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Contextual effects on historical memory: Soviet nostalgia among post-Soviet adolescents

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Abstract

Using an original survey of adolescents in post-communist Russia and Ukraine, this study analyzes attitudes toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The results demonstrate how contextual factors – the republic’s position within the former Soviet Union and prior history of colonization – affect the level of nostalgia among the young generation. Based upon semi-structured interviews with adolescents, the study identifies sources of positive and negative attitudes toward the Soviet demise. Furthermore, the research reveals cross-national differences in the relationship between Soviet nostalgia and national pride.

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Keywords: Historical memory; Soviet Union; Nationalism; Youth

Introduction

Historical memory is a vital component of nation- and state-building processes. Voluminous literature documents the significance of historic narratives for identity construction and social cohesion (Anderson, 1991; Eley and Suny, 1996; Jedlicki, 1999; Rorlich, 1999; Spillman, 1997). A number of studies indicate how collective memory of slavery shaped racial relations in the United States (Hoetink, 1973;

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Woessner and Kelly-Woessner, 2006). Prolific scholarship traces implications of Holocaust remembrance for world politics (Maier, 1988; Schrafstetter, 2003). Recent research from the Middle East shows how diverse perspectives on the region's history can instigate political violence and hamper conflict resolution (Davis, 2005; Telhami and Barnett, 2002). The reproduction of historical memory is most important and most susceptible to change in times of social turmoil. A shared understanding of the past helps citizens make sense of the present and envision the future. The persistence of historical memory, however, depends upon the transmission of ideas from one generation to another. Dramatic social change may disrupt the passage of historic narratives and myths from parents to children. To date, however, there is dearth of cross-national public opinion research on the historical memory of youth grown up during a period of great political transformations.

Using an original survey of adolescents, this paper examines attitudes toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union in post-communist Russia and Ukraine. Soviet nostalgia refers here to the disapproval of the Soviet demise. A distinguishing characteristic of contemporary adolescents in the post-communist region is that they have grown up without any first hand experience with the defunct state. By gauging the extent of Soviet nostalgia among this age group, the present study attempts to assess the extent to which the reproduction of historical memory continued in the wake of a reconfigured political space.

Analysis of citizens' interpretations of the Soviet collapse warrants academic attention because the political event has sent far-reaching repercussions across East European societies and has profoundly changed lives of ordinary citizens. From the political standpoint, the emergence of independent states from the debris of the Soviet Empire resulted in the re-drawing of territorial boundaries and the formulation of new foreign policies. At the economic level, the collapse of the socialist system and the downfall of planned economy have thrust most citizens into abject poverty. Culturally, individuals assumed the task of re-imagining a political community and reviving national identity.

Scholars responded to these trends, in part, by scrutinizing various manifestations of historic revisionism in Eastern Europe. Some studies explored physical transformation of public spaces as an outcome of changing cultural norms (Forest and Johnson, 2002; Lavrence, 2005; Light, 2004). Others focused on processes of history re-writing (Iordachi and Trencsenyi, 2003; Kuzio, 2002). Another strand of research scrutinized shifts in the educational system (Eklof et al., 2005; Janmaat, 2006; Popson, 2001). Yet, within this line of inquiry, little attention has been devoted to the analysis of how youth perceives the communist past. Though opinion polls consistently show that support for democratic principles and norms is the highest among youth (McFaul, 2003; Rose et al., 1998), it is premature to assume that young people have utterly rejected the Soviet system. Drawing upon a survey of Russian citizens aged 16–29, Mendelson and Gerber (2005, 2006) find a high degree of ambivalence about Stalin's role in Soviet history. According to their survey taken in June 2005, one-fifth of young Russians would vote for Stalin if he were running for president. An additional 20% were not absolutely opposed to the idea of voting for an authoritarian ruler. These results do not bode well for a democratic

breakthrough in Putin's Russia. Given the importance of historical memory in shaping dynamics of domestic politics and international relations, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of how the young generation in the post-communist region perceives life experiences under the previous regime.

This study seeks to add to the literature by demonstrating contextual effects on Soviet nostalgia among post-Soviet adolescents. The research compares and contrasts attitudes toward the Soviet Union in the core (Russia) and the periphery (Ukraine) of the former Soviet empire. Furthermore, the study documents the impact of prior history of colonization on adolescents' interpretations of the past in Ukraine.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section “[Case selection: historic revisionism in Russia and Ukraine](#)” provides reasoning for the selection of Russia and Ukraine as case studies. Then the paper details the methodological approach used to collect and analyze survey data. The empirical analysis is divided into three parts. First, the paper analyzes the level of Soviet nostalgia across selected states and cities. Then the analysis specifies positive and negative attributes of the Soviet Union identified by adolescents. Finally, the study investigates the link between Soviet nostalgia and national pride. The paper concludes by identifying areas for future research.

