

CHAPTER 5

An Unattainable Ideal

Youth and Patriotism in Russia

Jussi Lassila

Abstract

The chapter discusses patriotism's role and future prospects in Russia in relation to its principal target, Russia's youth. Beneath the overall conformism with the Kremlin's patriotic policies, youth's relatively marginal engagement with any fixed patriotic identity is to be found among a variety of patriotic activists who prefer a distinct patriotic position to the state and the rest of society. In generational terms, Russia is witnessing a deepening gap between the policymakers of patriotism and the youth. On the one hand, the state repeatedly attempts to strengthen patriotism as an ideological tool in controlling societal and cultural processes, while, on the other hand, youth's departing views from Soviet-like modes of patriotic education ignite demands to increase the role of patriotism further. Over the course of the next 10–15 years, it

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is very likely that a change in the balance between Soviet-era and post-Soviet cohorts of policymakers and conductors of patriotic policies will have a significant impact on the role and meaning of patriotism in Russian society.

Keywords: Youth, patriotism, militarism, patriotic education, Putin

Introduction: Patriotism as a Substitute for the Lost Ideology

Russian identity and patriotism, especially among young people over the past 25 years, have visibly eroded, westernized and de-heroized through television and other media, the Internet, film distribution, mass art, all types of advertising and propaganda, which in essence were part of the information-psychological war of the West, aimed at transforming the Russian mentality, its value-normative core. (Semënov, 2017, p. 133)¹

The topic of patriotism is perhaps the most tangible evidence of Soviet legacies figuring in Russia almost 30 years after the end of the Soviet Union. There are two factors worth mentioning in explaining this legacy. First, after the early stages of the Soviet rule that comprised Lenin's anti-state internationalist ideas, Stalin's doctrine of socialism in one country was a pre-stage of *Soviet patriotism* regardless of the ideational controversy between communism (Soviet) and a bourgeois type of belonging to a nation state (patriotism). Retrospectively, this controversy became ultimately buried in Hitler's attack in 1941 when the 'Great Patriotic War' of the Soviet state was formulated under the existential threat. Regarding the magnitude and repercussions of the war, as well as the Soviet victory in it, it is no wonder that it became the cornerstone for the post-Soviet patriotism. In terms of cultural trauma (Giesen, 2004), wars have always been central pillars for nations' identity narratives, and human losses in this war were particularly devastating. While the actual cultivation of the victory began in the mid-1960s (Dubin, 2004), at the crossroads of Soviet geopolitical power and of the looming stagnation of the Soviet system,

the past-looking cult of the war became deeply intertwined with the memory of the Soviet Union's 'golden days' (Gudkov, 2012; Kangaspuro and Lassila, 2012; Wolfe, 2006).

Second, as to other elements of Soviet patriotism – namely ideals of universally good behaviour and citizenship and readiness to defend your homeland – its appeal strengthened considerably among the number of policymakers, teachers and citizens during the chaotic years of the 1990s. In addition to changes in public opinion in the mid-1990s, from pro-Western sympathies to growing demands of national order and a strong state (Dubin, 2001), the political elite became more sensitive towards patriotism. During his presidential campaign in 1996, Boris Yeltsin encouraged society to search for a new national idea. This was a political concession towards issues of national identity in the midst of deepening distrust among the population towards the Kremlin's liberal and economically centred policies. Likewise, a new emphasis on national identity was Yeltsin's tactics of 'patriotic centrism': the political stance that aimed to resonate with the majority mood while downplaying the political capital of the Kremlin's hard-line anti-Western opponents (Laruelle, 2009, p. 23). Unsurprisingly, its central historical reference was the memory of the Great Patriotic War (Malinova, 2015, pp. 91–100).

It was Vladimir Putin's rule that meant the actual consolidation of patriotic centrism in Russian society and politics. The cultivation of Soviet patriotism was 'hijacked' from communists' political rallies and 'nationalized' for the Kremlin's political capital in galvanizing the state's unity around the new president (Kangaspuro and Lassila, 2017; Malinova, 2017). The introduction of the state programmes of patriotic upbringing and the establishment of pro-Kremlin youth movements in 2001 were the first moves in implementing the Putin-era identity policies (Lassila, 2014; Sperling, 2009). The process went on without major disturbances throughout the first decade of the millennium. The first major blow to the Kremlin's alleged consensus of patriotism appeared via anti-governmental protests in the winter and spring of 2011–2012. Whereas the state patriotism had become largely manifested thus far by activities of pro-Kremlin youth movements – supposedly

preventing any youth activities against the state – the large-scale oppositional mobilization in 2011–2012 proved that the societal prevalence of patriotism was a different thing than a political engagement with it. The story of the Naši youth movement as the major patriotic youth policy actor was over and the implementation of state youth policies was restructured (Lassila, 2014, 2016; Schwenk, 2019).

Patriotism as a major pillar of the Kremlin's policies did not disappear, however. Quite the opposite: since 2012, along with Putin's third presidential term and the Kremlin's strengthening authoritarianism, the military aspect of patriotism and patriotic education have become more emphasized. In terms of Russia's domestic developments, the year 2014 became the watershed for the military-patriotic trend within patriotism (see Eemil Mitikka and Margarita Zavadskaya, Chapter 6, this volume). The annexation of Crimea, the war in Ukraine and the conflict with the West have had a significant impact on the goals and contents of patriotic policies. Before the year 2014, the state's programmes of patriotic upbringing since 2001² have demonstrated a more or less visible friction with those youth policy goals that have relied on civic education patterns (Blum, 2006; Lassila, 2014; Piattoeva, 2005). Developments since 2014 provided for proponents of the Soviet-style patriotic upbringing a major leitmotif to demand further efforts to militarize the curriculum of patriotic education.

