

# **Personality Traits and Foreign Policy Views of Russian Elites**

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# Puzzle

Why are some people “hawks” and some “doves”?



What explains difference in foreign policy views of elites?

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# Research Question

Do personality characteristics of people who hold high positions in power affect their foreign policy views?

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# **Rational Choice Theory**

**Answer:**

NO!

What matter are interests,  
expectations, strategies,  
coalitions...

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# Political Psychology

## Approach

Emphasis on psychological traits of decision-makers

- Greenstein 1975;
  - Holsti 1976;
  - Etheredge 1978;
  - Tetlock 1981
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# Challenge

Access to elites is extremely difficult to obtain -----

Reliance on secondary indirect sources, or expert evaluations, or content analysis

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# Our Approach

- Original survey data of Russian Elites based on

Sixth Wave of Russian Elites Survey

Project headed by William Zimmerman

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# Place in the Literature

- Bridging classical studies of elites' attitudes and beliefs with advanced research on psychological traits in social psychology
  - Analysis of the elites' orientation on foreign policy beyond the US
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# Theoretical Framework

- Psychological Traits (Big 5 approach):
  - Authoritarian Personality Theory (Adorno)
  - Interpersonal generalization theory (Christiansen)
  - Leader Trait Assessment theory (Hermann)
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# Hypothesis

Psychological traits that constitute personal authoritarianism should be associated with more aggressive foreign policy orientations

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# Dependent Variables

- Definition of National Interests of Russia
  - Orientation toward the use of military force
  - Perception of the US as a threat to Russian national security
  - Opposition to international operations in Libya and Syria
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# Independent Variables

- Conservative Parenting Values
  - Ethnocentrism
  - Mental Rigidity
  - Need for Order
  - Punitiveness
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# Conservative Parenting Values

Obedience + responsibility + religiosity –  
(self-expression + tolerance + imagination +  
independence)

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# Ethnocentrism

- Composite Index based on feeling thermometer

Attitudes towards Russians – (attitudes towards Muslims + Caucasians + Immigrants + homosexuals)

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# Mental Rigidity

“Of all the various philosophies in the world there exist apparently only one that is undoubtedly correct”

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# Need for Order

5-point scale

- “order established at any price, even if it involves violations of human rights” to “by no means establishing order infringe upon citizen’s rights”.
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# Punitiveness

“the interests of society must be protected even if innocent people sometimes are imprisoned”.

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# Controls

- Self-esteem
  - Trust
  - Group belonging (**Military, Legislative, Executive, Business, Science and Media**)
  - Political affiliation (report of vote for Vladimir Putin)
  - Membership in CPSU
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Education
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6<sup>th</sup> wave of the Russian Elite Survey September-October 2012

240 individuals from

- 1) Legislators
- 2) Government
- 3) Military
- 4) State-owned enterprises
- 5) Business-owners
- 6) Media
- 7) Science



# Empirical Analysis

- Confirmatory factor analysis
  - Dependent variables represent different factors
  - Strong factor of ethnocentrism (without homosexuals)
  - No coherent factor beyond parenting values
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# Regression Analysis

	Broad National Interests	Use of Military Force	US as a threat	Opposition to intervention in Libya	Opposition to intervention in Syria
Conservative Parenting	-0.070 (0.165)	-0.76** (0.19)	-0.750** (0.201)	-0.56** (0.21)	-0.764** (0.224)
Ethnocentrism	0.05** (0.02)	-0.07** (0.01)	0.06** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Mental Rigidity	-0.05 (0.32)	0.03 (0.08)	0.02** (0.009)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.009 (0.01)
Need for Order	0.35** (0.17)	0.28 (0.19)	0.16 (0.18)	0.52** (0.22)	0.53** (0.22)
<u>Punitiveness</u>	-0.09 (0.1)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Self-Esteem	0.01 (0.034)	0.31 (0.384)	-0.095 (0.396)	-0.231 (0.386)	0.138 (0.397)
Trust	-0.017 (0.014)	-0.09 (0.16)	0.019 (0.013)	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.013 (0.012)
Age	0.07 (0.32)	0.05** (0.02)	0.014 (0.24)	-0.030 (0.026)	-0.016 (0.025)
Gender	0.039 (0.436)	0.771 (0.572)	0.426 (0.450)	-0.032 (0.505)	(0.010) 0.497

# Regression Analysis

Gender	0.039 (0.436)	0.771 (0.572)	0.426 (0.450)	-0.032 (0.505)	(0.010) 0.497
Education	0.173 (0.201)	-0.102 (0.651)	-0.045 (0.201)	-0.519** (0.232)	-0.303 (0.296)
Membership in CPSU	-1.6** (0.6)	-0.077 (0.599)	-0.156 (0.558)	-0.117 (0.630)	1.07** (0.505)
Support for Putin	0.234 (0.210)	-0.344 (0.247)	0.027 (0.217)	-0.061 (0.243)	-0.006 (0.237)
Military	0.454 (0.616)	3.75** (0.862)	0.242 (0.681)	0.254 (0.814)	0.775 (0.811)
Executive	0.512 (0.632)	0.588 (0.702)	0.855 (0.627)	-0.060 (0.862)	0.591 (0.778)
Legislative	2.9** (0.7)	0.131 (0.744)	-0.190 (0.885)	0.01 (0.862)	0.608 (0.848)
Business	0.301 (0.711)	0.585 (0.742)	0.325 (0.623)	0.693 (0.757)	0.616 (0.807)
Media	1.256** (0.537)	0.390 (0.867)	0.646 (0.694)	0.032 (0.815)	0.329 (0.874)
Science	1.4** (0.634)	-0.459 (0.734)	0.350 (0.595)	0.958 (0.649)	1.017 (0.667)

Note: standard errors in parentheses

# Results

- 1) Personality traits are strong and significant predictors of foreign policy orientations
- 2) Conservative parenting values are associated with “Dovish” views. Also ethnocentrism is negatively related with positive attitudes towards military force.

## **Isolationism**

- 3) Need for order and mental rigidity more predictably were found to be positively associated with aggressive confrontationist foreign policy views
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# Interpretation

“Cheap talk”: attitudes and behavior

The role of emotions, intuition, beliefs in decision-making

“The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer - often, indeed, to the decider himself”. JFK

Association or causality?

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# Conclusions

Political leaders are also human beings

