

Special Double Issue: The Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites, 2014-2018  
Guest Editors: Sharon Weir and William Zimmerman

CONTENTS

Introduction to the Special Double Issue on Russian Elites	355
Sharon Weir and William Zimmerman	357
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361
Foreign Policy Attitudes of Russian Elites: A Review of the Literature	361

 Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group


ISSN: 1060-586X (Print) 1938-2855 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpsa20>


# Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian elite: the irrelevance of Aleksandr Dugin's geopolitics

Kirill Kalinin


To cite this article: Kirill Kalinin (2019) Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian elite: the irrelevance of Aleksandr Dugin's geopolitics, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 35:5-6, 461-470, DOI: 10.1080/1060586X.2019.1663050

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1663050>

 View supplementary material 



 Published online: 04 Nov 2019.

 Submit your article to this journal 

 Article views: 1052

 View related articles 

 View Crossmark data 

 Citing articles: 4 View citing articles 

ARTICLE



# Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian elite: the irrelevance of Aleksandr Dugin's geopolitics

Kirill Kalinin

Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA

## ABSTRACT

The consistency and effectiveness of Russia's assertive foreign policy has earned Putin, both domestically and internationally, the image of a powerful and ambitious leader with a strategic plan to re-establish the Russian empire and defend Russia's core national interests. Speculation among scholars and practitioners regarding the existence of such a "strategic plan" makes Aleksandr Dugin's conspiratorial neo-Eurasianism project an especially appealing subject of research. This paper explores key ideas of Dugin's neo-Eurasianism, as described in his *Foundations of Geopolitics*, and tests them empirically with data from the Survey of Russian Elites: 1993–2016 using a Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling approach. Its main finding is that the theory has limited utility for understanding elites' foreign policy perceptions and therefore its influence should not be overstated. Moreover, there is no evidence that Dugin's theory is more salient in the post-Crimean period than in the pre-Crimean period.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 March 2019  
Accepted 3 June 2019

## KEYWORDS

Eurasianism; Dugin; Russian elites; Bayesian Structural Equation Modelling

## Introduction

Since 2014, Russia has found itself in an intensely difficult situation. Enthralled by its perception of its special role as a "unique civilization," an alternative pole of "global multi-polarity," Russia began to actively challenge the contemporary world order and prevailing international norms. Its geopolitical "blitzkrieg," designed to force the West to review the rules of the game, not only threatens a protracted confrontation with the West, but also weakens Russia domestically. In many ways, these actions align with a particular ideology that has been gaining supporters in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union: neo-Eurasianism. The neo-Eurasianism shared by some parts of Russia's ruling elite is among the strongest and most tenacious ideologies gaining influence in Russia's contemporary policymaking.

One of the most prominent proponents of this ideology is Aleksandr Dugin, whose textbook, *Foundations of Geopolitics*, celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication in 2017. Dugin's Eurasianist ideas penetrated the halls of power in Moscow with ease, and quickly found fecund soil fertilized by geopolitical resentment (resentment). By forging close personal ties with pillars of the presidential administration and parliament, the secret services, and the Russian military (Dunlop 2004), Dugin made his book available as a practical guide for rebuilding the Russian empire. Even in my years as a student at the Volgograd Academy of Public Administration, Dugin's text was used as an international relations primer. The combination of historical grievances, a confrontational geopolitical climate, and rising political demands for coherent ideologies may have made Russian elites susceptible to his radical ideas.

In a world where Russia consistently makes headlines due to its role in Ukraine and Syria, as well as its interference in the 2016 US presidential election, Dugin's theory warrants thorough empirical investigation. Grounded in ideas of geopolitics, the theory asserts a distinct civilizational space for Russia as a leading continental – and potentially global – power. In absolutizing “zero-sum” strategies and portraying the world as a place where “might makes right,” the theory encourages Russian elites to employ a mixture of military and non-military means to subvert, destabilize, and misinform “rival blocs,” thus helping to establish Russia's dominance in Eurasia. Dugin portrays history as a struggle for global supremacy between neo-Eurasianism, represented by continental powers headed by Russia, and Atlanticism, embodied by maritime allies led by the United States. In this context, Ukraine is considered a pivotal state for the entire Eurasian project.

Dugin is by no means a coherent writer, meaning that it can be difficult to elucidate his ideas. Nevertheless, I will attempt to draw out the most important of these ideas so as to test their congruence with elite thinking on the basis of existing survey data. Notably, some of its parts intersect with other theories of international relations – for instance, Mearsheimer's “offensive realism,” which maintains that in an anarchic international system, states maximize their own relative power to ensure their security (Mearsheimer 2001). Other parts are rooted in classical geopolitics or ideas originating from the Soviet Cold War playbook. What makes Dugin unique, however, is his view that each civilization belongs to a particular geography and that this defines its international behavior – that is, Russians behave in a distinctly Russian way due to their affiliation with the Eurasian heartland.