The persistence of patriotism as the state's policy ideal is also a result of Russia's weak legacy of civil society and of resistance against authoritarian initiatives (Lussier, 2016). Resources and societal traditions for establishing individually oriented civic education patterns in the 1990s were minuscule. Along with deepening economic problems, teachers and authorities simply lacked the framework and skills to conduct West-looking civil society ideals. These challenges were already appearing during the perestroika-era educational practices when teachers were embattled with new ideals of communicative equality intended to replace previous authoritative didactics (Gorham, 2000). These challenges deepened in the chaotic circumstances of the post-Soviet 1990s that rapidly fostered old ways of teaching children as future

citizens. As Anna Sanina (2017) points out in her comprehensive study on patriotic education in Russia, ‘for the majority of teachers and school directors, the task of civic education was new, so they understood and implemented it through the tools that were accessible to them, and the greatest of those tools was patriotic education’ (ibid., p. 144). A quote from Sanina’s respondent, a 55-year-old male teacher, captures the weight of the Soviet-era patriotic education patterns vis-à-vis new democratic expectations:

What could we tell them [the students]? That tomorrow they will have a bright future ... a bright future is also something from ideology, right? The ideology was sort of forbidden. So we had to appeal to the emotions and feelings of patriotism, and to show that our great country is great, that we ascend after the Great Patriotic War. (ibid., p. 145)

Whereas the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation explicitly prohibited any state ideology, the process of amending the Russian Constitution, which began with President Putin’s address to the Federal Assembly on 15 January 2020, lifted the importance of patriotism to a new, constitutional level.³ These changes crystallize patriotism’s role for the country’s political establishment as the most suitable ‘ideological substitute’ for the widespread negative experiences that the 1990s evoked in the majority of Russians. In addition, as the quote above shows, patriotism had been an intrinsic element for teachers educated during the Soviet years, who had faced the hardships of the 1990s. All these factors facilitated the consolidation of the state patriotism as the flagship of Russia’s identity policies under Putin. Its symbolic cradle has been the cultivation of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, not least due to its exclusive role as the most important national event for the population.

Against this backdrop, the chapter examines patriotism’s role and prospects in Russia vis-à-vis its central target, Russia’s youth. A central point is the coexistence that prevails between the overall conformism with the state’s patriotic policies among the population, including the youth, and a relatively marginal engagement to any fixed patriotic identity. In terms of this coexistence, or of

tension, the next two sections contextualize patriotism in light of youth's political participation over the course of the Putin era, drawn from the existing literature on the topic. The discussion shows that those who wish to identify themselves as true patriots prefer a distinct patriotic position to the state and the rest of society. In a similar vein, the nationalist military voluntarism related to the war in Ukraine appears as a part of diverse popular interpretations that the state's vague patriotic policies have generated. Both issues illustrate the absence of consensus on 'correct' and satisfactory ways of conducting patriotism in society. Taking together these developments, the rest of the chapter illustrates that Russia is witnessing a deepening generational gap between policymakers of patriotism and youth. This gap is present, on the one hand, in repeated attempts to strengthen patriotism as an ideological tool in controlling societal and cultural processes. On the other hand, the impression on youth's departing views from Soviet-like modes of upbringing ignite demands to increase the role of patriotism further, in particular among those who are prone to traditional values, typically understood as values that shone in the past. Meanwhile, vague parameters of evaluating patriotism's effectiveness along with opposite trends in youth's social behaviour, as well as ageing implementers of patriotic policies, do not provide promising prospects for patriotic education policies in the future. A potential rupture between generations does not mean that patriotism would disappear from educational and policy ideals. Yet, it is highly probable that an inevitable change in the balance between Soviet-era and post-Soviet cohorts of policymakers and conductors of patriotic policies will have a significant impact for the role and meaning of patriotism in the future.

Patriotism and Political Participation

There are plenty of data that indicate political apathy among Russians, in particular, among Russia's youth. Weak political participation of youth is even mentioned as a challenge in the current state's youth policy (*Strategiâ razvitiâ molodeži Rossijskoj Federacii*, 2013), yet the Kremlin's exclusive political practices

have repeatedly demonstrated that politically passive citizens are much more preferable than active ones. Over the course of the years, opinion polls have shown that citizens, including young Russians, are politically passive. At the same time, they demonstrate a relatively positive attitude towards political participation, yet in generational terms young Russians have tended to be less interested than older people in political issues (see e.g. FOM, 2008, 2017). However, such data seem to predict youth's actual behaviour poorly, as far as we have seen that youth in particular have been active in protest events in 2017 and 2018. In this respect, it can be asserted that youth's apoliticism is not related to politics as such but to existing political structures and formations (Omelčenko, 2006). For instance, at a time of the large-scale public presence of pro-Kremlin youth organizations in late 2007, the majority of respondents (66%) pointed out that they did not know anything about the Naši youth movement, which appeared to be the most familiar movement in the poll of the Levada-Center (2008). For 56% of respondents, Naši did not arouse any special feelings either (ibid.). In a similar vein, according to a poll by FOM (2011), approximately 55% of respondents did not know any youth movements, although the most familiar ones were the pro-Kremlin movements Molodaâ Gvardiâ ('Young Guard'), Naši and Molodaâ Rossiâ ('Young Russia').

The case of patriotism demonstrates a similar coexistence between the overall conformism with ideals promoted by the state and the popular lack of interest towards the conductors of these ideals. Citizens tend to separate their lack of approval of the government's actions from general support and pride in their country (Levada-Center, 2014; see also Mitikka and Zavadskaya, Chapter 6, this volume). The state-promoted patriotism in Russia can be seen as a component in institutions of domination – that is, 'instruments of authoritarian imposition, designed to produce compliance and cooperation within monopolies of political power' (Schedler, 2013, p. 54). In this capacity, 'authoritarian regimes need to build solid institutions of domination if they wish to thrive and survive' (ibid.). In line with Andreas Schedler's argument, according to which uncertainty is an endogenous rather

than exogenous risk for all authoritarian regimes, in particular for electoral authoritarian ones, the Kremlin's patriotism represents mixed results. It has effectively fulfilled the vacuum of political ideals in the post-communist ideational absence, strengthening the impression of the Kremlin's ideological domination. However, at the same time, Russians' perceptions on patriotism show that they are far from fixed, not to mention politically active, engagement with the state's ideals of patriotism.

