

Political and Psychological Features of the Perception of Russia in the Minds of Foreign and Local Students

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The research is based on the survey conducted among two focus groups: international students and Russian ones. The survey consists of three blocks: history and politics of Russia, mentality and social clichés, associations.

The analysis of the foreign students' responses revealed three key trends in the perception of Russia. **A positive attitude:** Russia is recognized as the heir of the USSR, a supporter of a multipolar world, traditional values and the principle of sovereignty in international relations. **Polarized opinions, depending on the historical and geographical context:** Western respondents are more likely to give negative assessments, while representatives of developing countries in the East and Africa tend to have a favorable perception. Thus, Russia appears to be both a threat and a peaceful force. **Uncertainty due to lack of knowledge:** neutral responses prevail on the opposition suppression, the 1917 revolution and the 2014 joining of Crimea, pointing to gaps in historical and political awareness.

It is essential to stress that the perception has a regional character. Although the general trend regarding the legacy of the USSR, the protection of sovereignty and multipolarity is positive, assessments of foreign policy and political regime vary significantly.

Latin America demonstrates an empathic positive assessment of Russia being the heir of the USSR, a counterweight to unipolarity, a partner of developing countries [2] and a critic of internal affairs interference. Traditional values are favoured, claims of imperialism and authoritarianism are neutral, but being a threat to Europe prevails which can be explained with the perception of Russia as a strong military power with industrial potential.

Africa perceives Russia as an alternative to Western influence: a full-fledged heir of the USSR, a supporter of multipolarity, traditions and the Global South. Negative theses (expansion, threat to Europe, interference, authoritarianism) cause disagreement, indicating not uniformly negative perception.

The CIS supports Russia as the heir of the USSR, advocate of multipolarity [4], traditions, sovereignty and developing countries; positively assesses Crimea [4]. However, Russia is considered a military threat to Europe, there are knowledge gaps in the 1917 revolution and uncertainty about modern politics.

The West is predictably contradictory: it rejects interference in elections, the illegitimacy of Crimea and the US's role in the Victory in WWII but recognizes Russia's status as the USSR heir and defender of traditions. The most persistent negative thesis is the suppression of the opposition. Interestingly, the expansion, the threat to Europe and authoritarianism are neutral, indicating a pluralism of opinions in civil society [3].

The developing East (Asia) is positive on non-interference, Crimea, the USSR, multipolarity and the Global South [4], strengthening the image of a reliable partner. Meanwhile, it remains neutral in terms of threats to Europe and politics, due to the weak influence of Western propaganda.

Overall, the psychological image of Russians is favorable with high marks on diligence, patriotism, unity and kindness. Stereotypes of rudeness are rare. Pessimism, alcoholism, patriarchy, and collectivism are neutral. The image of “strong, united people” enhances Russia’s attractiveness as a partner, facilitating dialogue with the South and East, reducing tensions in the West.

Meanwhile, Russian students form a dual image of the country: deep respect for the historical heritage is combined with a neutral attitude to modern political realities, reflecting the maturity of public consciousness.

On the issues of territorial expansion, the threat to Europe, authoritarianism, opposition suppression opinions are without a consensus. Results indicate different views from defenders of national interests to constructive criticisms of what stimulates the development of the nation. Pessimism, patriarchy, alcoholism, collectivism are assessed neutrally as these traits are still not remnants of the past. Moreover, ignorance of the events of 1917 is noted, indicating gaps in historical awareness.

However, there is a positive attitude towards historical heritage and values. Russians believe in non-interference, the legitimacy of Crimea, the decisive role in the Victory in World War II, being the heir of the USSR and strengthening of traditional values. The psychological portrait highlights hard work, patriotism, national unity and kindness, creating the image of a strong nation.

Notably, the previous agenda (USSR, Crimea) is perceived positively, in contrast to the ambiguous present. Consequently, a task to link achievements with current politics through explanatory work needs to be assigned, turning youth patriotism into the basis of Russia’s sovereign development.

To conclude, international students show a polarized perception of Russia with a regional bias (critical West of the opposition; supportive East, Africa towards multipolarity), neutrality in disputes (expansion), lack of knowledge (Crimea, 1917) and a positive psychological image of Russians. While Russian students demonstrate internal ambivalence, there is positivity towards the past (USSR, Crimea, WWII) and neutrality towards the present (politics, mentality). The occurring difference exists due to external formation of views by geopolitics, internal by history.

Источники и литература

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Иллюстрации

БЛОК 1															
вопрос	Россия стремится к территориальной экспансии против соседей	Россия представляет угрозу для безопасности Европы своей военной мощью	Россия - авторитарная страна, в которой подавляется свобода граждан	Россия вмешивается в выборы других стран	Присоединение Крыма 2014 является незаконным и осуществлялось без поддержки местного населения	Цель Специальной Военной операции - империалистическая экспансия	Главная причина победы в Великой Отечественной Войне - экономическая помощь США, холод	Революция 1917 организована иностранными агентами, чтобы вывести Россию из Первой Мировой войны	Россия - наследница СССР	Как правопреемница СССР, Россия отстаивает принцип суверенности в международных отношениях	Россия выступает за многополярный мир	Россия - наследница мощного научно-технического потенциала СССР	Россия выступает за укрепление традиционных ценностей и защиту национального единства	Оппозиция в России не подавляется	
среднее значение	-0,31	-0,33	-0,15	-0,89	-1,06	-0,70	-1,37	-0,66	1,15	1,14	0,99	1,27	1,28	0,98	-0,48