Using the Bayesian Structural Equation (BSE) approach, this paper attempts to test the extent to which certain ideas laid out in Dugin's *Foundations of Geopolitics* are shared by Russia's foreign policy elite. Drawing on empirical data obtained from the Survey of Russian Elites: 1993–2016 (Zimmerman, Rivera, and Kalinin 2019), I explore and empirically operationalize neo-Eurasianism by disaggregating it into a set of concepts related to Russian identity, the national economy, authoritarianism, militarism, expansionism, and security threats, as well as geopolitical allies and rivals.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 1 provides a short review of Dugin's theory. Section 2 describes the basic empirical model. Section 3 presents the results of the quantitative analysis. Conclusions are drawn in the final section.

## Dugin's theory of Eurasianism

Essentially, Dugin's theory is an amalgamation of multiple elements from the classic geopolitics works of Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, Karl Haushofer, and many others. Dugin builds on Mackinder's theory by emphasizing the intrinsic confrontation between “land powers” and “sea powers.” The “land powers” are associated with fixed space, leading to stable social norms and traditions that manifest themselves in authoritarian, hierarchical systems with an opposition to trade. By contrast, the “sea powers” are founded on dynamic space and conducive to blurred ethical and legal norms, thus lending themselves to democratic, non-hierarchical, and commercial modes of organization of life (Dugin 1997, 46). Dugin writes that, geographically, “land powers” prevail across Northeast Eurasia, occupying the territories of the erstwhile Russian Empire or the USSR, whereas “sea powers” dominate the coastal zones of the Eurasian continent, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean (16). Mackinder's theory, extensively utilized by Dugin, emphasizes Russia's unique situation as a land power in the “heartland,” or the center of the Eurasian continent. On this view, Russia identifies neither with East nor West, but with a third – culturally and geopolitically distinct – entity: Eurasia (165–166). Thus, according to Dugin, Russia has a “historical imperative” to defend its authenticity (167) and project its geopolitical influence (44) in the face of foreign influences.

For Dugin, the Cold War period was the climax of the confrontation between “land power” and “sea power,” with both the USSR and the US seeking to maximize their respective strategic spaces (Dugin 1997, 18). In retrospect, Dugin sees Gorbachev's reforms of “perestroika” and “new thinking” – and the ensuing demise of the USSR – as voluntary concessions by the heartland that brought about a conscious transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world. Dugin warns that the West's victory in the Cold War spells

the end of the bipolar world and the subsequent birth of a unipolar world, with the geopolitical winners strategically designing the world in their own interests and thus destroying the conceptual future of "Eurasia" (160). He contends that the West makes every effort to prevent the formation of a large-scale continental geopolitical bloc led by Russia (160–161).

Dugin glorifies the Russian people as a "planetary historical phenomenon" and the bearers of a civilizational mission to unify the Eurasian space against the Catholic-Protestant West (Dugin 1997, 188–191). He emphasizes that Russians "care about everything and everyone, and therefore ... their interests are limited neither by the Russian ethnos, nor by the Russian Empire, nor even by the whole of Eurasia" (191). As a result, Dugin is deeply concerned about the Russian ethno-demographic crisis. In his view, such a crisis could be resolved through a national ideology that focused on cultural and religious revival: "Russians should realize that, first of all, they are Orthodox, second, they are Russians, and only third, people" (255). To Dugin, it seems logical that "the people should be inspired by the idea that, by giving birth to a Russian child, each family participates in the national mystery, replenishing the spiritual wealth of all the people" (257). However, he dismisses Russian nationalism as a pro-Atlanticist phenomenon (112), emphasizing space rather than blood as Russia's defining feature. Without their empire, he concludes, the Russians are destined to lose their identity and disappear as a nation (250).

In Dugin's view, one of the most daunting geopolitical tasks facing Russia is the creation of a Eurasian strategic bloc that would include the former Soviet republics and Eastern European states, countries in the "continental West" (NATO members), and countries in the continental East (Iran, India, Japan) (Dugin 1997, 171). Dugin warns that "if Russia does not immediately begin to recreate the Great Space, i.e. re-establish its natural sphere of strategic, political, and economic influence ... it will plunge itself and all the peoples living on the 'World Island' into a catastrophe" (172). Dugin denies the statehood of post-Soviet and Eastern European states, calling them "territorial processes" that lack any sovereign attributes (184), being politically and culturally close to Russia but also affected to some degree by the West (426). Indeed, he goes so far as to describe them as part of a "cordon sanitaire," the hostility of whose inhabitants toward both East and West is exploited by Atlanticism to create tension between the continental powers – Germany and Russia (428–429).

