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Conceptualizing Nativism in Authoritarian Russia: From Nationalist Ideology to Antimigrant Riots

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Abstract

Rejection of immigration has become a major political factor in many countries throughout the world. The notion of nativism can be used to analyze forms of this rejection insofar as it involves promoting the interests and way of life of “natives” at the expense of migrants. This article adopts a twofold approach to conceptualize the nativist phenomenon in contemporary Russia. First, I consider discursive expressions of nativism as observed among ethnonationalist actors as well as in the rhetoric of the authorities (especially in the context of Russia’s war on Ukraine), against a background of widespread xenophobia. This reflection draws on interpretations of the slogan “Russia for the Russians.” Second, I consider popular expressions of nativism, including those linked to ethnic violence. I analyze a series of antimigrant riots since the 2000s based on surveys, analysis of the media, and field data. These riots, often supported by organized nationalist actors, involve claims that can be defined as nativist in that they concern protection of natives (*korennyye*) from “foreigners,” understood in ethnic or racial terms and deemed to be the cause of social ills. Overall, this article contributes to comparative studies of nativism in countries that face mass internal or foreign migration.

Keywords: nativism, nationalism, ethnic conflict, Russia, riots.

Introduction

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the new Russian Federation suddenly became a society of immigration. It remains one of the countries with the most immigrants worldwide: around 11 million, or 8% of the country's population—a level stable since the 1990s (United Nations 2020). While post-Soviet migrations have contributed to making Russian society more diverse in terms of ethnic diversity and cultural practices (Abashin 2014b; Malakhov 2014b), they have generated hostility to migrants to the point that violence and intimidation against them have multiplied. The rejection of immigration, considered a long-term or even fundamental threat, has taken root as a form of consensus in Russia's politics and society.

Of course, xenophobic attitudes and practices of racialization, discrimination, and exclusion of ethnic minorities and immigrants are seen in many world societies, including in Europe. These expressions and practices equally affect Western European countries that have seen mass immigration since the 19th century, particularly after the Second World War (Lucassen 2005), and Central and Eastern European societies that have seen the development of a genuine “moral panic” amplified by the 2015 “refugee crisis” (Lucassen 2018; Krzyżanowski 2020). In this respect, the context in Russia is comparable to that elsewhere in Europe (Kosmarskaya and Savin 2016, 136–142; Malakhov 2019). What does seem to set Russia aside is the lack of opinion makers and political forces defending immigration and migrants' rights (Malakhov 2019, 315–316). Moreover, contrary to many Western countries, the Russian case raises the problem of the rejection of internal migrants in addition to foreign citizens. The former refers here to ethnically non-Russian citizens of Russia, including those from the North Caucasus (Mukomel 2016). Indeed, Russia has formed as a multiethnic society. In the 2010 census, the ethnic majority (*russkie*) accounts for 80% of the inhabitants

of Russia, while another 20%—that is, 30 million people—belong to one of the 190 other nationalities.¹

In this article, I will consider the relevance of the concept of nativism, which is intrinsically associated with the rejection of (im)migration, in an analysis of the contemporary Russian context. My argument is twofold. First, I consider that this conceptual introduction is justifiable,² as the notion of nativism links together the other key concepts used in comparative research and Russian studies, including nationalism, xenophobia and, more recently, racism while addressing relations between these concepts.³ Unlike these high-level categories which support general comparisons (Sartori 1970), nativism is a mid-level concept in that it applies solely to societies which face mass (im)migration and the resulting cultural diversity (Guia 2016). Second, I argue that the Russian context is suited to using not only an approach to nativism focused on nationalist actors but also one addressing popular expressions of the nativist phenomenon, including that linked to collective violence.

I will draw on two examples for this reflection. The first concerns the interpretation of the slogan “Russia for the Russians” (*Rossia dlia russkikh*)—sometimes alongside related regional slogans such as “Moscow for the Muscovites” or “Stavropol (Krasnodar, Rostov, etc.) is not the Caucasus”—from the perspective of nativism. In addition to being driven by ethnonationalist movements, the slogan “Russia for the Russians” has become an ordinary social construction widespread in Russian society. The second example concerns the conceptualization of antimigrant riots that have emerged in Russia since the 2000s. These riots are part of a context marked by the generalization of xenophobia—although unevenly spread in time and space (Chapman et al. 2018)—and rising “horizontal” ethnic conflicts. These riots, often supported by organized nationalist movements, make demands which can be defined as nativist in that they concern protection of “natives” (*korennye*) from “foreign elements” deemed to be behind certain social problems. However, nativist riots are different

from “Sons of the Soil” (SoS) conflicts in a few ways. Unlike SoS conflicts, nativist rioters generally belong to a country’s ethnic majority, not a minority ethnic group. Nativist riots do not involve direct competition over land and symbolic ties to a particular territory, which are the heart of SoS conflicts. Finally, nativist riots are short-lived and “almost nonlethal” (see below), whereas SoS conflicts are typically lengthy and (much) more lethal (see Fearon and Laitin 2011; Côté and Mitchell 2017; on SoS conflicts in the post-Soviet space see Kolstø 2019b).

Two central characteristics of the nativist phenomenon can be distinguished, drawing on large-scale survey data, media analysis, and field data. First, it is a self-defense posture, centered on a perceived cultural, socioeconomic, or demographic threat stemming from migrants perceived as endangering “our” way and conditions of life. Second, although hostile feelings and behaviors can be directed toward all “nonnatives” and not just those of a culture different from that of the natives, nativism in Russia takes on an ethnoracial dimension when the threat is perceived to come essentially from geographical regions considered culturally non-Russian, such as the Caucasus and Central Asia.⁴ It then fits in with more general trends: the ethnification of Russian nationalism (Kolstø 2016) and the racialization of social relations in Russia (Zakharov 2015). At the same time, the notion of nativism is useful in explaining variations in xenophobic attitudes and ethnic violence in the country, which cannot be attributed to the dominant ethnic group alone (Alexseev 2010).

Defining the Nativist Phenomenon: Two Approaches to Nativism

Introduced by Louis Dow Scisco in a 1901 essay entitled *Political Nativism in New York State*, the concept of nativism has been a constant in the work of historians and sociologists from the United States since the 1950s, who have sought to identify the forms and origins of hostile sentiments expressed by Americans regarding different ethnic, national, cultural, or religious groups whose ways of life and values were perceived as being foreign. This nativist

phenomenon, the first documented expressions of which in the North American context date back to the late 18th century, was then defined as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections” (Higham 1955, 4), or else “a state of mind shared by segments of the dominant population, characterized by (more or less overt) expressions of anti-Catholicism, xenophobia, and racism directed toward other segments of the population within American society” (Friedman 1967, 408–409). The term nativism was therefore initially associated with the arrival of ethnically or culturally different populations and the fear of such immigration increasing.