Case selection: historic revisionism in Russia and Ukraine

The case selection is motivated here by the intent to assess attitudinal differences of adolescents grown up in the core and the periphery of the former Soviet Union. Despite cultural affinity and geographical proximity, Russia and Ukraine profess conflicting visions of communist-era history. Because Russia formed the core of the Soviet state, Russian and Soviet identities have become closely intertwined. Numerous reports show that a majority of Russia's citizens perceived the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a personal loss and a severe blow to the national image (Yakusheva, 2001). In the 2005 Annual Address to Duma, President Vladimir Putin himself referred to the collapse of USSR as “a major geopolitical disaster of the century” (Putin, 2005). Among other things, Putin's government reinstated the Soviet national anthem and resurrected the Soviet red star as the military's emblem. The Kremlin also promoted the rehabilitation of Stalin as a praiseworthy Soviet leader (Bransten, 2003; Lambroschini, 2004).

At the same time, Ukraine's government made modest attempts to expose the brutality of the Soviet system.¹ The commemoration of the 1932–1933 man-made famine (Holodomor) has become a prime occasion for denouncing Stalinist methods of social control. Ukraine's State Security Services (SBU) declassified and made open

¹ In his inaugural presidential address, the first popularly elected President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk formally denounced Ukraine's participation in the 1924 act creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Lalpychak, 1991). Furthermore, Ukraine's second President Leonid Kuchma published a book “Ukraine Is Not Russia” to reassert the legitimacy of Ukraine's statehood (Fedynsky, 2003).

to the public more than 5000 documents from the KGB archives recording the starvation of Ukrainians in 1932–1933 (Musatova, 2006). Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, passed a bill branding the famine as an act of genocide against Ukrainians. Russia's Duma, meanwhile, refused to acknowledge the ignominious role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in masterminding the starvation of ethnic Ukrainians and discrimination against other ethnic groups.² Given these cross-country variations in the mode of dominant political discourse, the expectation is that adolescents in Russia will view the dissolution of the Soviet Union in less positive terms than their peers in Ukraine.

This study also expects to find sub-national variations in the interpretation of the communist past. Empirical research has consistently shown the political salience of the East–West cleavage in Ukraine (Barrington and Herron, 2004; Birch, 2000; Kubicek, 2000). The Western part of the country has been under the jurisdiction of the Hapsburg Empire for more than a century and has been annexed by the Soviet Union only after World War II, whereas the Eastern part of the country has long been a province of the Russian empire and a Soviet Socialist Republic since 1922. In the post-Soviet period, Halychyna emerged as the stronghold of Ukraine's independence and westward cooperation. In contrast, Donbas became a holdover for advocates of close ties with Russia. The East–West cleavage derives, in part, from the ethnic and linguistic composition of the region. According to the 2001 census (<http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua>), ethnic Ukrainians comprise 94.8% of total population in Lviv region (*oblast*) and 56.9% in Donetsk region. In addition, 58.7% of ethnic Ukrainians residing in Donetsk region consider Russian, rather than Ukrainian, as their mother tongue. These differences spill out in the political sphere. Given the profound impact of the East–West regional cleavage on political behavior of Ukrainians, adolescents from Donetsk are likely to report a much higher level of Soviet nostalgia than those from Kyiv and Lviv.

Survey methodology

The survey is based on local samples from areas with contrasting political conditions rather than a nationally representative sample. Three Russian cities included in this study are Moscow, Tula, and Rostov-on-the-Don. The capital city of Moscow has long been regarded as the host to the most liberal-minded and affluent segment of Russia's population. According to the report by Associated Press (2006), Moscow has now more millionaires than New York City. The expectation is that Moscow adolescents will report a lower level of Soviet nostalgia than their peers in the other two Russian cities. Within Russia, the study expects to find the highest level of Soviet nostalgia in Tula, a city located 200 km south of Moscow within the so-called Red Belt. To raise the appeal of the Communist Party, Vasilii

² In articulating the Russian official position on Stalin-era atrocities, Andrey Kukoshin, the head of the Russian Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, labeled the passage of the Holodomor bill as 'a big mistake' (UA Regnum, 2006).