According to Dugin, the Ukrainian question is the most daunting problem facing Moscow today, since its successful resolution is pivotal to the success of the entire Eurasian project. In his words, "[T]he existence of Ukraine in the current borders and with its current status as a 'sovereign state' is no less than a monstrous blow to Russia's geopolitical security, and is equivalent to the invasion of its territory" (Dugin 1997, 348). Dugin explains that the geopolitical risks Ukraine poses to his imperial project stem from its political ambivalence as a country in the "cordon sanitaire," its large territory and population, its control over the Black Sea coast, and its willingness to join NATO (348, 377–383). In a similar vein, Dugin proposes close integration of Belarus and Russia while preserving the cultural and linguistic identity of Belarusians and localized ethnic groups (376).

Following Karl Haushofer, Dugin argues for the creation of a Berlin-Moscow-Tokyo axis – that is, building alliances with Germany in the West, Japan in the East, and Iran in the South (Dugin 1997, 72). In Dugin's view, the creation of a Moscow-Berlin alliance would, from a political standpoint, allow Russia to squeeze the United States out of Europe and ensure that the "cordon sanitaire" was absorbed into the resulting "land power." From an economic perspective, it would guarantee the flow of modern technology into Eurasia (216–226). Likewise, a Moscow-Tokyo alliance would help push Atlanticism out of the East. The southward expansion guaranteed by a Moscow-Tehran alliance would open the Eurasian empire to the southern seas (238–241). Dugin proposes luring Germany and Japan into these alliances with the promise of Russian territory: Germany would get Kaliningrad Oblast, while Japan would receive the Kuril Islands. Dugin also sees nothing wrong with deploying Russia's natural resource wealth for political gain, including by manipulating exports and compensating potential allies for the weakening of ties with the US (276). After all, he believes that the Atlanticist project is fragile enough that the creation of alternative alliances will eventually lead to its collapse (259).

Surprisingly, Dugin views both China and Turkey as proponents of Atlanticism. In particular, he argues that for China, close ties with the West would be far more beneficial than those with Russia on account of the West's superior technological standing and the fact that Russia's geopolitical interests necessitate containing China's ambitions to its north (360).

Dugin warns that the plausibility of the Eurasia project depends on a strategic nuclear balance between Atlanticism (NATO) and Russia (264). The presence of such a balance increases Russia's attractiveness in the eyes of other states and helps to resolve security threats emanating from the United States and NATO (265–267).

From an economic standpoint, Dugin argues that as the social value of certain economic activities increases, "collective" ownership surpasses "private" ownership. These economic spheres are directly connected to the strategic interests of the state and should be controlled exclusively by the state (283). However, this economic structure is affected by national security vulnerabilities: whereas in peacetime the private sector expands at the expense of the collective and state sectors, in wartime the state sector comes to dominate the other two (283).

Speaking about Europe in general, Dugin contends that if contemporary Europe were to find itself in a situation of strategic, cultural, economic, and political dependence on the United States, it would most likely see a rise in anti-American sentiments and embrace a struggle for geopolitical independence from the US (367). By taking advantage of these processes, he argues, Russia could pull Europe out of NATO, promote NATO-free European integration, form a strategic military alliance with Germany, and establish economic cooperation on the basis of mineral and technology exchange (368).

## The model: theory and empirics

While my review of Dugin's theory by no means attempts to be comprehensive, it helps to illuminate the core ideas outlined in his *Foundations of Geopolitics* and develop a conceptual framework for further statistical testing. Unfortunately, many implications of his theory cannot be empirically tested because they cannot be mapped onto the available data, while even testable elements are potentially subject to measurement errors. Nevertheless, the survey data and modern methods of statistical analysis allow me to test whether the attitudes of Russian elites are in line with the basic implications of Dugin's model.

From the perspective of domestic politics, the growth in internal and external threats is expected to be strongly positively associated with greater support for the state economy and authoritarianism, as well as higher levels of nationalism and patriotism, and lower levels of xenophobia (because lower levels of xenophobia would ensure the integrity of a multi-ethnic Eurasia). It is anticipated that at the international level, the perception of external threats will be lower with respect to Russia's *allies* (Japan, Germany, Europe)<sup>1</sup> and higher with respect to its *rivals* (NATO, the US, Great Britain, China) and countries in the *cordon sanitaire* (Ukraine, Estonia, Poland, Georgia). These groupings are based on Dugin's assessment of whether selected states would be strategically supportive of Russia's Eurasian ambitions. Moreover, one can expect that national identity factors will be positively associated with these country groupings: the stronger the feelings of patriotism, nationalism, and xenophobia, the stronger will be positive attitudes toward *allies* and negative attitudes toward *rivals* and *cordon sanitaire* states. Expansionist sentiments are expected to be positively correlated with more negative attitudes toward Russia's *rivals* and countries in the *cordon sanitaire*. Both "hard power militarism" and "soft power militarism," used as instruments of geopolitical dominance with a focus on military force and natural resources, respectively, are expected to be positively associated with a heightened sense of external threat and approval of expansionism (e.g. Russia's unification with Ukraine, Belarus, or Europe).