Although nativism has been seen as a historically recurrent phenomenon, the use of the notion was long reserved to the sole geographical context of the United States (Anbinder 2006). While the nativist phenomenon fueled the emergence of influential populist movements in 19th-century America (Betz 2013), it has also been expressed in other spatiotemporal contexts, such as France at the end of the same century. Boulangism was an eloquent expression of it, particularly in its later form, promoted by Maurice Barrès. A prominent writer and Boulangist Deputy, Barrès sought to reconcile the principles of ethnic nationalism and socialism through the idea of “national preference,” supposedly to protect French workers from foreign labor (Betz 2017, 344–346). From this perspective, the central feature of nativism is the “preference for native-born people of a given society,” common among “individuals who consider themselves to be the original inhabitants or rightful citizens of a given region or nation” (Fernandez 2013, 1).

Theorizing nativism from the standpoint of the post-1945 European context, Guia (2016, 11) defines it as “a philosophical position, sometimes translated into a movement, whose primary goal is to restrict immigration in order to maintain some deemed essential characteristics of a given political unit [that is] the cultural, racial, religious, or political status quo.” In this respect, nativism can be identified through ideological or discursive elements,

including the perception of immigration as a fundamental threat to the survival or well-being of the nation, the need to support only native culture and values, or the introduction of exclusive or priority rights for natives (Guia 2016, 12).

Here, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the notion of nativism and the concepts of nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. On one hand, nativism can be seen as a form of nationalism and, more precisely, a form of ethnic nationalism resting on exclusion (Connor 1994; Tudor 2018). If nationalism relies on the divide between in-group and out-group members—that is, “us” vs. “them” (Muller 2008)—nativism specifies this divide as that between native populations—the historical nation—and nonnative minorities, rooted in migration (recent or not). Like ethnonationalism, nativism thus supports policies not only of migration control but also (in extreme variants) of deportation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide of minorities (Smith 1994; Kaufman 2001).

On the other hand, nativism is linked to xenophobia and racism. All three categories refer to bigotry and excluding attitudes, ideologies, or worldviews that target those who are depicted as foreigners, regardless of the attribute that distinguishes in-groups from out-groups (e.g., race, language, history, culture, or religion). While “classical” biological racism implies a hierarchy for it presents in-groups as superior to out-groups on the physical or biological ground, cultural (or new) racism relies on the “maxim that different cultures are essentially incompatible with each other” (Hervik 2015, 797; see also Rodat 2017; Rutland 2022). But like nationalism, xenophobia and racism are (too) general terms which designates hostility to *all* types of out-groups, whether in terms of fears (phobias) or ideological content. If these groups are of migration background, one could speak about “migratophobia.” Nativism is a more precise term that focuses on *the defense* of in-groups against incoming out-groups in a given territory. To put it simply, xenophobes and racists dislike or even hate “others,”

nativists seek to protect their own, native, group against newcomers in different ways, including legal restrictions or (vigilant) violence.

Globally, there are two ways to define nativism. The first approach considers nativism as an ideology or a worldview relying on a specific discourse. Indeed, the recent broadening of the spatial scope of the nativism concept is due to study of radical right parties, primarily in Europe and North America (Mudde 2007; Art 2011; Betz 2017; Pappas 2019). This research has provided important conceptual precisions concerning the analysis of the demands made by contemporary nationalist actors and helped transform the category of nativism into a tool for comparative studies.⁵ For example, Mudde (2007, 19) defines nativism as “an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.” This definition links the concept of ethnonationalism to that of nativism because the main nationalist maxim says that the nation (cultural and identity unit) and the state (political organization) should be congruent (Gellner 1983). As an element of the populist radical right’s ideology, nativism is often associated with slogans like “Britain for the British” or “Bulgaria for the Bulgarians,” which “summarize the core goal of every nativist: ‘Our own state for our own nation’” (Mudde 2007, 139). However, contrary to plain ethnonationalism, nativism as an ideology states that only the “original” population—or, as in the Russian multiethnic context, some original populations—can remain on the territory, and the nonnatives (primarily migrants) must leave.

The ideological definitions of nativism, along with the use of concepts such as populism and authoritarianism, have been useful to describe and analyze the ideology, rhetoric and manifestos of political parties usually classified as far-right including the National Rally (Rassemblement National, former Front National) in France, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), and the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. Yet while it is

important to focus on political actors, doing so appears to overshadow an initial approach considering nativism first and foremost as a set of popular attitudes and mobilizations, formed by shared xenophobic or racist sentiments and based on the premise of the rights of native populations. The latter see themselves as legitimate in a given territory—a town, a region, or a state—and assert their preeminence over nonnatives (or recent migrant groups) defined in terms of ethnic or geographical ancestry and biological or cultural features. In this article, I will employ an analytical framework combining these two perspectives on nativism to analyze the contemporary Russian context.

I will begin by demonstrating that the nativist discourse has been embraced in Russia by nationalist para-state and above all non-state actors. The former are notably represented by the late Vladimir Zhirinovsky's misleadingly named Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and the latter by radical movements like the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and the "Russians" (*Russkie*) (Laruelle 2009, 2017). Their discourse and political programs have been built around the status of the dominant ethnicity (Kaufmann and Haklai 2008) among other native groups and their defense with regard to nonnative groups. I will then briefly demonstrate that these attitudes are widespread in Russian politics and society, where a sort of anti-immigration consensus has set in. Finally, I will look at antimigrant riots interpreted as an essentially *popular* expression of Russian nativism, although nationalist actors can support these explosions of violence and provide them with a nativist framework for interpretation.

"Russia for the Russians" as a Nativist Political Slogan: The Dominant Ethnic Group and Other Native Peoples

The slogan "Russia for the Russians" first appeared in the last third of the 19th century. In public exchanges, it was used by intellectuals and statesmen to assert Russia's global power, to proclaim the unity of the people at home, or to invoke the predominance of the majority

ethnic group—*russskie* (Ivanov 2016). The slogan echoed other similar ones, such as “America for the Americans” in the USA, which rose to prominence following the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine (Ivanov 2016, 51–58).