Paul Goode's (2016) detailed ethnographic study on patriotism's perception among Russians in 2014–2015 shows that Russians' perception and understanding of patriotism is a curious mix of individualism and conformity (see also Huérou, 2015). As a central indication of this conclusion, Goode refers to a casual opinion poll made by a Russian website in August 2014, which urged citizens' opinions in response to the question 'what is more important to you, Crimea or cheese?' (Goode, 2016). According to the poll, 67% of respondents chose cheese over Crimea regardless of the patriotic and anti-Western euphoria that prevailed in Russia in the summer 2014 (*ibid.*). The poll's obvious lack of representativeness notwithstanding, it encapsulates Goode's respondents' views. There is individualism in showing, for instance, material preference of cheese over some abstract ideas, and conformity by constantly viewing patriotism as a positive thing. Russians are generally convinced that the vast majority of their fellow citizens are solidly patriotic, while they believe that the government and society has been effective in producing patriotism. However, when it comes to citizens' personal position, Goode points out, 'Russians embrace an individualist, localized, and apolitical patriotism that takes shape through daily practices related to loving the motherland, daily life, and sacrificing public choice' (*ibid.*, p. 423).

In terms of the regime's political mobilization and means of legitimization, Goode sees that official patriotic narratives have more or less succeeded (*ibid.*, pp. 429–430). Nevertheless, the population's general conformism with patriotism does not make one patriotic. Individuals have their own notions of patriotism, which are closer to an apolitical ideal rather than to public display or civic engagement. It follows that 'official patriotism in Russia

cannot be said to generate regime legitimacy so much as it produces and regulates public displays of regime loyalty, even when such displays appear to others to be ritualized or inauthentic' (ibid., p. 445).

With regard to this individual perception and understanding, patriotism as a concept appears to be autonomous and may serve the purpose of either supporting or criticizing the Kremlin (ibid., p. 421). For instance, in the Levada-Center's (2014) survey in early 2014 (before the annexation of Crimea), the great majority of Russians, 84%, shared the view that 'patriotism is a deep personal feeling; a person decides for him/herself what is patriotic and what is not'. In the 18–24 age group the share was 86%. Only 8% shared the view that 'the state has to define what is patriotic and what is not', and 7% did not know. Furthermore, in terms of political mobilization attached to patriotism, 82% of Russians thought that 'one can criticize the authorities and, at the same time, be a patriot', and only 11% preferred the view that 'one who criticizes the authorities cannot be considered a patriot' (ibid.). Although there was a slight increase towards the state's role in defining the meaning of patriotism in April 2015, a year after the annexation of Crimea, the basic division of views had remained the same. 80% saw patriotism as 'a deep individual feeling', and 13% preferred the state's role in defining patriotism (Levada-Center, 2015).

These data illustrate that the vast majority of Russians reject the idea of the state imposing and defining patriotism from above. However, in 2015, approximately half of Russians (49%) shared the idea that 'a state program of patriotic upbringing is necessary because today, in the front of external and internal threats, the state must bring up patriots ready to defend interests of the country' (Levada-Center, 2015). Such controversy can be explained by the overall consensus on the importance of patriotism that prevails in the Russian society: an individual has a personal patriotic attachment to his/her country and this attachment is something that cannot or should not be imposed by the state. At the same time, there seems to exist a suspicion on fellow citizens' patriotic engagement, and, in terms of fixing the problem, people tend to rely on the Soviet-era didactic practices on patriotic upbringing.

Although answers varied depending on different socio-economic, generational, geographic and education groups, there were at least approximately 30% of Russians⁴ who saw patriotism as a deeply individual matter while, at the same time, arguing for the state's patriotic upbringing policies. This kind of 'controversy in consensus' was also a central finding in Goode's study, which resulted in a constant separation that his respondents drew between patriotism (and overall adaptation to it) and 'being a patriot' (Goode, 2016, pp. 444–445). In other words, for Goode's respondents the most common way of thinking was 'I consider myself a patriotic person, I have an individual view on it, I appreciate active patriots, yet I am not such a person'.

Patriotic Activists

In terms of active patriots as a distinct category from 'loyal masses', Marlene Laruelle's study on members and activists of patriotic youth clubs in Russia shows also patriotism's ambivalence as a state-political guideline (Daucé et al., 2015; Laruelle, 2015). The narrative of the activists and young people participating in these clubs was distant from official discourses, promulgated in top politicians' declarations and education programmes; for instance, 'the idea of regaining Russia's great power status through the daily engagement of citizens alongside the state was totally absent' (Laruelle, 2015, p. 23). Again, these clubs may serve the function of political loyalty by emphasizing their local importance, that is, 'small motherland' (*malaâ rodina*). Likewise, such emphases may have an impact on the fact that people tend to be more patriotic in rural areas. However, to interpret this patriotic activism as a widespread political platform for effective society–military relations is an overstatement (see e.g. Robertshaw, 2015). For sure, many patriotic clubs have links to military institutions but these connections are based on their general military-patriotic position and worldview, rather than on any systemic or consensual coordination of military-patriotic upbringing. As Laruelle points out (2015, pp. 23–24),

Most of the militarized clubs criticize the current state of the Russian military, the lack of seriousness and professional awareness of its officers, and recognise the dangers associated with the hazing (*dedovščina*) of conscripts. Some military clubs thus form a very clear-cut strategy directing some young men to units with no hazing, while trying to persuade others that it would be better for them to avoid military service.

In this respect, there is a paradoxical situation in which the municipalities finance patriotic clubs to prepare young men for conscription, while in practice these clubs may assist in avoiding military service (*ibid.*, p. 23). Moreover, among those clubs, which deal with military history and searching for soldiers' remains, the military is often seen as a 'place full of people lacking passion, who want to live at the state's expense and are in fact mere bureaucrats' (*ibid.*; see also Dahlin, 2017). Indeed, many members of these clubs have not done their military service (Laruelle, 2015, p. 24).