Рис. : Data from a survey of Russian students on the political and historical block

БЛОК 2													
вопросы	Русский человек менее открыт по своей натуре, нежели западный человек. Ему свойственно быть скрытным.	Русский человек - грубый и бесчувственный	Русский человек редко улыбается иностранцам и незнакомцам	Русский человек циничен	Русский человек пессимистичен	В России господствуют патриархальные устои	Русскому человеку свойственно принимать алкоголь в большом количестве	Русский человек трудолюбив	Русский человек патриотичен	В России господствует коллективизм	В России людям свойственно коллективную ответственность	Русский народ единый и сплоченный	Русский человек добрый и душевный
среднее значение	0,10	-1,21	-0,07	-0,86	-0,34	0,66	-0,27	1,21	1,01	0,07	0,29	0,86	1,38

Рис. : Survey data of Russian students on the sociological block

БЛОК 3													
вопросы	С каким актором у России самые конфликтные взаимоотношения?	По Вашему мнению, начало Российской государственности	Пожалуйста, объясните свой ответ на вопрос: "Когда, по вашему мнению, зародилась российская государственность?"	Ключевая заслуга в победе во Второй Мировой войне принадлежит	Первая ассоциация со словом Россия	Если у Вас есть свой вариант ответа на вопрос "Какие ассоциации у вас возникают со словом "Россия"?", Вы можете написать его здесь	Ассоциация со временем года	Главное достоинство России	Если у Вас есть свой вариант ответа на вопрос "Что является главным достоянием России?", вы можете написать его здесь	Что Вы считаете главным достижением России?	Россия ассоциируется у меня со следующими прилагательными		
среднее значение	Европейский союз	862	СССР	ольшая территория, богатая природа,	свои ответы	зима	богатая культура	свои ответы	Победа во Второй Мировой войне	Сильная, могущественная, воинственная,			

Рис. : Data from a survey of Russian students on the associative block

1 block													
Question/ region	Russia is striving for territorial expansion towards its neighbor	Russia is a country with a authoritarian political regime in which citizens' freedoms are suppressed	Russia intervenes into the elections of other countries	The main goal of the Special Military Operation is imperialistic expansion	The main reason of the victory in the Great Patriotic War is the economic support of the USA, cold weather	Russia is the heir of the USSR	As the heir of the USSR, Russia protects sovereignty and international relations	Russia supports the idea of the multipolar world	Russia is the heir of scientific and technological potential of the USSR	Russia supports the idea of strengthening traditional values to protect national unity	Russia provides support for developing countries	Opposition in Russia is not suppressed	
West	0,27	0,55	-1,09	-0,55	-1	0,55	0,64	0,45	1,1	0,45	-0,81	-0,27	
CIS	-0,2	-0,4	-0,4	-0,4	-1	1,4	0,8	1,4	1,4	1,4	1	0	
Africa	-1	-1,29	-1	-0,29	-0,57	2	1,85	1,71	2	2	0,86	0,86	
Latin America	0	-0,34	-1	-1,5	-0,5	0	0,84	1,17	0,84	1,17	1	0	
Developing East	-0,21	-0,57	-0,93	-0,78	-0,64	1,29	1,57	1,14	1,36	1,43	1,36	0,64	

Рис. : Data of the survey of foreign students in political and historical block

2 block											
Question/ region	A Russian person is less open by nature in comparison with a European one. Russians tend to be private	A Russian person rarely smiles to foreigners and strangers	A Russian person is cynical	Patriarchic mindset is dominant in Russia	A Russian person tends to drink alcohol in big amounts	A Russian person is patriotic	Collectivism is dominant in Russia	People tend to bear collective responsibility	Russian people are united	A Russian person is kind and sincere	
West	-1,64	-1,18	-0,27	0,09	-0,09	0,9	-0,27	-0,36	0,72	1,09	
CIS	-0,2	0	-0,8	0,2	-0,6	0,6	0	0,8	0,6	1,2	
Africa	0,34	0,34	-1,83	-0,83	-0,83	1,17	0,5	0,84	1,5	1,67	
Latin America	0	0,29	-1,5	-0,83	-0,83	1,16	0,5	0,83	1,5	1,67	
Developing East	0,14	0	-0,64	0	0,16	1,16	0,67	0,67	0,83	1	

Рис. : Data of the survey of foreign students in sociological block

3 block								
	With which subject does Russia have the most tense relations?	In your opinion, when did the Russian Statehood begin?	The key accomplishment in The Second World War belongs to	What association do you have with the word "Russia"?	With which season do you associate Russia?	What is the main heritage of Russia?	About what accomplishment of Russia do people know in your country?	Russia is associated with the following adjectives
West	Ukraine	862	Russia	Big territory, rich nature, big number of natural resources	winter	rich culture	WW2 victory	powerful, strong, militant, unbeatable
CIS	Ukraine	862	USSR		winter	rich culture	WW2 victory	
Africa	Ukraine	862	Russia		winter	rich culture	space flight	
Latin America	Ukraine	862	Russia		winter	rich culture	space flight	
Developing East	Ukraine	862	Russia		winter	rich culture	WW2 victory	

Рис. : Data of the survey of foreign students in associative block