Starodubtsev, the governor of Tula region for two terms, has restored a number of Soviet-era youth policies.³ Finally, Rostov-on-the-Don is an ethnically diverse Russian city with the population of almost one million people. Approximately 100 ethnic groups reside in Russia's southern region, including Azeri, Belarussians, Georgians, Poles, and Ukrainians (City Administration, <http://rostov-gorod.ru>). Given the cross-national dispersion of family networks and the anti-migrant stance of local Cossack organizations, adolescents from Rostov-on-the-Don are likely to exhibit a high level of Soviet nostalgia. The centrality of the East–West cleavage in Ukrainian society compels the choice of Donetsk, a city located in the coal-mining area in the East, and Lviv, a city in the Western part of the country. From the political standpoint, the capital city of Kyiv represents the middle ground between the two polarized regions.

Within each city, three school districts have been identified for participation to ensure a representation of various social groups. One of the schools, with an upper-class bias, is located downtown. Another school is situated in the bedroom community populated mainly with middle-class families. Finally, the third school is located in the working-class neighborhood. Notwithstanding some limitations, any political attitude patterns shared by these respondents are likely to be at least somewhat characteristic of post-communist youth at large.⁴

A total of 1814 adolescents filled out a pen-and-pencil questionnaire. In addition, 76 students (40 from Russia and 36 from Ukraine) participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The interviewees were recruited from the pool of students who filled out the written questionnaires. All the interviews were conducted in Russian or Ukrainian on the school premises. The fieldwork was performed in spring 2005.

³ Under Starodubtsev's patronage, the Soviet-style youth organization "Young Pioneers" resumed its activities at schools and the Union of Communist Youth of Tula Region held a founding convention.

⁴ The demographic characteristics of survey respondents closely correspond to the characteristics of the country's population. The gender distribution is remarkably equal (49.5% male and 50.5% female). The gender misbalance, the over-representation of women in the total population, is characteristic of older age groups, but it is irrelevant for the adolescent population. According to Russia's 2002 census (<http://www.perepis2002.ru>), the percentage of men in the population aged between 15 and 19 equals 50.8%.

The ethnic composition of the sample also adequately represents the population at large. The measurement of the sample's ethnic composition is tailored to the national context. In Russia, students were prompted to identify their belonging to an ethnic group. Instead, given the frequency of mixed marriages, Ukraine's students were asked to report their parents' ethnicity (separately for the mother and the father). Russia's respondents (89%) identified themselves as ethnic Russians, compared to 80% in the general population. Given that the survey sites were concentrated in the European part of Russian Federation and excluded regions with the dense concentration of non-Slavic ethnic minorities, the 9% over-representation of ethnic Russians is rather modest. Representatives of various ethnic groups, including Armenians (2.9%), Tatars (1.1%), and Ukrainians (2.1%) participated in the survey, capturing in part the ethnic diversity of Russian regions. In Ukraine, the participation rate of ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians serves an indicator of the sample's correspondence to the general population. Based upon the adolescents' recall of the father's ethnicity, 75% of respondents were ethnic Ukrainians, compared to 77% in the total population. Besides, 18% of ethnic Russians in the sample is a close match to 17% of ethnic Russians in the country's total population.

Empirical analysis

Table 1 presents the results of bivariate analysis between Soviet nostalgia and place of residence. The findings clearly demonstrate contextual effects on adolescents' attitudes toward the Soviet Union. According to the survey results, almost two-thirds of Russia's adolescents disapprove of the Soviet demise, whereas 62% of Ukraine's respondents endorse the dissolution of the Soviet state. The young generation seems to reproduce dominant interpretations of the communist past in each country, illustrating political differences between the core and the periphery of the former Soviet empire. Furthermore, the findings reveal the impact of the East–West regional cleavage on political attitudes of young Ukrainians. As Table 1 shows, Kyiv respondents represent the country's average stacked between the two extremes. On the one hand, 92% of Lviv adolescents endorse the disintegration of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, 67% of Donetsk respondents harbor nostalgia for the USSR. In fact, Ukraine's within-country variations are greater than the Russia–Ukraine cross-national variations (when Ukraine's responses are aggregated at the country level).

The cross-city distribution of Russia's responses, in contrast, is quite even. The correlation between Soviet nostalgia and Russia's city of residence is statistically insignificant ($p = 0.172$). Nonetheless, respondents from Tula are 7% more likely than their peers from Moscow to emphasize the negative consequences of the Soviet demise. Tula's marginal lead in pro-Soviet attitudes might be attributable to the fact that regional politics within the so-called Red Belt is dominated by the Communist Party supporters.