Following Laruelle (*ibid.*), patriotism appears to be a loose platform of 'being a citizen', a form of social activity or hobby via which social legitimacy can be attained. While being built on officially valorized and valued goals – first and foremost, on the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War – patriotic clubs can be seen as useful in terms of fostering the social engagement of Russian citizens and of cultivating their rejection of politics. In other words, patriotic clubs figure as instances of loyalty by producing and maintaining 'an almost content-free and depoliticised patriotism' as the regime's involuntary and concealed allies while claiming their independence from state prerogatives (Daucé et al., 2015; Laruelle, 2015, p. 25). However, the role of the clubs becomes more problematic in terms of the clubs' independence from the state's control:

The majority of clubs existed prior to the Kremlin's renewed interest in the patriotic theme. They are animated by dynamics 'from below', not encouraged from 'above'—even if both tendencies merge, in particular around issues of finance. The clubs are closer to a form of social assistance than to ideological

surveillance: their concerns are drug and alcohol use, family issues and youth anti-social behavior. ... The clubs promote patriotic values that go in the direction desired by the state (order, hierarchy, morality). (Laruelle, 2015, p. 25)

Similar to these clubs, Johanna Dahlin (2017) shows in her study on the Russian Search Movement⁵ that activists often criticize the state as having lost its legitimacy in carrying patriotic values. Instead, genuine patriotic values are regarded as being in the hands of the people or at least in those of some 'enlightened' individuals (ibid.; Laruelle, 2015, p. 26).

These views are in tune with activists of the Naši youth movement who eagerly distinguish themselves from the 'common youth', who they see as politically passive, as well as from other youth political actors and representatives of the state's patriotic policies (Lassila, 2014, pp. 83–92, 154–159). At the same time, while building appealing patriotism for the youth with ambitious aims, Naši lapsed into repetitious and stereotypic representations of patriotism of the Soviet era (ibid.). Hence, the demand for cultivating patriotism is certainly present in society and mutually shared by citizens and patriotic activists. However, a consensus on how to cultivate patriotism 'correctly' is missing. For citizens this appears as the simultaneous conformism with patriotism's overall relevance in society and personal separation from any political and civic activities including patriotism. For patriotic activists, the overall demand of patriotism clashes with the lack of resources or ineffective bureaucracy, or through authorities' measures that suppress voluntary patriotism into a strictly limited framework.

As an example of the latter, according to a law initiated at the end of 2017, all weapons had to be licensed in Rosgvardiâ⁶ from the beginning of the year 2018. The licence requires that weapons must be purchased via official weapon stores, which means that hardly any historical weapon (muskets and the like) could meet the criteria. The consequence was that these guns, commonly used by military history enthusiasts, might become illegal (Dožd', 2017). A representative of a club saw the decision simply as the result of authorities' fear of any armed people who are aware of

military tactics (ibid.). His view is not completely conspiratorial. For instance, Elisabeth Sieca-Kozłowski (2010) points out in her study on military-patriotic education that the state's aim, besides encouraging youth into military service, is also to gather war veterans⁷ into the state's control by preventing their potential spontaneous activities. Recently, along with strengthening control over the internet, practitioners of military history have fallen under repressive measures (Meduza, 2018).

Laruelle (2015 p. 26) asserts that this kind of misunderstanding between the state-backed patriotism and patriotism's actual practices has been useful for the Kremlin (see also Huérou, 2015). This can be explained by the fact that patriotic activities that are in line with the official patriotic goals (the cultivation of the Great Patriotic War's memory in particular) figure as a part of the de-politicized loyalty to the regime. As long as nascent political alternatives to Putin's authoritarian regime are missing, this is certainly true. Yet, my own experience from a military museum in the Leningrad oblast does not completely support this view. This tiny museum is located in the site of bloody battles around the besieged Leningrad, and is dedicated to these events. While practising common patriotic activities by aiming to identify Red Army soldiers who fought there, as well as searching for the remains of soldiers, the director of the museum demonstrated an extremely critical stance towards official views and interpretations of the war. He identified himself as an ultimately patriotic citizen who was proud of demonstrating his independence from the state, while not hiding his deeply anti-American views. The museum's exhibitions did not display any notable difference from the state-run military-patriotic museums in St Petersburg and Moscow except having poorer terms of reference. Yet, the director explained his dedication to the museum by the obligation of seeking the truth of the events and the madness of the war. For instance, by conducting a careful study of the Red Army soldiers executed by NKVD (the Soviet interior ministry) with the Memorial organization, the NGO familiar with its work with the Stalin-era repressions and difficulties with the current regime. This neglected and almost taboo theme in the persistent narrative of the Great Patriotic War

was often expressed with his sarcastic notions on Russia as the victory state (*strana pobeditel'*), while asking by the same token: where can you see the victory today?⁸

From Civic Patriotism to Military Nationalism

Actual practices and survey data related to patriotism show that patriotism's capacity to function as a common national idea securing the unity of the multinational state is tilting towards the division between ethnic Russians and those who do not belong to that group (Goode, 2016; on the relationship between nationalisms and the state, see Laine, 2017). For instance, in 2014, according to a poll by the Levada-Center (2014), 34% of Russians agree (fully or partially) with the statement that 'persons of "non-Russian" nationalities are guilty of causing many of the misfortunes of Russia.' However, when this topic related to migration was asked in less provocative manner, 73% of Russians agreed with the statement 'the government should try to restrict the influx of migrants.' Only 19% agreed with the view that 'the government should not have any administrative barriers against migration, but instead try to use it for the benefit of the country' (ibid.).