Since Dugin's theory puts particular emphasis on Ukraine, regarding it as pivotal to the success of the Eurasian project, Russian elites might see the Ukraine crisis as a battleground for the fate of the Eurasian project, forcing them to be more amenable to Dugin's ideas. The strength of the aforementioned associations between concepts is therefore expected to differ between the periods before and after the annexation of Crimea, with stronger associations between concepts after 2014. Another implication of the Ukraine crisis would be greater susceptibility to neo-Eurasianism among those who are tasked with

defending and promoting state interests: elites associated with the government or military apparatus would display stronger ideological adherence to Dugin's ideas than other elite groups.

The proposed measurement model examines the relationship between “factors” and “manifest variables” by allowing the factors and variables to correlate with each other. In other words, the measurement model enables me to obtain quantitative measurements of the abstract concepts (factors) described in the previous paragraph – internal/external threats, nationalism, patriotism, state economy, authoritarianism, etc. – and to estimate the strength of the linear relationship (association) between each pair of factors.

The model includes 13 concepts drawn from Dugin's theory. Each factor represents different sets of manifest variables obtained from the survey data (see Table A1 in the online Appendix). Since the nature of the factors is inferred from the relationships among the observed variables chosen to measure them, then if some manifest variables are missing from the data or misrepresent the factor, the possibility of measurement error is higher. In this paper, I assume that my proposed factors are adequately measured by the manifest variables. The model was estimated using the Markov Chain Monte Carlo method (MCMC) in OpenBUGS (Lee 2007; Lunn et al. 2013; OpenBUGS 2013); see Appendix B for details.<sup>2</sup>

At the domestic level, the *Internal Threats* factor includes assessments of domestic security threats, such as Russia's inability to resolve its internal problems, a rise in ethnic tensions, a “color” revolution, a rise in economic inequality among the Russian population, a rise in prices and inflation, and a decline in the oil price. The *State Economy* factor is constructed using variables that measure the degree of disapproval of economic competition, perceptions of whether all heavy industry should belong to the state, and the importance of state-owned enterprises in the economy. The *Authoritarianism* factor encompasses the questions of whether the public expression of dangerous ideas should be prohibited, whether competition among parties does not make the system stronger, whether order should be established at any price, and whether Russia should follow a unique Russian path. The final question harks back to the Slavophile-Westernizer debate of the mid-nineteenth century about whether Russia should take its own historical path or follow the model of Western democracies; Zimmerman shows that support for a unique Russian path is highest among socialist authoritarians, i.e. those whose orientations are congruent with traditional Soviet communist orientations (Zimmerman 2002). The *Patriotism* factor hinges on a set of questions related to whether the person is proud of Russia's political influence in the world, economic achievements, armed forces, history, and level of democracy (Kalinin 2018). The *Nationalism* factor combines two subsets of questions: ethnic-based (importance of being Russian by nationality and of being Orthodox) and civic-based (importance of speaking Russian, being born in Russia, having Russian citizenship, and respecting the Russian political system). The *Xenophobia* factor explores elites' negative attitudes toward Jews, immigrants, Muslims, and people from the Caucasus.

At the international level, the *External Threats* factor includes a set of manifest variables measuring perceptions of foreign security threats due to the growth of US military power compared to its Russian counterpart, border conflicts between Russia and the CIS countries, and terrorism, as well as general assessments of the US and China as country-threats to Russian national security. The factor *Allies* reflects positive perceptions of those states viewed by Dugin as potential supporters of Russia's neo-Eurasianist project, such as Japan, Germany, and Europe; the factor *Rivals* contains negative perceptions of those states or organizations viewed as threats to the project (NATO, United States, Great Britain, China); and the factor *Cordon* captures attitudes toward a set of states listed by Dugin as belonging to the *cordon sanitaire*: Ukraine, Estonia, Poland, and Georgia. Finally, the political instruments factors, which assess Russian elites' willingness to resort to military or non-military means, are denoted by *Hard Power Militarism* and *Soft Power Militarism* (hereafter referred to as *Hard Militarism* and *Soft Militarism*). The *Hard Militarism* factor is based on a set of variables reflecting the propensity to use military force to achieve a military balance with the West, to provide security for allies, to defend Russian economic interests, and to defend Russians abroad. The factor of *Soft Militarism* depicts willingness to use non-military means – for instance, oil resources – to achieve expansionist foreign policy objectives. Finally, the factor of *Expansionism* explores whether elites are in favor of Russian unification with Ukraine, Belarus, or Europe.



### Findings

My estimates suggest that all survey variables measure the corresponding factors reasonably well.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 contains correlation matrices depicting the sign and strength of pairwise association between our factors. The correlation coefficient is bounded between -1.0 to 1.0, where -1.0 indicates a perfect negative correlation, 0 means that there is no relationship between the factors, and 1.0 indicates a perfect positive correlation. Negative correlations are shown in blue, positive correlations are shown in red, and those factors that are very weakly correlated are shown in white. To find the correlation coefficient between the factors of *Patriotism* and *Expansionism*, to take one example, the reader should find the row for *Patriotism* and the column for *Expansionism*, then locate the intersection between the two.