How much resemblance do adolescents' attitudes bear to the opinions of the adult population in the selected states? To address this question, we can turn to the results of Russia's national representative survey conducted by the Moscow-based Public Opinion Foundation (FOM). Since 1991, FOM conducted six polls gauging attitudes of Russian citizens toward the outcome of the Belovezhsk Treaty. The findings are summarized in Table 2. The survey data register a high level of nostalgia for the

Table 1
Adolescents' attitudes toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union

Appraisal	Country		Russia's City			Ukraine's City		
	Russia	Ukraine	Moscow	Rostov	Tula	Kyiv	Lviv	Donetsk
Positive	37.4	62.3	40.1	38.9	33.1	64.4	91.8	31.4
Negative	62.6	37.7	59.9	61.1	66.9	35.6	8.2	68.6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(891)	(846)	(292)	(303)	(296)	(278)	(281)	(287)
Cramer's V	0.249***		0.063			0.512***		

Note: the survey item was designed as a dichotomous choice between a positive appraisal of the Soviet Union's disintegration and a negative one. The question wording was, "Do you consider the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a positive or a negative thing in your country's history?" A combined percentage of "don't know" and "non-response" was 4.3%. $N = 1737$. *** The relationship is significant at the 0.001 level.

Source: survey of adolescents in Russia and Ukraine, 2005.

Table 2

Attitudes of the adult population toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia 1992–2006 and Ukraine 2006

Appraisal	Year						
	1992	1997	1999	2001a	2001b	2006R	2006U
Positive (do not regret)	32	15	11	15	15	26	30
Negative (regret)	69	84	85	79	76	62	59
Don't know		2	4	6	8	11	11
Total <i>N</i>	100% (1500)	100% (1500)	100% (1500)	100% (1500)	100% (1500)	100% (1500)	100% (2215)

Note: the question wording in the Russian survey was, “Could you tell whether you regret or not the dissolution of the Soviet Union?” Russia’s Public Opinion Foundation (*Fond obshchestvennogo mnenia*) conducted the opinion polls in December 1992, January 1997, January 1999, March 2001 (2001a), December 2001 (2001b), and December 2006 (2006R). The sample size each time was 1500 respondents.

The question wording in the Ukrainian survey was, “Please report what is your attitude toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union?” Ukraine’s company Research and Branding Group conducted the opinion poll in November 2006 as a part of the international project Eurasia Monitor. The sample size was 2215 respondents.

Sources: Eurasia Monitor (2006), Public Opinion Foundation (2001), Vovk (2006).

Soviet Union among Russia’s adult population: more than half of Russians disapproved of disintegration processes at each time point. The level of nostalgia for the USSR peaked at 85% in January 1999. In the wake of the 1998 economic crisis, bitter disappointment with wild capitalism might have boosted the appeal of the Soviet system. In addition, the unification treaty with Belarus might have rekindled hopes for the resurrection of the Soviet Union in a new political form. In the long run, the perceived inability of President Yeltsin to put the country back on track and restore Russia’s standing in the international community have contributed to the resurgence of positive recollections about the USSR.

Strikingly, the results from the FOM survey conducted in December 2006 and a nationwide poll of Ukrainian citizens in November 2006 indicate that the magnitude of Soviet nostalgia among Russians and Ukrainians has reached similar levels. By the end of 2006, 62% of Russia’s citizens and 59% of Ukraine’s citizens reported regrets about the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In part, these findings reflect inescapable changes in the demographic situation. The passing of the old generation drives down the level of positive recollections about the Soviet Union. The FOM results for the year 2006 show that only 42% of 18–35 year old respondents regret the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while 70% of those aged 36–54 feel this way. Nonetheless, it is striking to observe how a large portion of young people looks favorably upon the defunct communist state. Section “[Adolescents’ narratives about the Soviet Union](#)” discusses how post-Soviet adolescents imagine the Soviet Union.

Adolescents’ narratives about the Soviet Union

Based upon qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews with Russian and Ukrainian adolescents, this study identifies several themes related to negative

and positive features of the Soviet Union. Table 3 presents a summary of these themes. The following discussion is divided into two parts. First, the paper identifies sources of negative attitudes toward the Soviet Union. Then the analysis unveils sources of Soviet nostalgia among adolescents.

