelines, that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be used only in generalized form.

45 William Zimmerman, et al. *Russian Elite—2020: Valdai Discussion Club Grantees Analytical Report* (Moscow: Valdai Discussion Club, 2013), p. 16. [http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Russian\\_elite\\_2020\\_eng.pdf](http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Russian_elite_2020_eng.pdf)

46 The interviewers used CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing) with tablets.

47 Bashkirova i partnery, “Otchet po proektu ‘Otsenka vneshnei politiki Rossii’” [Evaluating Russian Foreign Policy: Methodological Report], 2020. Available upon request.