As anticipated, there is a strong positive association between factors in the “national identity” group: *Nationalism*, *Patriotism*, and *Xenophobia*. In the upper left-hand corner of the correlation matrix, this set of factors is positively associated with *Internal Threats* and *External Threats*, only partially confirming my theoretical expectation, since *Xenophobia* yields the sign opposite to what the theory predicts. Moreover, counter to my expectations, these findings display a mild decrease in the association between threats and national identity factors in 2016 compared to 2012.

In line with the theory, both observed periods exhibit a positive association between *State Economy* and *Authoritarianism*, with a substantial increase in the post-Crimean period (2012: 0.46; 2016: 0.72). *State Economy* and *Authoritarianism* are also weakly correlated with *External Threats* (2012: 0.57, 0.42; 2016: 0.61, 0.51, respectively) and *Internal Threats* (2012: 0.58, 0.34; 2016: 0.67, 0.43, respectively), with a marked increase in 2016 compared to 2012, thus confirming my hypothesis about the relevance of the 2014 annexation of Crimea to threat perceptions.

On the international level, the factor of *External Threats* demonstrates a moderately positive and stable association with *Allies* (2012: 0.38; 2016: 0.33), *Rivals* (2012: 0.33; 2016: 0.14), and *Cordon* (2012: 0.32; 2016: 0.31), suggesting that the growth in *External Threats* increases positive perceptions of *Allies* and negative perceptions of *Rivals* and *Cordon*. The results of empirical analysis in the upper middle part of the correlation matrix show that the feelings of patriotism, nationalism, and xenophobia are positively correlated with attitudes toward *Allies*, *Rivals*, and *Cordon* states, thus speaking to the notion that domestic nationalistic sentiments shape perceptions of enemies and potential partners. Evidence of temporal changes is quite mixed: while *Patriotism* and *Xenophobia* become more positively

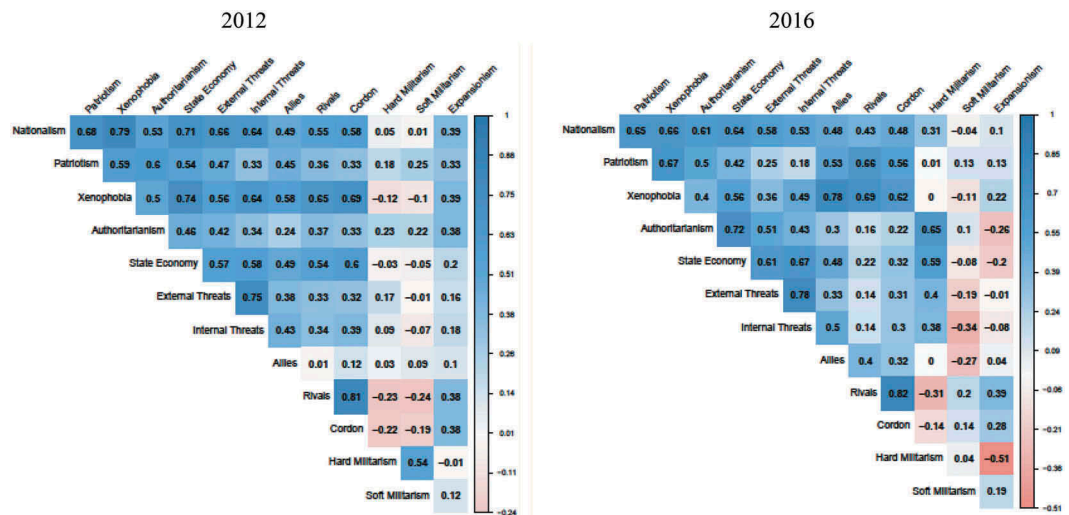


Figure 1. Correlation matrix of factors.

associated with *Allies* and *Rivals* between 2012 and 2016, the association of *Nationalism* with *Allies* and *Rivals* wanes over time.

Interestingly, more negative attitudes toward *Rivals* and *Cordon* seem to be positively correlated with expansionist sentiments (2012: 0.38, 0.38, respectively; 2016: 0.39, 0.28, respectively). Although the theory would expect that both *Hard Militarism* and *Soft Militarism*, as instrumental factors, should demonstrate a strong positive association with both *External Threats* and *Expansionism*, my findings are somewhat mixed: while *Hard Militarism* is positively correlated with *External Threats* (2012: 0.17; 2016: 0.4), it is negatively correlated with *Expansionism* (2012: -0.01; 2016: -0.51); and while *Soft Militarism* is positively correlated with *Expansionism* (2012: 0.12; 2016: 0.19), it is negatively correlated with *External Threats* (2012: -0.01; 2016: -0.19). In other words, my analysis demonstrates inconsistency in the associations among perceptions of external threats, the use of hard or soft power, and expansionistic perceptions. This runs counter to my original expectation that Russian militarism would be strongly positively associated with expansionism. The *Expansionism* factor, however, also yields a positive association with *Rivals* (2012: 0.38; 2016: 0.39) and *Cordon* (2012: 0.38; 2016: 0.28), demonstrating that the growth in negative perceptions of these country-groups results in more salient expansionist attitudes. This observation is in line with the theory: rising tensions between Russia and geopolitical rivals are making expansionist rhetoric more popular with elites. However, the expected increase in the strength of correlations between 2012 and 2016 is not supported by the data.