USSR: a dark page in national history

The analysis indicates that there are four major factors conducive to the positive appraisal of the Soviet demise: (1) national independence, (2) civil liberties and political rights, (3) revival of national culture, and (4) access to a variety of goods. For the most part, according to the data presented in Table 3, Russian and Ukrainian adolescents raised similar issues in regard to the Soviet Union. But there is a notable exception: Russian respondents made no positive references to the restoration of the country's independence or the revival of national culture. In contrast, national independence has been a key reason why many Ukrainian adolescents endorsed the dissolution of the communist state. As 15-year old Volodymyr from Lviv put it, "Now we have our country to ourselves. We have an independent state." The issue of cultural revival was, in particular, important to those adolescents grown up in the heartland of Ukraine's nationalism. Zhenia (14-year) from Lviv proudly remarked, "We have the freedom of choice now. We can speak Ukrainian, rather than Russian." It is hardly surprising that few respondents from the predominantly Russian-speaking Donetsk appreciated the significance of rolling down Russification policies.

In general, respondents in both Russia and Ukraine acknowledged that the collapse of the communist state has resulted in the lifting of some restrictions on civil rights and liberties, including the freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of religion. "A person could be locked up in prison for a simple joke. It is good that

Table 3
Reasoning behind the appraisal of the Soviet collapse

Theme	Country	
	Russia	Ukraine
Positive appraisal of the Soviet Union's dissolution		
National independence		+
Revival of national culture		+
Civil liberties and political rights	+	+
Access to a variety of consumer goods	+	+
Negative appraisal of the Soviet Union's dissolution		
Loss of influence in the World (superpower status)	+	+
Deterioration of intra-regional cooperation (slavic unity)	+	+
Economic decline and loss of social security	+	+
Increase in crime	+	+
Worsening of community relations	+	+
'Unfair' treatment of ethnic Russians abroad	+	

Note: $N = 40$ (Russia); $N = 36$ (Ukraine).

Source: survey of adolescents in Russia and Ukraine, 2005.

this system is gone,” said 15-year old Lyuda from Tula. More broadly, the young generation appreciated some room for individuality: “There was no room for individuality, only the grey mass. (Denis, 15-year old, Tula, Russia)

The ideas of equality and socialism were used to brush everybody with the same comb. People were denied opportunities to develop their creativity and potential. (Lyosha, 16-year old, Tula, Russia)

On a more materialistic level, the adolescents seemed to savor greater availability and variety of consumer goods. The young generation denounced the Soviet-era deficit of goods and relished the supply side of the open economy. A 16-year old girl from Moscow put it this way:

When the Soviet Union existed, one had hard time finding such basic things as soap or the laundry detergent in the store. I got used to eating fresh fruit and yogurt for breakfast, these products were a big deficit in the past. (Nastia, 16-year old, Moscow, Russia)

Favorable assessments of the market economy were, nonetheless, intermingled with criticism of the ruling elite. According to Nastya from Kyiv:

Our politicians managed the transition very badly. Take the transition from a planned to a market economy, for example. When they [politicians] made Ukraine independent, there was just a struggle for high-ranking positions. The constitution was adopted only five years after independence. It is a shame. The politicians organized everything very poorly. (Nastia, 16-year old, Kyiv, Ukraine)

For some adolescents, however, the gargantuan proportions of incompetent political leadership and high level corruption seem to provide decisive reasons to look back on the Soviet Union with a tinge of vicarious nostalgia.

Bemoaning the collapse of Soviet Union

The qualitative analysis shows that adolescents regret the dissolution of the Soviet Union for a combination of six reasons: (1) loss of influence in the world, (2) deterioration of regional cooperation, (3) economic decline and social insecurity, (4) increase in crime, (5) worsening of community relations, and (6) ‘unfair’ treatment of ethnic Russians abroad. The first two factors evoking the notions of the superpower status and Slavic unity merit special attention because such pro-Soviet sentiments generate mass support for Russia’s aggressive foreign policy in the region.

The description of the Soviet Union as a superpower endowed with military and economic might was a commonly held view among Russian adolescents. Students pointed with a tint of pride to the fact that USSR used to enjoy worldwide recognition as a state to be reckoned with. Consistent with the predominant view of Soviet historiography, 15-year old Sasha from Tula praised Stalin’s contribution to the industrialization of the Soviet Union: “Stalin had taken Russia in with a ploughshare and left it with nuclear weapons.” To reinforce her point, another respondent from Tula recited a line from a poem by a famous Soviet poet Vladimir Maiakovsky:

Soviet Union was a superpower, everybody respected it. It is no accident that Maiakovsky wrote about the Soviet passport the following lines: “Look at it, envy it – I am a citizen of the Soviet Union.” Reagan labeled USSR as the evil empire, and others are still trying to break us. Many former Soviet republics became NATO members, they grow united against us. (Ania, 15-year old, Tula, Russia)