In the early 20th century, “Russia for the Russians” became the watchword of newly formed national-monarchist movements (e.g., Union of the Russian People, Union of the Russians, Russian Monarchist Party), known as the Black Hundreds. These movements identified as true Russians (*istinno russskie*) and patriots and declared themselves true to the crown. Their spokesmen used the slogan to denounce the hold of outsiders (*zasilie inorodtsev*), particularly Jews, and to call for the reestablishment of the majority ethnic group’s domination within a multiethnic and multifaith empire (Ivanov 2016). According to these actors, it was necessary for the Russians, as the constituent group of the crown, to benefit from special rights. Under this interpretation, the Russian slogan is similar to that of “France for the French” (*La France aux Français*), embraced by several generations of French nationalists since the late 19th century (Birnbaum 1993). Whereas the French slogan expressed refusal of the Republic and rejection of the Other, be it domestic or external—Jews, Protestants, free masons, and immigrants (*métèques* [aliens])—the Russian nationalists’ slogan essentially concerned the internal cultural diversity of an imperial society.

After disappearing from public discourse during the Soviet period, the slogan “Russia for the Russians” reemerged in the 1990s, becoming one of the most widespread slogans in the country by the early 21st century and seeming to have significant mobilizing potential (Levada Center 2013a). The ethnocentric baggage of the slogan, already typical of its pre-1917 use, has grown considerably. While the word *russskii* could, in prerevolutionary Russia, refer to the Slavic peoples of the East (Great Russians, Little Russians/Ukrainians, and Belarusians), populations of Orthodox religion, or even all the Tsar’s subjects, the word was gradually ethnicized during the Soviet period. The two wars in Chechnya also contributed to

that process (Malakhov 2014a, 57–59). In consequence, the slogan *Rossiia dlia russkikh* now primarily refers to the status of the dominant ethnic group rather than the political community, generally referred to as *rossiiskii*. However, the semantic boundaries of “Russianness” remain blurred both in public debates and in daily life (Shevel 2011; Blakkisrud 2016; Blackburn 2021), and since 2012 the Russian official discourse has refocused from *rossiiskii* to *russkii* (Blakkisrud 2023). For instance, the term *russkie* can be used by some people to designate all citizens of the Russian Federation. Thus, in the 2013 NEORUSS (New Russian Nationalism project) survey, 25% of respondents supported this inclusive meaning of the term when asked about the slogan “Russia for the Russians,” while 30% answered “mostly but not exclusively ethnic Russians,” and only 39% meant “ethnic Russians only” (Blakkisrud 2016, 265–266; Kolstø 2016, 40). Even if the slogan remains open to different interpretations, it seems that ethnocentrism has become the common denominator for political actors in early 21st century Russia. Indeed, only actors focusing primarily on ethnic issues within the country use this slogan—contrary to those Russian nationalists who take rather imperialist and/or statist stances, from Gennady Zyuganov’s Communist Party (KPRF) to patriotic conservatives of the Izborsky Club (Laruelle 2016). At least three central readings of the slogan can be distinguished in contemporary political discourse.

The first is the most radical but also the least elaborate. It invokes the establishment of an ethnically or racially homogeneous state, achieved through the expulsion, or even extermination, of all non-Russian, non-Slavic, or non-white populations deemed unassimilable or racially inferior. This racist conception of the nation is promoted by extremist movements which, drawing on neo-Nazism and white supremacy, legitimize and practice violence against visible minorities (Laruelle 2009, 60–71; Arnold 2016). After growing significantly during the 2000s, the influence of White Power ideology in Russian nationalism has been in decline ever since (Verkhovsky 2018).

According to the second reading, the Russians are victims of discrimination or neglect in “their own” country. This discourse has notably been promoted by the national-populist LDPR, led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy until his passing in 2022, and presently in Putin’s authoritarian regime (Gel’man 2015) as part of the “systemic opposition.” While, in the 1990s, Zhirinovskiy could call for continued Russian expansion through the *Last Thrust to the South* (the title of his 1993 book), the LDPR’s slogan for the 2003 legislative elections was “We are for the poor, we are for the [ethnic] Russians!” Ahead of the 2011 elections, Zhirinovskiy launched the campaign under the slogan “Russia is also for the Russians” and declared, “We are not saying that Russia is only for the Russians. This slogan must be set aside. Many native peoples live in Russia, and [some of them] were on their territories well before the Russians. But we are saying to the Russians that Russia is also their country” (LDPR 2010). Interestingly, Zhirinovskiy justified the rewording of the initial slogan by saying that it is now seen as “extremist” in a multiethnic Russia, which is why “it is not about giving Russians exclusive rights or privileges.” But, since the well-being of all Russia’s citizens is considered subordinate to that of the dominant group, “we need to understand that the Russian people is master too, and not a guest, on this land!” (LDPR 2018).⁶ As such, the LDPR has for years been calling for the elimination of the republics of Russia (*respubliki*), which the more numerous ethnic minorities enjoy, to be replaced with provinces (*gubernii*), and for the adoption of a restrictive migration policy setting a limited quota allowed to enter Russia (TASS 2011).

The third contemporary reading of “Russia for the Russians,” which is openly promoted by opposition ethnonationalists excluded from official politics, portrays a dominant ethnicity threatened above all by (non-Slavic) immigration. It is a fundamentally nativist understanding of the slogan, partly building on the second and stressing the theme of migration. One proponent of this was the DPNI, created in 2002 under the leadership of

Aleksandr Belov (Potkin). By 2011, when a court decision banned it for “extremism,” the DPNI has become the most influential movement in Russian opposition nationalism, adopting from the outset a firm anti-immigration discourse inspired by the Western European radical right (Mudde 2007, 71; Laruelle 2009, 74–79, 83). It called for the closure of borders with the states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, considering immigration from these countries the fundamental threat to Russia and the main cause of such social ills as poverty, unemployment, and (organized) crime. The DPNI made deportation of all “illegal” immigrants (*nelegaly*) its primary goal. In its 2009 manifesto, the DPNI called for legal and social protection of the dominant group among other “native peoples” (*korennyye narody*) of Russia in the face of growing migration flows that would pose the risk of making the majority become a minority.⁷ It also advocated the introduction of priority Russian citizenship for all representatives of these peoples and the establishment of strong social policies to ensure the demographic growth of native populations (Ustav 2009).