Overall, my analysis demonstrates that Dugin's theory has limited applicability to our understanding of contemporary elite perceptions in Russia. In other words, elite sentiments do not mesh neatly with all aspects of Dugin's theory. The data is supportive of external and internal threats relating to perceptions of authoritarianism, on the one hand, and perceptions of nationalism and patriotism, on the other. However, higher levels of xenophobia are inconsistent with Dugin's vision of a unified multiethnic Eurasia. Moreover, in the international dimension, both types of militarism (hard and soft) seem to be negatively or weakly positively correlated with expansionist tendencies. Furthermore, my expectations of the substantial presence of stronger correlations in the post-Crimean period compared to 2012 are not confirmed by my empirical findings in the majority of cases (the exceptions being stronger correlations between *State Economy* and *Authoritarianism*, as well as between *Hard Militarism* and *External Threats*).

My overall finding – that Dugin's geopolitics are becoming increasingly irrelevant to Russian elites – is also supported by data from Google Trends, which shows how often any given search term is entered relative to the total search volume across various regions of the world. Using this data, I find that global search requests for "Aleksandr Dugin" peaked at the height of the Ukrainian crisis; his name has remained a relatively popular search term ever since (see [Figure 2](#)). However, if I focus on the Russian Internet, Dugin's popularity exhibited a smaller spike, and since 2014 his search-interest has decayed to near zero, from which we might infer that Dugin's influence on Russian intellectual life is quite limited. As some scholars and observers note, this influence could be purely instrumental: the Kremlin may choose to use Dugin's theory to justify its decisions (Laruelle 2008; Gessen 2017).

Although Dugin's theory is not highly predictive of elite attitudes as a whole, it may have more predictive power for the attitudes of those closest to the halls of power. Members of elites associated with the government or military apparatus might well display stronger ideological cohesion around Dugin's ideas than other elite groups. To test this claim, I resort to estimation of a series of ordinary least squares regressions (OLS), with factor scores – numerical values indicating an individual's relative standing on each factor – used as dependent variables. Among the included independent variables are elite group dummies indicating whether the respondent works in private business, state-owned enterprises, the executive and legislative branches, or the military/security apparatus (the mass media and science groups are omitted from the models in order to serve as reference categories); gender; age; education (with higher humanitarian and higher technical coded as "0" and higher military and higher administrative coded as "1"); and religiosity (10-point scale from "not at all important" to "very important").

The results of analysis for selected factors are presented in [Table 1](#) (see Appendix Table A2 for complete results). According to the findings for 2012, compared to the reference category (elites in



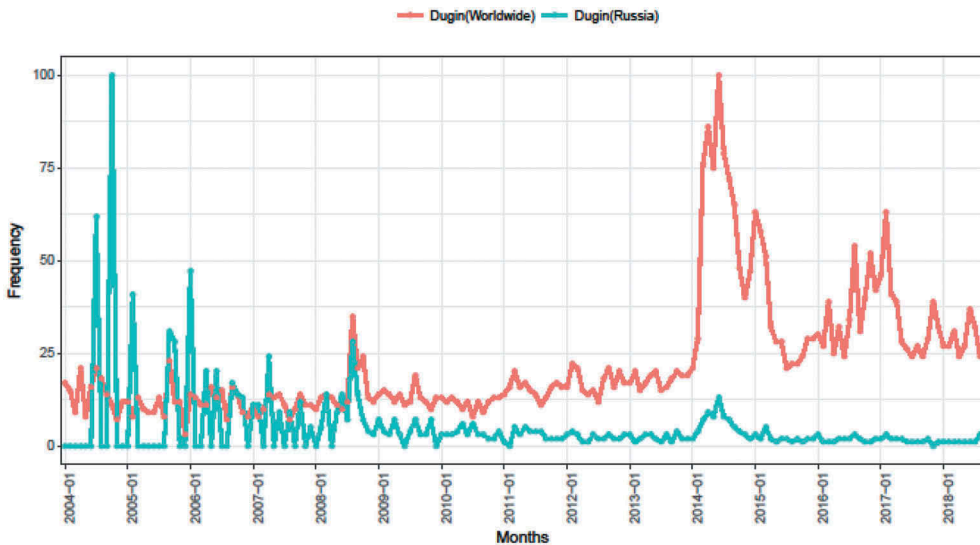


Figure 2. Google Trends data for the search term “Aleksandr Dugin.”.