The year 2014 demonstrated that a common national idea under the official framework of state patriotism and the Soviet legacy of militarism could become materialized in the name of unrestrained nationalism and military adventurism rather than in terms of defending the multi-ethnic Russian Federation according to official patriotic ideals. The unfolding war in eastern Ukraine in summer 2014 lifted the myth of Novorossiâ – the historical territory containing south-eastern Ukraine – from almost complete ignorance to the epicentre of Russia's political mainstream. At the same time, it showed that the ideological hollowness of the official patriotism had not tamed political circles, more apt to illiberal views than Western-democratic emphases. Nationalist imaginaries of Anti-Majdan and Novorossiâ mobilized armed voluntary groups whose ideas relied either on the restoration of the Soviet Union, of building a fascist Russian state, or of an Orthodox Russian empire (Laruelle, 2016). Whereas many of

these war adventurers belonged to various oppositional and anti-Kremlin nationalist groups (see e.g. Horvath, 2015; Lassila, 2019), the Kremlin's capacity to divide and instrumentalize them along with the regime's policies can be seen as a success. The variety of interpretations that the nationalist myth of Novorossiâ generated among these groups intensified their ideational cleavages rather than transforming their effort into any large-scale nationalist consolidation in the name of the 'Russian Spring'.⁹

Robert Horvath (2015) points out that the annexation of Crimea appeared to be more dividing than consolidating element among Russian nationalists. He sees three factors behind this division. First, the Kremlin-aligned nationalists interpreted the Maidan revolution in Ukraine as a threat to Russia, while oppositional nationalists saw the regime collapse in Ukraine as a civic model in acting against authoritarianism. Second, the general fault line between ethnic nationalist and imperialists had deepened, since the first envisioned Novorossiâ as an ethnically purely Russian enclave, while the latter dreamed of a multi-ethnic Eurasian empire. Finally, the speed of events and the Kremlin's sudden move towards an ambiguous mixture of ethnic and imperial nationalisms managed to 'steal' the nationalists' agenda unto the regime's control (ibid., pp. 820–821; Pain, 2014).

From the viewpoint of seeing patriotism as the regime's means of ideological domination, one could argue that the mobilization of diverse anti-governmental nationalist circles into loyalists of the Kremlin, wittingly or unwittingly, demonstrates that patriotism as a state policy worked. However, this was the Kremlin's ability to instrumentalize, or to conduct 'ideational improvisation' (Hale et al., 2019) in the name of national pride, rather than the success of the state's patriotic guidelines per se. Indeed, official policies on patriotism pursue the Soviet-era ideals of 'good' patriotism that are in contrast to 'bad' nationalism, for instance by linking patriotism to an explicit Soviet-era concept of *internationalism*.¹⁰ In this regard, the outcome of Novorossiâ and of nationalist-militaristic voluntarism served the Kremlin's short-term political interests beyond existing official patriotic policies. The year 2014 underlined the ideological hollowness of patriotism, its

reliance on Soviet-era ideals, and the realities of young people that are increasingly distant from the world of the Soviet days. This gap preserves the lacuna that is filled by actions that counter the official patriotism, either by unexpected nationalist adventurism or by a much more common indifference towards ideals of active patriotic engagement.

Identifying Problems of Patriotic Education

How have then the establishment and policymakers reflected upon obvious problems that prevail between doctrinal patriotism and its perception among the youth? Two emphases can be found in the discussion concerning patriotism's importance in youth's socialization, which can be termed *broad* and *narrow*. Following the broad approach and its essentialist view on patriotism's unambiguous importance and acceptance in society, patriotism is seen as a nexus of all good things that must be fostered further. For example, in one of the numerous textbooks on this matter, patriotism is described as follows:

(P)reservation of mother tongue; attention and concern for big and small [home] Motherland; respect for historical and cultural heritage of the country; responsibility for the fate of the country; mercy and humanism, that is, true patriotism is the combination of positive features that must be formulated by society including pedagogues among younger generations. (Šul'ženko, 2017, p. 241)

This is a manifestation of the enduring legacy of the Soviet-era 'patriotism of everything' (Sanina, 2017). It is not far-fetched to assert that the post-Soviet absence of a state ideology within the legacy of the Soviet-era didactic patterns facilitates seeing patriotism as a solution for variety of anomalies that patriotically oriented pedagogues sense in today's life of youth. The narrow approach, instead, does not deny the broad framing of patriotism as such but it urges not forgetting the ultimate goal of all patriotism. That is, preparation for military service, and indeed, for a war.

A common feature of both approaches is an echo of moral panic. Multiple problems of Russian society become articulated via

expectations targeted at youth, while existing problems are seen as a result of the lack of patriotism. Whereas this kind of reasoning is present in the Putin-era youth policies in general, it has become more emphasized since 2012 (see Veera Laine, Chapter 3, this volume). From a Western liberal viewpoint, a substantial problem of patriotic education is in its paternalistic approach to youth, which treats them as a monolithic group of citizens, initially passive objects who are under the constant risk of ‘wrong’ influences, and thus must be directed into ‘correct’ ones. Again, this is a resilient mood of the Soviet-era youth policies that surfaced during the perestroika-era youth debates (Pilkington, 1994) and have prevailed ever since (Omel’chenko, 2006, 2012). For instance, in an article dedicated to problems of patriotic education, the author sees challenges of ‘Western pragmatism’ as follows:

Research in this field demonstrates that today youth’s world-view comprises a pragmatic relationship to education targeted at achieving a prestigious profession, seeing education as a tool of receiving material well-being and high social status. This is related to a consumerist and passive attitude towards culture, to a commitment to Western ideals of material well-being, of career development and social success. (Rusinova, 2015, p. 3)

The quote indicates that the tension between traditional educational ideals (that is, Soviet-era patriotic upbringing) and perception of these ideals among the youth is recognized. However, instead of discussing the overall rationality of patriotic education and its function for youth’s everyday needs and societal expectations, the main problem is seen in the surrounding society that allegedly generates ‘wrong’ orientations for youngsters. Furthermore, an important deficit in minimizing problems of patriotic education is in the lack of a coherent state ideology, which appears to be opposite to the democratic principles of the 1993 Constitution:

When we talk about state policies, about fight against extremism, improvement of patriotism, we must talk about very complex structure. It’s not only about youth, it is about the work with adults, with media, including restrictions in the field of information, although someone screams that ‘hey, we have freedom’¹¹

... this is our problem, and how I see it, is that we lack a unite and general concept of ideology in the country. We don't have it. (Puzanova and Larina, 2017, p. 34)

With these concerns in mind, Putin's conservative-patriotic additions to the Constitution in 2020 can be seen as the regime's response to long-standing demands of the country's conservative circles. The document *Patriotic Upbringing of Youth in the Russian Federation: State of Affairs, Actual Problems and Directions in Development (Patriotičeskoe vospitanie molodeži v Rossijskoj Federacii: sostojanie, aktual'nye problemy i napravleniâ razvitiâ)*, published by the Federal Council of the Russian Federation in 2015, is a phenomenal collection of these demands (Sovet Federacii, 2015). The document comprises presentations and a transcript of the discussion related to challenges of patriotic education in Russia's regions. The discussion had 20 participants representing different institutional positions in Russia's regions whose average birth year was 1962.¹² A principal challenge for many of them was related to ways how to increase the efficiency of patriotic education. Furthermore, a common solution for existing problems crystallized in the demand to increase the military dimension instead of a broader, let alone more dialogical, approach to patriotism. One participant argues that 'the holy goal of the military-patriotic upbringing is to guarantee citizens' preparedness for military service and the defense of Fatherland' and contrasts this mission to civic dimensions of patriotic education (ibid., pp. 40–42). In a similar vein, post-Soviet educational reforms are seen deeply detrimental since they have shown, from a participant's viewpoint, 'an opposite direction with school parliament, career, habituation with foreign countries and cultures, tourism and all the rest' instead of the Soviet-era military-patriotic education (ibid., pp. 42–43).

Moreover, solutions for existing problems indicate a full-scale envisioning of the Soviet-era practices and criticism against youth-centred civic education ideals. According to a participant, the latter represents 'flawed ideology of child-centrism (*deto-centrizm*) that might lead to the destruction of the upbringing

process of children and of traditional family relationships' and urged that the system of patriotic upbringing needs to be built 'according to the principle of family and fatherland-centrism' (ibid., p. 47).

When viewed from a larger youth policy perspective, the document reveals the resilience of identity flux in Russia since the end of the Soviet Union. The issue is not about the lack of political interest in educational matters, youth and citizenship but about profound uncertainty and frustration on how these educational matters should be taught and how they could work better. Patriotism is simultaneously a nexus and battleground for different interpretations and policy-level interests. It is a battleground between the ministries of education and defence, while it is the nexus for those numerous teachers and policymakers who matured during the Soviet Union and were socialized into the pattern of patriotic education (Sanina, 2017; see Arseniy Svyrenko, Chapter 8, this volume). In this respect, patriotism's essentialist role in the Russian society can be explained by the legacy of the Soviet-era normative ideal of the decent citizen¹³ which has been cultivated and realized in various youth policy projects over the course of the Putin era (Lassila, 2011, 2014). Within this normative legacy, patriotism figures as an umbrella for everything that is valued as necessary for a good citizenship (healthy, diligent, polite, civilized, responsible for surroundings, respectful of traditions, loyal to parents, authorities and the state and ready to defend it against enemies). This strong Soviet-era legacy is increasingly compounded with another, equally strong Soviet legacy, namely militarization. The document welcomes the profound 'patriotization' of society as a whole but urges that this process should be done in strictly military terms. Most importantly, the whole discussion on patriotism's meaning and relevance among the youth has paid – as in the Soviet Union – no attention to youth's own views (Omel'chenko 2006, 2012; Pilkington 1994).

Following the discussion of policymakers' concerns in fostering patriotism's role in society, it seems that the major solution for recognized challenges is a stronger reliance on the military dimension of the Soviet-era patriotic ideals. This can be seen by

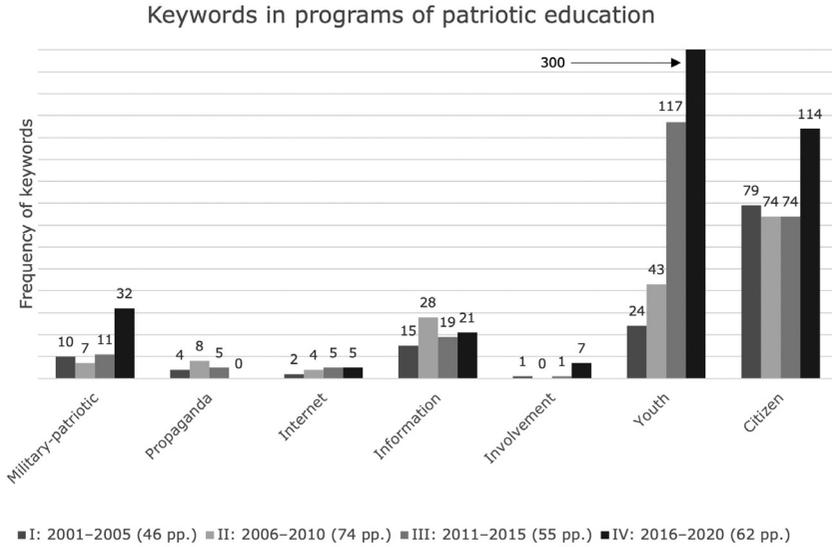


Figure 3: Frequency of keywords per programme of patriotic education.

Source: State programs of patriotic education 2001–2020 (Patriotičeskoe vospitanie 2001–2005, 2006–2010, 2011–2015, and 2016–2020).

Figure by the author.

Note: Length of each programme in pages in the brackets.

comparing the frequencies of seven keywords that are repeated regularly in the four programmes since 2001 (see Figure 3).