But Russian adolescents grudgingly acknowledged that the country’s current standing in the international community pales in comparison to the enormous authority exercised by the Soviet state. The respondents placed the blame for Russia’s damaged reputation at the door of the external forces:

I wish Russia got more respect worldwide. Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia is blamed for everything. Who is responsible for Soviet debts? Russia. Who is to blame for war in Afghanistan? Russia. It is not fair. (Lyosha, 16-year old, Tula, Russia)

When prompted to comment on the dissolution of the Soviet Union, most Donetsk respondents echoed the views of their peers in Russia. Apparently, it is a vestige of socialization in the community densely populated with ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians. According to a 16-year old from Donetsk:

We used to be an invincible, united state. Everybody was scared of the USSR. We even horrified the United States. The USA was scared of our missile defense system. (Kolia, 16-year old, Donetsk, Ukraine)

Both Russian adolescents and their Donetsk counterparts seemed to relish the idea of Slavic unity. Artem, a 15-year old respondent from Moscow, argued that a united Slavic fist (*edinyj slavianskij kulak*) posed an insurmountable threat to external enemies during the Cold War era. In his words, nobody could dare to launch a belligerent attack on the Soviet territory at that time. Yet, the geopolitical situation has drastically changed. Instead of the perceived friendship between the Soviet republics, a flurry of political and economic confrontations has become characteristic of Russian–Ukrainian relations. The so-called Orange Revolution further drove a rift between the two countries. Crucially, though, Russian participants in the survey have placed the blame for Ukraine’s leaning toward the West on US efforts to undermine Russia’s geopolitical weight in the region, rather than on the independent choice of Ukraine’s citizens.

A number of Russian adolescents still sincerely believe that the former Soviet republics lost a valuable asset – Russia’s protection – after gaining independence. They seem to be unaware of nationalist mobilization across the former Soviet republics prior to the collapse of the communist state:

When Kievan Rus was formed, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus were all together. Now Russia lost some parts of its territory, and a great loss for the other countries is the loss of the protection Russia used to provide for them. (Roman, 15-year old, Tula, Russia)

Another source of Russians' frustration with the international community has been the perceived unfair treatment of ethnic Russians abroad. A 16-year old respondent from Tula, for example, regarded the removal of monuments to Soviet soldiers in Latvia as a personal insult.⁵ Russian public schools devote considerable attention to teaching World War II events, but in-depth analysis of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Act and its implications for the region seem to be obscured. Instead, history textbooks glorify the victory of Russian people over the Nazis and elevate the role of Stalin in solidifying the power of the Soviet state. It is not surprising that the interviewed high school students seemed unfamiliar with the fact that the Red Army occupied Latvia in June 1940 and incorporated it in the former Soviet Union by force.

When it comes to domestic issues, adolescents lamented the level of poverty in the country. Given the high unemployment rate in the post-Soviet period, the respondents found the idea of job security in the communist-era appealing.⁶

The dissolution of the Soviet Union had bad consequences for people. There used to be a lot of jobs. People could afford a lot of things. There was enough money to live on. It is not the same now. (Andriy, 15-year old, Lviv, Ukraine)

In the Soviet Union, there were plenty of job opportunities. If you did well in school, you could find a job. There was some hope for the future. (Bohdan, 14-year old, Donetsk, Ukraine)

The family budget of most families has worsened after the Soviet Union fell apart. (Aniuta, 15-year old, Donetsk, Ukraine)

Another attractive feature of the Soviet system for adolescents was low crime rate. A 15-year old respondent from Moscow argued it was right to impose some restrictions on people because it ensured control over everything. Indeed, criminal activities have experienced a hike in the 1990s (Shelley, 2000; Solomon and Foglesong, 2000). The impoverished population turned to petty crimes and violence. Moreover, the absence of a transparent legal environment has led to the expansion of opaque business practices and mafia-like organizations. This insecure social environment engendered adolescents' concern about the high crime rate:

There wasn't so much crime in the past. One could walk quite safely at night. Now one trembles with fear when walking in the dark alley late in the evening. (Sveta, 15-year old, Moscow, Russia)

People used to fear the letter of the law. (Oleg, 14-year old, Kyiv, Ukraine)

⁵ The Kremlin continues to deny the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. When the incumbent government of Estonia expressed the intent to remove the monument to Soviet soldiers from a central location in the capital city of Tallinn, Russia immediately issued a note of protest. On the dispute over Soviet-era monuments, see Myers (2007).