After the prohibition of the DPNI, the ethnonationalists launched the Ethnopolitical Movement the “Russians” (*Etnopoliticheskoe dvizhenie Russkie*), conceived as a federation of various nationalist organizations across the country. The new movement, directed at strengthening the “ethnic solidarity” of the dominant group, was led notably by Belov and Dmitry Demushkin, former leader of the neo-Nazi-inspired Slavic Union (*Slavianskii soiuz*, shortened to “SS” in Russian), which was banned in 2010. The manifesto of the *Russkie* movement, adopted in June 2011, proclaimed the ultimate goal of creating a “National State of the Russians.” In this state, “the rights and freedoms today confiscated [by the authoritarian regime] will be restored to [the members of the dominant ethnicity],” political prisoners will be released, “ethnic crime” will be vanquished, and “national and social justice” will be restored. At the same time, the movement declared it wanted to put an end to “migratory occupation” on Russian soil (*zaselenie Rossii migrantami*) and the “payment of the tribute to

the Caucasus.”⁸ It wanted the Russian government to adopt a great public program to “support the Russian people and other native peoples threatened with extinction” (Manifest 2011). It is noticeable that while the ethnonationalist discourse appears to recognize Turkic populations (such as Tatars, Bashkirs, and Yakuts), Finno-Ugric populations (such as Udmurts, Mordvins, and Maris) and, perhaps, Mongolian populations (such as Buryats and Kalmyks) as native peoples and traditional national minorities, that is clearly not the case of (North) Caucasian populations. These are mostly perceived as “(illegal) migrants” when it comes to migration to ethnic Russian-dominated regions. Therefore, for opposition ethnonationalism the politicking is over not only the control of external borders but also the internal migration of some “non-Russians.”⁹ The *Russkie* movement was banned in 2015, again for extremism.

Despite the ban on the registration of ethnonationalist parties and a series of crackdowns on ethnonationalists themselves that I will discuss below, it is on the basis of another overtly nativist claim, as defined above by Mudde, that there is today a near consensus among many Russian nationalists, be they “systemic” or “nonsystemic,” “empire-oriented,” or ethnonationalist (Kolstø 2016; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2018)¹⁰: the legal recognition of the status of the Russians as the “state-bearing people/nation” (*gosudarstvoobrazuiushchii narod/natsiia*). This demand was thus displayed in the programs of the DPNI and the LDPR (TASS 2011). It is also the case for the Double-Headed Eagle Society (current Tsargrad Society), founded in 2017 by “Orthodox businessman” Konstantin Malofeev and claiming to be the heir to the Black Hundreds, a movement with whom it shares the monarchist, imperial, and orthodox principles. It calls in its manifesto for “changes to the state migration policy [...] in order to make it serve the native population [*korennoe naselenie*] of Russia.” That would involve “protection of the [Russian] labor market from the influx of unqualified labor from the republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia” (Manifest 2017).¹¹

Although one could struggle to assess the relative weight of each understanding of “Russia for the Russians,” the third one has clearly gained in popularity since the 2000s. However, as Putin’s regime officially rejects the slogan,¹² nationalist para- and non-state actors have sought to translate this into a series of more precise (and sometimes less radical) claims. Thus, in January 2020, shortly after Vladimir Putin’s address to the Russian Parliament in which he proposed to amend the Constitution, various nationalist actors, including the chairman of the unregistered National Democratic Party Konstantin Krylov (1967–2020) and the empire-oriented and Orthodox publicist Yegor Kholmogorov, published an open letter to the authorities, calling for a series of “Russian amendments” (*russkie popravki*) to be adopted. The signatories¹³ called for the status of the Russians as “the state-bearing nation” to be enshrined in the Constitution, as “without the [ethnic] Russians there is no Russia”; the new phrasing would thus have to replace the current notion of the “multinational people of Russia” (*mnogonatsionalnyi narod Rossii*) (Ruspopravki 2020; see also Khramov 2020). It is interesting that, despite this key role claimed for the majority ethnic group, the authors acknowledged that non-Russian peoples, “which are part of the union of peoples” with the ethnic majority, “form a united nation in the civic sense of the term.” In doing so, they exploited the civic nationalism discourse in support of the majority population. In this sense, the nationalists partly converge with the official position of the state authorities, which describe Russia, in the words of Vladimir Putin (2012), as both a “multiethnic civilization” bound together by the Russian people and its culture and a *rossiiskaia* civic nation, considered inclusive for all native populations including North Caucasian ones (Blakkisrud 2016). The signatories of the letter further advocated the recognition of the Russian Federation as the “national home of the Russian people and the other native peoples of Russia,” committing as such to the protection of their rights both domestically and in areas “with a high concentration” of these populations.¹⁴ Beyond priority for Russian naturalization,

the authors of the amendments called for the establishment of a principle of protecting Russian culture—seemingly against non-Russian cultural influences—across the country’s territory, while “the cultures of other native peoples already enjoy such guarantees” in their autonomous territories.

The constitutional amendments approved by President Putin and enshrined by a referendum in summer 2020 proved disappointing to many Russian nationalists. Their calls for a special status for the dominant ethnicity were largely ignored.¹⁵ However, the term “state-bearing people” did appear in Article 68-1, with the new wording: “The official language of the Russian Federation across the whole of its territory shall be Russian, as the language of the state-bearing people which is an integral part of the multinational union of equal peoples of the Russian Federation” (State Duma 2020). This decision prompted concern and criticism from the spokespeople of ethnic minorities (Kavkazskii uzel 2020), and it also disappointed advocates of civic nation-building (Fediunin 2022). It seems to further President Putin’s controversial decision to end compulsory teaching of minority languages in public schools situated in the Federation’s republics (Bowring 2018) while reinforcing the Russocentric trend in official nation-building (Blakkisrud 2023). These actions can be seen as part of the regime’s politics of “managed nationalism” (Horvath 2021; on the Chinese case see Weiss 2014). Indeed, Putin’s regime has constantly sought to maintain control over the nationalist camp by borrowing from its rhetoric and interacting with the various nationalist forces—sometimes through repression, sometimes through cooptation (Fediunin 2023). In this respect, it carries out some of the nationalists’ goals while marginalizing competing actors.

Anti-Immigration Consensus and State-Sponsored (Ethnoracial) Nativism

The response of the Russian authorities illustrates a desire to dominate the nationalist and—more particularly—nativist discourse but also to use xenophobia as an instrument of power

legitimation (Kingsbury 2017). In rejecting the political slogan “Russia for the Russians,” they do not appear unaware that it is also a widely shared social construction in public opinion. According to Levada Center data, this idea is systematically supported by almost half of respondents, 15%–20% “firmly” and 30%–40% “to a reasonable extent.” Only 20%–30% of those surveyed consider the slogan “extremist” or “fascist.” It is important to remember that support for this idea has remained mostly stable for the last two decades, despite a few peaks, such as autumn 2013 when it was supported by two-thirds of respondents (Levada Center 2020).