Almost identical frequencies of certain keywords (like *military-patriotic* and *propaganda* between the first and the third programmes, or *citizen* between the second and third programmes) imply a copy-paste-style repetition of sections used in previous programmes. As such, besides the absence of reasonable parameters of evaluation, this feature is an indication of ritualistic and poor policy planning (Sanina, 2017). Variation between the programmes' page numbers notwithstanding, the most important qualitative change is present in the current program concerning the words *military-patriotic*, *propaganda*, *involvement* (*vovlečenie*), *youth* and *citizen*. Youth's generally recognized importance in patriotic education has been pinpointed further by mentioning *youth* 300 times (see Figure 3 above), as well as the word *citizen* several times more often than in the previous programmes. At the same time, there is a triple increase in mentions of *military-patriotic*

and no mention of *propaganda*. Whereas the foreign political circumstances, in particular the conflict with the West, have had a clear impact on the increase of the military aspect in the fourth programme since 2014, there is a peculiar reflection with regard to ways to increase the role of patriotism among the youth. The identical increase of the term *involvement* – basically absent in the previous programmes – suggests that propaganda as a means of information has not had desirable effects. Such changes in the usage of words indicate that certain problems have been identified and then replaced with some new words and concepts. Yet, these changes hardly make any breakthrough in minds of youngsters as far as the programmes of patriotic upbringing are not only stuck on premises that weakly respond to youth's expectations and understanding of patriotism; in light of the fourth and current programme, it seems that patriotic expectations are moving even further from young people's lives.

The survey Patriotism in Russia: If the War Comes Tomorrow, conducted by the state-aligned pollster VCIOM in September 2016, showed that the index of patriotism had declined markedly since 2008 (VCIOM, 2016). No matter how credible the given patriotism index is in methodological terms, it shows that patriotic education of young people has not worked particularly effectively. In 2008, this index was 80, in 2013 it was 67 and in 2016 the figure was 62. By looking at the answers between age groups to the questions that examined citizens' willingness to sacrifice in the event of war, the picture is not flattering in terms of patriotism. Especially in younger age groups (18–44 years), less than half were ready to go to the front, and even in the oldest age group (60+) the proportion was only 60% (see Figure 4 below).

Similarly, 39% answered *yes* to whether they would be willing to give a quarter of their salary to the state in the event of a war (41% among the 18–24 age group); 17% were willing to give less (21% among the 18–24 age group) and as many as 31% (29% among the 18–24 age group) were not ready to give anything (*ibid.*).

In a broader comparative study of Russian values, the country has long been part of a group of other former socialist countries that emphasize security, stability and little interest in universal

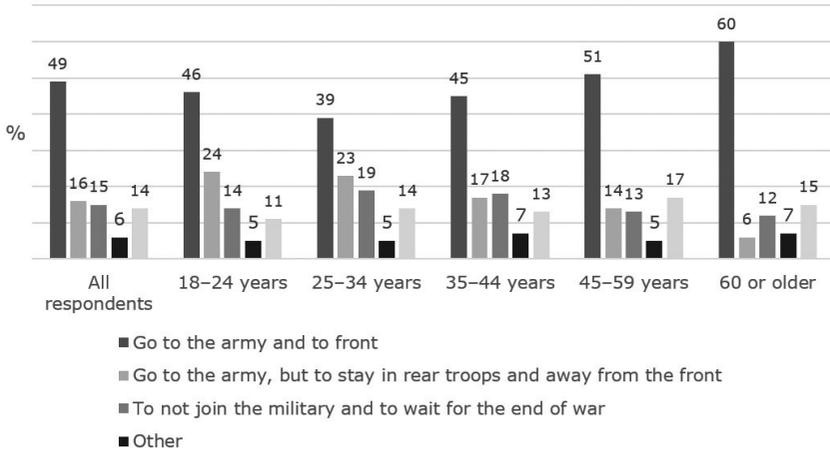


Figure 4: Military-patriotic attitudes in Russia by age group.

Question: 'If the war begins with a neighboring country and your sons, brothers, men, etc. get a command, what would you advise him to do?'

Source: VCIOM (2016). Figure by the author.

affairs (Evropejskij dialog, 2018). The most significant change for Russia is that the aspiration for openness (change of affairs) has begun to strengthen among the Russians, but, on the other hand, there is less interest in universal affairs (growing egoism). If this trend strengthened, it is highly probable that the tension between patriotic policies and youth's expectations would deepen further (Novye izvestiâ, 2018). The fear of youth's egoism, experienced by older generations, can further strengthen moral panic, which maintains the idea of treating youth according to practices of the Soviet-era patriotic upbringing. Consequently, these ideals are increasingly distant from youth's expectations.

Discussion: the Growing Gap between Official Visions and Youth's Expectations

Many empirical examples of projects related to patriotism highlight the common '*pokazuha*' (window dressing) culture of the Soviet era, which was used by various actors in the command economy to ensure the continuation of their own operating conditions

for the eyes of producers (not customers!). In accordance with this tradition, high-profile projects under ministries emphasize quantitative objectives for the political leadership. At the local level, regional authorities and educational institutions formally build a credible framework for the ministry. Examples include the *Ūnarmiâ* project, initiated by the Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, in 2016, and the revival of the Soviet-era *Politrुक* institution in the army in the spirit of the present patriotic policy in 2018 after extensive lobbying (see Jonna Alava, Chapter 9, and Arseniy Svyrenko, Chapter 8, this volume).¹⁴

It can be expected that civic education, embraced by patriotic upbringing, will face major problems by 2030. The majority of its teachers and implementers represent the Soviet-era generations, who will move aside over the next 10–15 years. The acute problem in many areas is the shortage of teachers and there are persistent difficulties getting younger teachers into schools owing to low salaries. It is noteworthy that, in 2017, the average age of teachers in Moscow was 36, whereas in Russia as a whole it was 52, while it is estimated that in a third of the country's educational institutions the average age of teachers is between 50 and 60 years. A tenth of teachers, in turn, work in retirement age (*Gazeta.ru*, 2017). In remote areas, where the population has been more inclined to adapt to state propaganda and the Soviet-era educational patterns, the ageing of teachers is a particularly acute problem (Sanina, 2017). Again, in generational terms, it can be suggested that conservative and patriotic patterns of education become emphasized in rural areas, where the mean age of teachers is significantly higher than in metropolises.