⁶ The socialist system guaranteed each individual a job upon graduation from the university and a stable income throughout lifetime. Hardly any employee was fired regardless of his or her job performance. Though discouraging personal initiative and high productivity, such a labor policy fostered an extremely stable socioeconomic environment.

By the same token, concern over declining moral standards occupied a prominent place in the students' reasoning about the negative effects of the Soviet demise. For example, 16-year old Olga from Moscow stated that there existed strict discipline and respect for the elderly in the Soviet Union. Now the youth display less deference toward the old generation and selfishly caters to its own needs. In consonance with the socialist ideology, several respondents viewed a high level of individualism as a sign of the degrading society. In general, the idea of collective good resonated with high school students:

We used to be very friendly, and we used to treat each other well. Now everybody stands up for oneself. People care only about what is good for them. Just look at our politicians. They have no scruples. (Larisa, 14-year old, Kyiv, Ukraine)

On balance, the semi-structured interviews revealed both positive and negative evaluations of the Soviet system by adolescents. To some, positive features of the communist regime, including job security and international prestige, outweighed the disadvantages of living in a closed society. But others attached greater importance to the exercise of political freedoms and the revival of national culture. A statistical analysis of the relationship between Soviet nostalgia and national pride will provide insights into the implications of these findings for nation-building processes in post-communist states.

Past and present intertwined: Soviet nostalgia and national pride

It is reasonable to assume that attachment to the old political community, the Soviet Union, will have an adverse effect on the level of national pride during the independence period. Before proceeding with the analysis of the relationship between Soviet nostalgia and national pride, it is important to note a remarkably high level of national pride among adolescents in both Russia and Ukraine.

As Table 4 shows, half of respondents are "very proud" of their homeland, with another one-third displaying slightly less exuberance about the country of citizenship. Less than 15% of respondents in both countries report a low level of national pride. At the sub-national level, Russia's adolescents residing in Moscow, Tula, and Rostov-on-the-Don report similar levels of national pride. Yet, Ukraine's adolescents are strongly divided along regional lines. Lviv respondents (72%) articulate a strong sense of national pride. Ukraine's citizenship elicits the same response only among 29% of Donetsk adolescents. Moreover, one-fifth of Donetsk respondents do not feel proud to hold Ukraine's citizenship. These results suggest that adolescents' political attitudes reproduce conflicting ideas over national identity in the post-Soviet period. What are implications of Soviet nostalgia for adolescents' attachment to the reconfigured political community?

Table 5 shows the effects of Soviet nostalgia on national pride in Russia and Ukraine. The results from Ukraine show that the lower Soviet nostalgia, the higher national pride. This is consistent with the assumption that attachment to the old political community will decline and the level of national pride will increase when

Table 4
National pride among adolescents in Russia and Ukraine

National Pride	Country		Russia's City			Ukraine's City		
	Russia	Ukraine	Moscow	Rostov	Tula	Kyiv	Lviv	Donetsk
A great deal	48.4	52.7	52.6	47.5	45.1	55.7	72.3	29.4
Quite proud	39.1	35.7	36.1	40.3	41.0	31.4	24.9	50.7
Not much	9.1	8.6	6.5	10.6	10.2	10	2.1	13.6
Not at all	3.4	3.3	4.8	1.7	3.7	3.0	0.7	6.3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(889)	(842)	(291)	(303)	(295)	(271)	(285)	(286)
Cramer's V	0.041		0.077			0.263***		

Note: the question wording was, "How proud are you to be a citizen of [country]?" The survey item was a four-point scale, ranging from 1, not at all, to 4, a great deal. $N = 1,731$. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.01$. Source: survey of adolescents in Russia and Ukraine, 2005.

former colonized states gain independence.⁷ The results from Russia clearly illustrate a substantially different attitudinal pattern: the extent of Soviet nostalgia is almost equally dispersed among those who take great pride in post-communist Russia and those who are less enthusiastic about holding Russia's citizenship.