The popularity of the slogan “Russia for the Russians” is part of a context of multiform xenophobia spreading within Russian society (Dubin 2014). In this respect, it is emblematic that supporting this slogan—“radically” or “moderately”—is highly correlated with the expression of xenophobic attitudes to ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities or to individuals with immigrant backgrounds (Pipia 2017). Moreover, supporters of the slogan can be found among those of all political forces represented in Russia’s Parliament, including the incumbent United Russia party and Vladimir Putin himself, but to a higher degree among those who vote for the LDPR or the KPRF (Pipia 2017, 169–170).

Anti-immigration attitudes occupy a special place within this multiform xenophobia. In the Russian public opinion, immigration is widely associated with a threat, be it cultural, economic, or security related. In the 2016 survey by the Levada Center, 39% of respondents said that “immigrants destroy Russian culture,” 28% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 27% disagreed. Some 62% said that “immigrants take Russians’ jobs” and 64% that “immigration increases crime rates” (Levada Center 2016). Cross-national surveys, including European Values Study data, indicate that more than 60% of Russians claim that immigration undermines systematically both the cultural life of the country and its economy (Gorodzeisky, Glikman, and Maskileyson 2015; Iakimova and Menshikov 2019). Moreover, negative

attitudes toward all kinds of immigrants—from the same race/ethnic group, a different ethnicity group as majority, and from poorer countries—increased in Russia between 2006 and 2016, contrary to many European countries (Iakimova and Menshikov 2019). In 2016, while 56% of Russian respondents had a positive attitude toward the arrival of “invisible” migrants to Russia, there were only 35% and 27% as for the arrival of “visible” migrants and those from poorer countries, respectively (Iakimova and Menshikov 2019, 56).

Interestingly, and still in contrast with Western countries, “negative attitudes toward immigrants in Russia are likely to emerge regardless of the natives’ socioeconomic status or conservative ideology” (Gorodzeisky and Glikman 2018, 544; see also Gorodzeisky, Glikman, and Maskileyson 2015). At the same time, ethnic Russians tend to view foreigners’ effects on Russian society in more negative terms than what members of ethnic minorities do. The role of individual characteristics in explaining anti-immigration attitudes is indeed larger within ethnic minorities (Gorodzeisky and Glikman 2018). Although Russians’ opinions about immigrants are largely shaped by the media, they also stem from concerns about cultural, demographic, and social shifts as perceived by respondents in their daily life, especially in urban areas (Kosmarskaya and Savin 2016; Blackburn 2021). These include the biggest cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg, which are home to the largest numbers of immigrants. Here, there is strong discrimination against “visible” minorities, in contrast to cities with ethnically mixed populations like Kazan and Ufa (Bessudnov and Shcherbak 2020).

As a fundamental threat, immigration must be restricted. Since the end of the 2000s, more than 60% of respondents in Russia have agreed that “the authorities must restrict the influx of migrant workers,” and in August 2020, 73% were of that opinion (up 6% on July 2018), as against 11% who disagreed (Levada Center 2020). In a 2019 IPSOS survey spanning 27 countries, only 6% of Russian respondents (compared with 15% on average for

the countries surveyed) agreed that the country “would be better off if we let in all immigrants who wanted to come here,” while 74% disagreed (IPSOS 2019). Regarding the restriction of minority groups’ rights, only just over a quarter of Russian respondents (28% in 2018) say they do not want to restrict the residence of any person in Russian territory based on their ethnicity (Levada Center 2018).

As in other European countries, the perception of immigration in Russia is not neutral in terms of ethnicity and race. Of course, real or assumed belonging to the “migrant” category (*prishlost*) can be a source of hostile sentiment without any apparent link to ethnicity and race. Thus, displaced persons, mostly ethnic Russians, who came from former Soviet republics to Russia in the 1990s, were subject to hostile attitudes, while ethnic “minorities traditionally present on a given territory [e.g., Tatars] are considered by the ethnic majority as ‘our own’” (Mukomel 2013, 63; see also Iakimova and Menshikov 2019). However, despite multiple difficulties involved with taking in these people, ethnically Russian and, more generally, Slavic immigration has not led to major tensions between local populations and new arrivals, who integrate fully into the host society (Abashin 2014b, 10). This is also true for the arrival, between 2014 and 2015, of hundreds of thousands of people from Ukraine’s war-torn Donbas to Russia, mainly in the regions located close to the Russian-Ukrainian border, despite the many difficulties that the displaced persons may have encountered in their social adaptation (Podlesnaya and Khomutova 2016).

The (im)migrant is, indeed, an ethnically and racially connoted figure in Russian ordinary, political, and media discourse. While Slavic mobile people are not usually considered to be “migrants,” it is telling that the latter category is deemed to include not only individuals from foreign states (those of Central Asia, Transcaucasia, or East and South-East Asia) but also Russian fellow citizens from North Caucasus republics who move to regions with an ethnic Russian majority (Mukomel 2016). The figure of the migrant refers then to a

person “who is coercively endowed with signs of ‘the alien’ [which include their] physical appearance, [their] faith and religious practices, [and their] cultural customs” (Abashin 2014b, 21–22). This racialization of migrants is heightened by the social stigma of supposed illegal status or their position in social hierarchies, produced by division of labor. This is a racialized category, designating those who should be excluded from the dominant society or placed in a position of inferiority: “migrants are classified as non-whites because the work they now typically perform is defined as menial in the public and political discourse. They are ‘black’ because they ‘work as hard as Negroes’ doing ‘dirty jobs’” (Zakharov 2015, 144).

Racialization also involves the construction of imaginary groups such as “people of Caucasian nationality” (*litsa kavkazskoi natsionalnosti*), “southerners” (*iuzhane*), or “blacks” (*chernye*).

Both federal and local authorities seek to exploit these opinions, contributing to their amplification. Malakhov (2014b, 1074) observes an “awkward situation for the Russian government: it implements liberal immigration policy and uses anti-immigration rhetoric at the same time.” Following its hindering actions on grassroots anti-immigration initiatives like those of the DPNI, the Russian authoritarian regime takes on “functions which are [usually] undertaken by far-right parties” in democracies. For example, in October 2006 President Putin condemned the “semi-gangs, some of them ethnic” he said controlled wholesale and retail markets in Russian cities. To put a stop to that, he said markets should be regulated “to protect the interests of Russian producers and population, the native Russian population” (Myers 2006). Six years later, in an article setting out his approach to the “national question,” then Prime Minister Putin linked the “failure of the multicultural project” in Europe to making “minorities’ right to be distinct absolute,” but not balancing that “with public, behavioral, or cultural commitments to the native population and society as a whole.” In the Russian case, he described immigration in terms of a threat to the traditional values of the nation and promised to “[bring] migration flows back to a manageable level” through the introduction of

restrictive measures such as compulsory Russian language and history tests for immigrants (Putin 2012).¹⁶ However, the state authorities seem to realize that the Russian economy has a constant need for immigrants, as native labor forces continue to shrink due to a low average birth rate and the general aging of the population. This understanding is embedded into the complex mosaic of migration management in Russia, relying on a mix of formal and informal instruments (Schenk 2018).