The greatest challenge of patriotic politics and its implementation is the expectations of the youth. Owing to the lack of reciprocity and feedback from youth, of genuine commitment and determined implementation of projects, as well as the inability to include youth, these educational goals are inadequate and in many respects unrealistic (for instance, in terms of the *Ūnarmiâ* project, see Meduza, 2017). One might ask whether the current regime, which is increasingly sensitive to maintaining its authoritarian status, is ready for any kind of genuine delegation and greater

autonomy for lower-level actors in the field of national security. This is primarily related to ways in which patriotic education could be developed, for example in the spirit of voluntary national defence. The patriotic euphoria that appeared in the aftermath of the invasion of Crimea has not strengthened the authorities' confidence in the patriotic activities and hobbies of the citizens. Quite the opposite: coercive measures have been increased to any activities independent from the state.

As a whole, young people see patriotism and willingness to defend their country in a positive light, but their perception and viewpoints do not fit with the administrative-bureaucratic framework. As previous studies have shown, there is a deep tension between the mainstream ethos of patriotism supported by the state and citizens' individual choices. Russians in general identify themselves as patriotic individuals, yet only a tiny minority participates in any patriotic activities. In a similar vein, the patriotic objectives of schools and educational institutions are seen positively, but their ways of doing things are seen as distant and bureaucratic for youth's daily lives.

In this respect, the state's political ideals are deeply distracted by the mistrust of the rulers towards the self-organization of citizens. One can see here a deep-seated fear of counter-revolutionary elements in the political tradition of Russian authoritarian governance. The more insecure the elite itself perceives, the more sensitive it is in controlling what it feels as threatening to its position. This kind of distrust was also apparent in activities of the pro-Kremlin patriotic youth organizations, whose goals and ideas of youth's independence and self-activity were vitiated by the top-down patronage, continuous reorganizations and eventual closures of activities.

Patriotic education acts as a political ideal, but, as a framework for political mobilization serving government, it involves risks that the administration avoids. The question may not be about the willingness and enthusiasm of the youth for national defence and 'practical patriotism' (59% of Russians declared their readiness to fight for their country in 2015, the fourth highest in Europe after Finland, Turkey and Ukraine).¹⁵ Rather, the issue is about bad governance, corruption and poor institutional confidence.

Taking into account Russia's political developments in 2017–2020, it is reasonable to assume that the gap between those who matured during the Soviet era and are still in political power and those who are maturing under this power will intensify in the coming years. There is a growing demand for change for the country's internal problems, while this demand is increasingly rejected by the state's conservative-patriotic ideals.

Notes

- ¹ Valentin Semënov is a professor at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethno-Sociology (Saint Petersburg State University).
- ² There have been four state programmes of patriotic upbringing since 2001. The first five-year programme was launched in 2001, the second in 2006, the third in 2011 and the fourth in 2016.
- ³ Article 67 of the new Constitution includes the following amendments (Polnyi tekst popravok, 2020): The Russian Federation, united by a thousand-year history, preserving the memory of the ancestors who transmitted to us the ideals and faith in God, as well as the continuity in the development of the Russian state, recognizes the historically established state unity; The Russian Federation honors the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland, and protects the historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the feat of the people in the defense of the Fatherland is not allowed; Children are the most important priority of the state policy of Russia. The state creates conditions conducive to the comprehensive spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical development of children, the education of patriotism, citizenship and respect for elders in them. The state, ensuring the priority of family education, assumes the responsibilities of parents in relation to children left without care.
- ⁴ This figure is derived from the assumption that all those who are against the idea of the state's patriotic upbringing (51%, including those who could not answer) would also share the idea of seeing patriotism as a deeply individual matter (80%).
- ⁵ An umbrella organization of searchers for remains of soldiers of the Second World War.
- ⁶ The National Guard of the Russian Federation, which was established in 2016 as the internal military force of the Russian government but whose actual commander-in-chief is the president.

- ⁷ At the time of the research, these concerned veterans from the Afghanistan and Chechen wars (Sieca-Kozłowski, 2010).
- ⁸ Personal interview, 4 November 2011. See also Carleton (2017, pp. 88–97) concerning the critical assessment of the Soviet triumphalist war narrative.
- ⁹ This metaphor was said to be invented by a visible nationalist commentator, Egor Holmogorov, who became a sort of incarnation of the change that happened among oppositional ethnic nationalists. For instance, during the mass protests in 2011–2012 Holmogorov supported Aleksej Naval'nyj's liberal-nationalist agenda while, by 2014, he had become one of Naval'nyj's loudest critics among nationalists.
- ¹⁰ Internationalism is present in three state programmes of patriotic upbringing except the last and current one (2016–2020). This does not mean, however, that the current programme would be 'less Soviet' in comparison to previous ones. Quite the opposite. For instance, the current programme introduces the physical culture training programme *Ready for Labour and Defense* (*Gotov k trudu i oborone*), which was used in the Soviet Union from 1931 up to the end of the Soviet Union.
- ¹¹ See Salla Nazarenko, Chapter 7, in this volume.
- ¹² Through the internet it was possible to find out birth years of 19 participants. Only one participant was born in the 1980s (1987). In other words, people in the age of around 57 are relatively strongly rooted in the Soviet-era education patterns. For a more detailed description, see Sanina (2017).
- ¹³ The primary example is the Moral Codex of Builder of Communism, introduced in the Soviet Union in 1961.
- ¹⁴ GLAVPUR's declared goals are to foster the principles of statehood, spirituality and patriotism among the military. The central role in the lobby for its establishment was played by General Andrej Kartapolov (b. 1963), who became the head of the new department. For more, see (Bobrakov-Timoškin, 2018; Kartapolov and Faličev, 2018).
- ¹⁵ For more, see <http://brilliantmaps.com/europe-fight-war>.

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