media/science), government officials have heightened perceptions of *External Threats* (Executive Branch: 0.21\*; Legislative Branch: 0.23\*) and greater levels of *Patriotism* (Legislative Branch: 0.3\*) and *Soft Militarism* (Legislative Branch: 0.28\*). The military and the security apparatus display comparatively higher anxiety over both types of threats (0.3\*), concern over Rivals (0.46\*\*), and disapproval of *Soft Militarism* (−0.44\*\*\*), which is unsurprising given the nature of these agencies. In a similar vein, exposure to military and administrative education, as opposed to other types of education, is conducive to higher levels of *Patriotism* (0.64\*\*\*), *Hard* and *Soft Militarism* (0.25\*, 0.39\*\*\*), and *Expansionism* (0.36). The latter observation is most likely explicable by reference to the specifics of civil and military education programs, and partly speaks to the prominence of specific theories, such as Dugin’s, in those contexts.

The cross-products of the year dummies and the elite group dummies enable me to draw comparisons between 2012 and 2016: a positive statistically significant coefficient would mean that for a specific elite group the average level of the factor score has risen since the year 2012, while a negative statistically significant coefficient would mean the opposite. Finally, a statistically insignificant coefficient means that there is no difference in the average levels of the factors between 2012 and 2016.

In the section with interaction terms (i.e. cross-products of the year dummies and the elite group dummies), Table 1 shows that compared to the pre-Crimean period, in the post-Crimean period, government officials display less susceptibility to *Internal* (Executive Branch: −1.25\*\*\*; Legislative Branch: −1.33\*\*\*) and *External Threats* (Executive Branch: −0.98\*\*\*; Legislative Branch: −1.01\*\*\*), less appreciation of *Hard Militarism* (Executive Branch: −1.27\*\*\*; Legislative Branch: −1.58\*\*\*) than *Soft Militarism* (Executive Branch: 0.43\*\*), greater concern about *Rivals* (Executive Branch: 0.55\*\*\*; Legislative Branch: 0.7\*\*\*), and higher levels of *Expansionism* (Executive Branch: 0.55\*; Legislative Branch: 0.83\*\*). Military elites exhibit slightly different attitudes: comparatively higher levels of *Patriotism* (0.36<sup>x</sup>) and favorability toward *Hard Militarism* (0.7\*\*) and *Soft Militarism* (0.45\*). Thus, even though government elites demonstrate greater ideological cohesion than non-government elites, the claim that ideological conformity with Dugin’s theory would be higher in the post-Crimean period than in the pre-Crimean period is only partly confirmed for the military/security apparatus. These results are also partially confirmed by the measurement models estimated separately for government and non-government elites (see Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix).

**Table 1.** Comparing the effects of socio-demographic variables on factors, 2012–2016 (selected factors).

Variables	<i>Patriotism</i>	<i>External Threats</i>	<i>Internal Threats</i>	<i>Rivals</i>	<i>Hard Militarism</i>	<i>Soft Militarism</i>	<i>Expansionism</i>
Intercept	-1.46 (0.96)	-0.59 (0.71)	-0.08 (0.92)	-0.05 (0.91)	0.23 (0.97)	0.51 (0.77)	-2.62* (1.25)
Executive Branch	0.11 (0.13)	0.21* (0.1)	0.09 (0.13)	0.09 (0.13)	0.17 (0.14)	0.07 (0.11)	0.00 (0.17)
Legislative Branch	0.3* (0.15)	0.23* (0.11)	0.1 (0.14)	-0.07 (0.14)	0.22 (0.15)	0.28* (0.12)	-0.17 (0.19)
Military/Security	-0.17 (0.16)	0.3* (0.12)	0.3 <sup>x</sup> (0.16)	0.46** (0.16)	-0.23 (0.17)	-0.44*** (0.13)	-0.22 (0.21)
Education (Military/ Administ.)	0.64*** (0.12)	-0.02 (0.09)	-0.19 <sup>x</sup> (0.11)	0.05 (0.11)	0.25* (0.12)	0.39*** (0.1)	0.36* (0.15)
Year2016	1.01 (1.37)	0.2 (1.00)	0.15 (1.29)	-0.15 (1.29)	0.4 (1.39)	-0.92 (1.09)	2.32 (1.73)
Executive branch * Year 2016	-0.11 (0.19)	-0.98*** (0.14)	-1.25*** (0.18)	0.55*** (0.18)	-1.27*** (0.2)	0.43** (0.16)	0.55* (0.24)
Legislative * Year2016	-0.13 (0.23)	-1.01*** (0.16)	-1.33*** (0.21)	0.7*** (0.21)	-1.58*** (0.23)	0.19 (0.18)	0.83** (0.27)
Military * Year2016	0.36 <sup>x</sup> (0.22)	-0.08 (0.17)	-0.07 (0.22)	-0.69** (0.22)	0.7** (0.23)	0.45* (0.18)	0.12 (0.29)
Education * Year2016	-0.48** (0.16)	-0.01 (0.11)	0.08 (0.15)	-0.12 (0.15)	-0.15 (0.16)	-0.27* (0.13)	-0.23 (0.2)