Similarly, the official nativist stance does not target North Caucasian populations. It is rather multiethnic than ethnocentric in the sense that it gives no overt privileges to Slavic groups. According to the Russian authorities, the definition of the “right” kind of migrants is “less a question of ethnicity, or where a migrant might be from, than their ability to easily integrate and willingness to stay in Russia and build a life there” (Sharifzoda 2019). For instance, the state “compatriots” policy, which designates the group eligible for preferential access to Russian citizenship, is open to “people living outside the border of the Russian Federation who made a free choice in favor of spiritual and cultural connection with Russia and who usually belong to peoples who have historically lived on the territory of the Russian Federation” (Federal Law No. 179-FZ from July 23, 2010; see Shevel 2012).

Since 2014, several amendments have been introduced to the Law on Citizenship to simplify the procedure for admission to Russian citizenship for “native Russian speakers” (*nositeli russkogo iazyka*), mainly Russian-speaking citizens of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Ukraine, including a 2019 presidential decree targeted at certain categories of Ukrainian citizens living on the self-proclaimed breakaway territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (Gulina 2020, 2021). Between 2012 and 2021, the number of people who received Russian citizenship has increased by almost a factor of eight, going from 95,737 to 735,385. Ukraine being the most populated country of the post-Soviet space after Russia, Ukrainians constituted an important share of naturalized Russian citizens. The 2014

Ukraine crisis and the following armed conflict in the Donbas region have greatly contributed to increasing this share: while Ukrainians represented on average 34% of those who got Russian citizenship from 2016 to 2018, this rate increased up to 60.1% in 2019 and 62.4% in 2020, before going down to 51.1% in 2021. After the simplification of the naturalization procedure in 2019 for the Donbas residents (“for humanitarian reasons” officially), almost 1.1 million Ukrainians became holders of Russian passports from 2019 to 2021, compared with 269 thousand between 2016 and 2018. It is significant in this respect that in 2021 42.3% of all Russian passports for new Russian citizens were issued in Rostov Oblast which borders Donbass (Finexpertiza 2022).

The Russian official nativist stance is pragmatic insofar as it helps compensate for the natural population decrease and feed the shrinking labor force in Russia. It is also instrumental in the context of a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War resulting from the invasion of Ukraine launched by Putin’s regime on February 24, 2022. The Russian invasion was justified both in terms “demilitarizing” Ukraine and defending the Russian-speaking populations, who were allegedly victims of discrimination and even genocide in Ukraine (Putin 2022).¹⁷ Denouncing Western and Ukrainian “Russophobia” (one of the key terms of Russian nationalism), the Russian leadership has once again mobilized the nationalist rhetoric by invoking the pre-1917 triune Russian nation, shared by many Russian nationalists, and insisting on the “unhistorical” and “artificial” character of the Ukrainian state and its post-Soviet borders. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that Putin’s “special military operation” has had the stated objective of cleansing Ukraine of “aggressive nationalists” and “neo-Nazis” who would have taken over the Ukrainian state with the goal of its “de-Russification.”

The nativist stance of the Russian state toward Ukraine and Ukrainians has been reinforced by a decree signed by President Putin on July 11, 2022, which extended a

simplified Russian naturalization process to all citizens of Ukraine (Pravo.gov 2022). This decision obviously targets reinforcing and extending the Russian military presence in the occupied Ukrainian areas, including the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia. It may also seek to depopulate Ukraine in the years to come in an attempt to divide the Ukrainian nation and make the Ukrainian state unviable.

Yet, at the regional level, the situation has long been different: Russian local authorities have used antimigrant rhetoric for years. Examples include southern regions such as Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai, where political leaders engaged throughout the 1990s and 2000s in hate speech depicting migrants from neighboring Caucasian regions as “a very numerous, homogenous, and aggressive group, which contributes to degrading the living conditions of the longer-standing inhabitants [*starozhilcheskogo naseleniia*]” (Savva 2012, 90). In Stavropol, ethnonationalist discourse invoking the construction of a “defensive wall” against migration from North Caucasian republics has been spread by para-state Cossack organizations and figures of the Russian Orthodox Church (Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2017). In 2010, authorities in several Russian regions, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg, launched an initiative to prepare texts codifying rules of behavior in public. These “rules” included mastery of Russian, respect for dress code, and the stigmatization of behaviors deemed aggressive or insolent, such as the traditional firing of shots in Caucasian wedding celebrations and lezginka dancing, also traditional in the Caucasus. After hot public debate, particularly on the Internet, the documents were never officialized. However, the generalization of protectionist and restrictive antimigrant rhetoric in Russian politics and society was illustrated by the media campaign ahead of the Moscow mayoral election in September 2013. The fight against irregular immigration became the central issue in the discourse of all candidates to the mayoralty, including the incumbent (and reelected) mayor, Sergey Sobyenin, his prime opponent, Aleksey Navalny, the representatives of the KRPF and

of the LDPR, and even Sergey Mitrokhin, then leader of the liberal Yabloko party (Abashin 2014a).

While anti-immigration rhetoric of the local authorities targeting racialized migrants has persisted in the post-2014 context, sometimes in a slower form (see below), it still does not concern Slavic mobile people, including naturalized Ukrainians who are thus perceived as natives.

Antimigrant Riots as a Popular Expression of Nativism in Russia

Expressions of nativism in the contemporary Russian context are not limited to nationalist and official discourses. They are present in public opinion as an aspect of the widespread xenophobia setting apart the collective “us” from ethnic “outsiders”—a division reinforced by the media that puts forward stereotypes on ethnic criminality (Schenk 2012; Dubin 2014; Arnold 2016; Hutchings and Tolz 2016).¹⁸ The stigmatization of these groups contains a “dormant aggressiveness” (Gudkov and Pipia 2018, 62), which tends to legitimize violent acts against suspected “migrants.” The persistence of antimigrant riots in Russia since the 2000s is telling here, as it reflects the sense of insecurity in the face of the arrival of ethnically different populations—that is, the flow of labor migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus into Russia since 2000.