This finding clearly shows how attachment to the old (Soviet) and new (post-Soviet) political communities seamlessly co-exists in contemporary Russia. The marriage of Russian and Soviet identities has been so intensely propagated in Putin's Russia that even a new generation of citizens finds it difficult to divorce Russia's identification from the alleged greatness of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study demonstrates the impact of social context on the historical memory of adolescents in Russia and Ukraine. It is clear from the analysis that individuals socialized in the former imperial periphery (Ukraine) are less likely to hold positive views of the colonizer (the Soviet Union) than those grown up in the core of the former empire (Russia). This attitudinal trend, however, holds only if the population in the peripheral state perceives the colonial period in a negative way. Ukraine's East–West cleavage vividly illustrates this point. Lviv adolescents overwhelmingly supported the dissolution of the Soviet Union, whereas more than half of adolescents in Donetsk harbored negative attitudes toward the Soviet demise. By the same token, region of residence is a strong predictor of national pride in divided societies. Respondents from Lviv exhibit much more pride in being citizens of Ukraine than

⁷ Though almost half of the Ukrainian population, mainly concentrated in the eastern part of the country and the Crimea, tends to disagree with the characterization of Soviet Ukraine as a colony, ample historical evidence demonstrates that Ukraine was forced into joining the former Soviet Union. Throughout the Soviet rule, Ukrainians were denied the right to secession.

Table 5
The relationship between national pride and Soviet nostalgia

Pride	Soviet nostalgia: Russia		Soviet nostalgia: Ukraine	
	Low	High	Low	High
A great deal	52.5	46.5	62.1	35.7
Quite proud	36.7	40.1	31.6	41.2
Not much	8.3	9.5	5.1	15.6
Not at all	2.5	3.9	1.2	7.5
Total	100% (324)	100% (536)	100% (512)	100% (294)
Cramer's V	0.065 ($p = 0.300$)		0.304***	

Note: ***the results are significant at 0.001 level.

Source: survey of adolescents in Russia and Ukraine, 2005.

their peers from Donetsk. Taken together, the results indicate that young Ukrainians residing in different parts of the country develop conflicting political allegiances.

A striking result is the compatibility of Soviet nostalgia and national pride among Russian adolescents. Apparently, spatial imagination of young Russians is heavily influenced by Soviet-era historic myths. Soviet historiography propagated a Russo-centric approach to the construction of historical memory. Since Putin's ascendancy to power, the Kremlin reinvented historic narratives of the Soviet period to advance the notion of Russia's enduring greatness and foster a sense of patriotism. The Ministry of Education reduced the number of history textbooks and standardized, to a large extent, their content. The governmental agency, for example, removed from public schools Igor Dolutskii's textbook on 20th-century national history because it presented an overly critical summary of Russia's history.

Furthermore, patriotic upbringing (*patrioticheskoe vospitanie*) has gained prominence in Putin's Russia. *The State Program on Patriotic Upbringing of Russian Citizens, 2001–2005* set three goals: to maintain political stability, rebuild national economy, and strengthen defense capabilities of the country. In addition to schools, the government called upon journalists and social scientists to contribute to this cause. The mass media were to increase programming aimed at strengthening patriotism, and the academic community was to develop a theoretical and methodological basis for advancing the goals of patriotic upbringing. To that end, the government allocated US\$43 million from the federal budget. The size of the federal budget for the 2006–2010 program has tripled demonstrating the Kremlin's commitment to cultivating patriotism among Russian's citizens.

Ukraine's ruling elite, in contrast, committed much less attention and fewer resources to patriotic upbringing. The ministerial decree on the implementation of youth policy (1998) stipulated the promotion of a national consciousness and legal culture among the youth by drawing a long list of activities, but without specifying the size of allocated state funds. The National Program on Patriotic Upbringing (1999) was also of limited reach. The government entrusted the Academy of Pedagogy with the responsibility to develop a concept of civic upbringing (*gromadians'ke vykhovannia*). This concept, however, has not found a nationwide application. And

the attempt to pass a new draft of the national program on patriotic upbringing failed in 2001.

These findings have an important implication for policymaking. The donor community and non-governmental organizations need to commit greater resources to the advancement of history education in the post-communist region. It is a daunting task because autocratic rulers in the former Soviet republics have also recognized the importance of ideational factors in sustaining the repressive regime. In June 2007, for example, President Putin criticized Russian teachers for using foreign grants to publish school textbooks and “dancing to the polka that others have paid for” (Felgenhauer, 2007).

Future research is necessary to develop a stronger understanding of how social context shapes historical memory of the young generation in the post-communist region. A limitation of this analysis is that it utilizes a sample of adolescents from several localities in each country. The design of surveys with a national representative sample will solidify our knowledge of contextual effects on historical memory of youth. When are young people willing to endorse Stalinist methods of social control? What is the impact of economic development on youthful appraisal of the communist past? Answers to these questions can advance our knowledge of conditions conducive to the consolidation of a non-democratic regime and inform policymaking debates in the region.

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