Notes: Models are based on ordinary least squares regression with select control variables displayed (see Appendix Table A2 for complete results). Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: <sup>x</sup> $p \leq 0.1$ , \* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ . The problem of missing data has been addressed with multiple imputation by chained equations with *mice()* package in R.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have tested the influence of the basic tenets of Dugin's neo-Eurasianism on the attitudes of Russian elites. My general findings suggest that for the most part, elites hold foreign policy attitudes in line with Dugin's theoretical premises only in certain respects – for instance, the positive association of threat perceptions with authoritarianism, national-identity factors, and country-groups. Government elites also exhibit higher levels of ideological cohesion than non-government elites. However, the xenophobia identified in Russian elites stands to undermine Dugin's empire-building project, which calls for a unified and multi-ethnic Eurasia. In addition, the key parts of the theory related to militarism and expansionism lack strong empirical support. Furthermore, Dugin's theory does not appear to be more salient in the post-Crimean period than in the pre-Crimean period, a finding that runs counter to my theoretical expectations.

Overall, my main conclusion is that Dugin's theory has limited utility for understanding elites' foreign policy perceptions. There are several possible explanations for this. First, my findings are based on the assumptions that Dugin's theory is internally consistent and that the measurement model adequately captures the concepts. If, however, these assumptions are violated, the observed inconsistency may be due to measurement error. Second, the Kremlin's willingness to exploit select elements of Dugin's theory in specific periods may make it only temporarily and partially salient to elites. Third, Dugin's theory may be too complex for elites to follow, making it hard for them to rally behind his ideas. Finally, it may also be the case that only those parts of Dugin's theory that are consonant with elites' pre-existing views (perhaps related to realism or remnants of Marxism-

Leninism) gain traction with them. But as a coherent body of work, Dugin's theory – although popularized in the West – is not particularly relevant in Russia itself.

## Notes

1. Dugin asserts that Germany and Russia, as continental powers, tend to be natural allies in terms of their geopolitical interests; Russia's natural rivals are the maritime powers, the UK and the US (214). He also claims that once it becomes geopolitically independent from the US, a unified and politically neutral Europe could become Moscow's ally in building "the body of new Europe" (367–368).
2. The Bayesian approach adds flexibility to estimation procedures: it helps to integrate prior knowledge about parameters of interest, combine imputation procedures for missing values with the overall estimation process, and relax traditional identification requirements along with normality assumptions, thus enabling the researcher to explicitly specify appropriate probability distributions. Given that the data sample is quite small and has many missing values, Bayesian estimation is the most appropriate for my estimation strategy.
3. In the Bayesian framework, inference involves communicating features of the posterior distribution of parameters. All estimates provided below are based on stationary posterior distribution of the Markov chain obtained from 20,000 iterations.

## Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was prepared for presentation at the conference "Sources of Conflict between Russia and the West," Hamilton College, Clinton, NY, April 20–21, 2018.

The author is grateful to William Zimmerman (University of Michigan), Sharon and David Rivera (Hamilton College), Kimberly Marten (Barnard College), Vladimir Gel'man (University of Helsinki), Dina Smeltz (Chicago Council on Global Affairs), and other participants in the conference "Sources of Conflict between Russia and the West" (April 20–21, 2018) for their valuable comments and suggestions on the previous version of this paper.

## References

- Dugin, A. 1997. *Osnovy Geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoe Budushchee Rossii [Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia]*. Moscow: Arktogeya.
- Dunlop, J. B. 2004. "Aleksandr Dugin's Foundations of Geopolitics." *Demokratizatsiya* 12 (1): 41–57.
- Gessen, M. 2017. *The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Kalinin, K. 2018. "National Identity and National Interests of the Russian Elites, 2012–2016." Paper presented at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April 5–8. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3160392.
- Laruelle, M. 2008. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Lee, S.-Y. 2007. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Bayesian Approach*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, Wiley Series in Probability and Statistics.
- Lunn, D., C. Jackson, N. Best, A. Thomas, and D. J. Spiegelhalter. 2013. *The BUGS Book: A Practical Introduction to Bayesian Analysis*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton.
- OpenBUGS. 2013. "OpenBUGS." Accessed 1 September 2018. <http://www.openbugs.net/w/Downloads>
- Zimmerman, W. 2002. *The Russian People and Foreign Policy: Russian Elite and Mass Perspectives, 1993–2000*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zimmerman, W., S. W. Rivera, and K. Kalinin. 2019. *Survey of Russian Elites, Moscow, Russia, 1993–2016*. ICPSR03724-v6. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. [distributor]. September 11. doi:10.3886/ICPSR03724.v6.