However, there is hardly a linear increase in riots. Indeed, these were absent between 2014 and 2018. This absence is notifiable because it corresponds to the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict and may correlate with the general decline of internal xenophobia. In its turn, this relative and temporary decline seems to be an effect of both the patriotic mobilization across Russia, caused by the annexation of Crimea, and the rise of negative attitudes toward Ukraine and the United States (Pain 2018, 20; see also Levada Center 2018). This observation is significant since it shows that nativism is not the sole driver of contemporary Russian nationalism. Ideologically, since the mid-19th century Russian

nationalism has oscillated between the temptation to form a nation-state, which favors the interests of the dominant ethnic group, and the imperial ideal, which is based on a desire to dominate areas and populations that are ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse. That is why it is meaningful to distinguish between two ideal types of nationalism: the first is ethnic or ethnocentric, and the second is imperialist or statist (Pain and Prostakov 2014; Kolstø 2016, 2019a). The former emphasizes the (ethnic) nation, whose interests may (or should) take precedence over the state, while the latter considers the maintenance of the state to be a central value and refuses to separate the nationalist agenda from state interests. The latter nationalism is thus more inclined to present itself under the label of “patriotism.” These two models compete with each other but also coexist to some degree in Russian history up to the present day (Ponarin and Komin 2016; Kolstø 2019a). In this respect, it can be argued that Russia’s attitude toward Ukraine contains both an imperial and an ethnic element, depending on the interpretation and meaning that different Russian actors give to the invasion of Ukraine: either they emphasize territorial expansion (like the members of the Izborsky Club) or they focus on defending Russians as an ethnic, linguistic, and cultural community. The motives of “regaining” Russian “historical lands” and of protecting Russian minorities in Ukraine were both explicitly invoked by the Putin regime.

But if the “Crimea is ours” euphoria has evaporated, labor immigration remains a long-term factor in the Russian context. Despite a prolonged economic slowdown in the late 2010s and early 2020s, most migrant workers already resident in Russia generally do not prepare to leave the country, even if they suddenly lose their jobs—as notably shown by the COVID-19 public health crisis (Denisenko and Mukomel 2020). Internal migration from the North Caucasian republics will also remain a factor for the foreseeable future, given economic hardships and continuous demographic growth in these regions. These trends risk giving rise to a new wave of ethnic violence targeting nonnative populations.

Table 1 enumerates those antimigrant riots that occurred across Russia between 2005 and 2021 and received major media coverage. The regions concerned include the city of Moscow and Moscow Oblast; the Republic of Karelia in the North-West; Astrakhan, Kirov, Penza, and Saratov Oblasts on the Volga; Stavropol Krai and Rostov Oblast in Southern Russia; Sverdlovsk Oblast (with Yekaterinburg as its capital) in the Ural; and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in the Russian Far East. This list does not include a great number of minor ethnic incidents that attracted little or no attention from federal media.¹⁹ It also does not include many local conflicts, involving individuals of different ethnicities that have not turned into ethnic violence.²⁰

Table 1. List of antimigrant riots receiving major media coverage in Russia, 2005–2021²¹

Dates	Locality/region	Main targets	Number of participants in collective violence	Number of known victims killed*	Property damage observed <i>yes/no</i>	Popular gatherings <i>yes/no (if yes, number of participants)</i>
August 2005	Yandyki (Astrakhan Oblast)	Chechens/ North Caucasians	around 300	1	yes	yes (no data)
June–July 2006	Salsk (Rostov Oblast)	North Caucasians	several hundred	1	no	yes (250–1,000)
August– September 2006	Kondopoga (Republic of Karelia)	Chechens/ North Caucasians	around 300	4	yes	yes (2,000)
May–June 2007	Stavropol (Stavropol Krai)	Chechens/ North Caucasians	around 400	4	yes (attempts)	yes (1,000)
December 2010	Moscow	North Caucasians	several hundred	2	yes	yes (5,000– 20,000)
July 2011	Sagra (Sverdlovsk Oblast)	Caucasians	around 100	1	no	no

June 2012	Demyanovo (Kirov Oblast)	North Caucasians	around 100	1	yes	yes (several hundred)
July 2013	Pugachev (Saratov Oblast)	Chechens/ North Caucasians	around 200	1	yes (attempts)	yes (several hundred)**
October 2013	Biriulevo West (Moscow)	Caucasians; Migrants from Central Asia	several hundred	2	yes	yes (several hundred)
March 2019	Yakutsk (Republic of Sakha–Yakutia)	Migrants from Central Asia	several hundred	3	yes	yes (3,000)
June 2019	Chemodanovka (Penza Oblast)	Roma	several dozen	1	yes	yes (1,000–1,500)**
September 2021	Sergiyev Posad (Moscow Oblast)	Migrants from Central Asia	no data	1	yes (attempts)	yes (several hundred)

Sources: Arnold 2016; Arnold 2019; BBC 2021; Gazeta 2007; Grozd'ia gneva 2014; Kommersant 2016; Memorial 2006; Semenenko 2015; <https://www.sova-center.ru/>.

* Including victims whose killing triggered the rioting.

** Riots lead to blockades of federal highways: Samara-Volgograd highway in Pugachev and the M5 highway from Moscow to the Ural Mountains in Chemodanovka.

These conflicts are typically classified as “(inter)ethnic conflicts”—by experts—and “mass disorder”—by the authorities (Semenenko 2015). However, there was a nativist dimension in all the riots cited, given that they are perpetrated by members of native populations (*mestnye* or *korennye* in Russian)—ethnic Russians or members of a titular nationality (such as Yakuts in Yakutia), perceived as legitimate in a given territory—against migrants or new arrivals (*priezzhie* or *nemestnye*). In most cases, the main targets were from the Caucasus, including from North Caucasus—that is, Russian citizens—but they were also migrants from Central Asian states in the case of rioting in Yakutsk and Sergiyev Posad and the Roma community in the case of Chemodanovka.

In the following sections I will consider some key characteristics of these major riots and analyze the authorities' posture, before discussing the role of organized nationalist actors.

The Typical Nativist Riot: Key Characteristics

Based on the above cases, I propose to reconstruct the typical model for the deployment of mass violence in the form of a nativist riot (see also Dubas 2008, 31–32). In all cases, except in Sagra (Sverdlovsk Oblast), the trigger was a serious crime attributed to a member of a nonnative ethnic community. It was a murder following a verbal altercation between young males, except for examples in Yakutsk, where a Yakut woman was raped by a group of workers from Kyrgyzstan; in Sergiyev Posad, where a local woman was raped and killed supposedly by two migrant workers; and in Chemodanovka, where information related to what triggered event remained murky. The altercation became a brawl, often with knives, leading to the death of a native participant. The triggering event led within a day or so to wider conflict through the involvement of members of the communities concerned. This could lead to mass violence involving dozens or even hundreds of participants armed with metal bars, cutting weapons, or more rarely—such as in Salsk and Sagra—firearms.

The mobilization of natives was triggered by the presence of a significant nonnative population, particularly if the latter's members were in business (in trade, for example) and were therefore suspected of prospering thanks to illegal activities or simply managing better than others financially.²² At the same time, members of a nonnative minority involved in the conflict could call on other minority communities in and around the area in question.²³ These clashes, which could kill or injure several people, led (in 11 out of 12 cases) to popular gatherings in the days that followed, known as *narodnye skhody*, involving hundreds or even thousands of locals. The protesters made demands on the local authorities that were present—notably the heads of local administrations and police—primarily concerned punishment of those presumed guilty, classified as “outsiders” or (irregular) migrants, and the deportation of

their whole community. For example, in Yandyki, in August 2005, the anti-Chechen riot was accompanied by calls to “deport unwanted guests” (Memorial 2006); in Kondopoga, in early September 2006, protesters shouted “Kick them out of here!” (*gnat ikh otsiuda*) (Arnold 2016, 117); in Biriulevo, in October 2013, they shouted “We are Russians, we are at home” (*my russkie, my doma*) (Sova Center 2013); and in Chemodanovka, in June 2019, their slogan was “Deport! Deport!” (*vyseliat*), directed at the local Roma population (Sova Center 2019b). In seven cases out of 12, plus three attempts, these gatherings led to damage or destruction—sometimes by fire—of nonnative property. In some cases (as in Kondopoga on September 2, 2006, central Moscow on December 11, 2010, and Biriulevo on October 13, 2013), *skhody* events have led to further violence against nonnatives. In all the 12 cases listed above, collective violence and popular gatherings led to considerable law enforcement deployments, including the riot police known as OMON. In many cases, regional administration leaders were seen visiting conflict areas to meet local chiefs and receive delegations of protesters.

Four central characteristics of these riots can be identified: reactiveness, spontaneity, pogrom-like violence, and “almost nonlethal” character. First, unlike violence carried out by skinhead and neo-Nazi groups (Arnold 2016, 1–84), these riots do not claim a goal guiding violent behavior (Oakley 1996). Rioters present themselves as a “reaction” to an event or situation embodying the threat migrants pose to natives. This popular reaction is subjectively justified by a lack of confidence in local authorities, which are widely deemed “disconnected,” corrupt, incompetent, and looking after “them” rather than “us.”²⁴ This is why many participants in the antimigrant riots do not believe in the will or ability of the local authorities to uphold the law and punish those guilty of the crime that gave rise to public upheaval, which spurs the sentiment that “it is up to us to do justice” (Jurczynszyn 2011a). This means these riots can be considered through the prism of ethnic vigilantism, insofar as the

rioters act like a force doing justice *in place of* the authorities (Arnold 2016, 138; Laryš 2019, 76–77).

Second, antimigrant riots are largely spontaneous rather than organized events. In the words of Pain (2013, 166), these are “horizontal” ethnic conflicts, as riots take place locally, as opposed to “vertical” conflicts, where the federal center and republics clash on some issues. More generally, antimigrant riots are rooted in the “horizontal interactions” of nationalism (Kaufmann 2017), as they arouse the engagement of nationalist political actors more than they result from that engagement. I will deal with this issue later.

Third, these riots are not directly rooted in the register of contentious politics. Typologically, they are closer to pogroms than violent protests (Horowitz 2001, 17–28).²⁵ According to Lapeyronnie (2006), the riots in the outskirts of French cities in autumn 2005 can be seen as a form of collective negotiation between, on one hand, populations suffering from discrimination and living in disadvantaged areas, where social stigma is coupled with racial stigma, and the government on the other. But in the case of Russia, the riots fulfill the definition of the pogrom, the central objective being to demonstrate “the unwillingness of the majority group to tolerate the presence of the minority any longer and so mark attempts to force them out, to make them ‘leave!’” (Arnold 2016, 10). Riot violence is targeted against stigmatized groups and not (or at least, not directly) against institutional actors deemed incapable of protecting the local population from “migratory occupation” or “ethnic mafias.” It is possible, however, that these riots are a stand-in for social and political protest. Thus, Pain (2014, para. 43) supposes that “attitudes of protest [in Russia] are increasing constantly, while metamorphosing: they can transform either into political movements or into ethnic riots or terrorist activities with religious aspects.”

Considering these characteristics of Russian riots directed against minority groups framed as migrants, it is interesting to contrast those events with ethnic riots that took place in

other countries. The model of a “deadly ethnic riot,” as theorized by Horowitz, offers the possibility of such a cross-country analysis. Horowitz (2001, 1) defines this form of riot as “an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.” Russian riots do share some elements of Horowitz’s model: they are essentially spontaneous, although the presence of organizers cannot be excluded; they are concentrated in time and space; and violence targets individuals, seen as part of an alien group and the property associated with them, rather than public institutions (Horowitz 2001, 1–28). But the key element is missing in the case of Russian nativist riots—that is, mass murders. Indeed, in almost all the cases analyzed by Horowitz in various Asian and African countries in the second half of the 20th century, hundreds or even thousands were killed. Yet there were few casualties in riots in early 21st century Russia; these are “mild riots” given the consequences of the violence (Horowitz 2001, 485–495), particularly by comparison with the violence committed by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine.

Finally, the almost nonlethal character of nativist riots in Russia may result from various factors. While some historical and sociological accounts support the idea that Russian society would be more violent than other societies in terms of violent crime and political violence (Andrienko and Shelley 2005; Oliker 2018),²⁶ a more plausible explanation is that Russia is a rather well-functioning state. Here, the law enforcement agencies are able to keep ethnic frenzy under control to a larger degree and do not comply with violent protesters. Even if the state authorities fail to provide order and justice prior to the riots (and are accused thereof by protestors), they seek to put an end to unsanctioned violence quickly. Over the years, the OMON forces, integrated into the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiia) in 2016, have accumulated extensive experience in suppressing protests, including opposition political protests. Nor has there been any attempt by the Russian government to use antiforeigner

protests as an instrument of foreign policy, as was the case in China with the government's management of the anti-Japanese and anti-American protests (Weiss 2014). On the other hand, violence abated when protestors realized that the state had begun to “perform actions that they thought it should be performing” (Arnold 2016, 127–128)—that is, catch and punish non-Russian crime perpetrators and/or displace the entire nonnative community. Another factor, as I will argue below, is the lack of mass support for radical rioters.

The Nativist Posture Adopted by the Authorities

The nativist nature of the Russian riots is also visible in the reactions of local authorities. Their responses can be interpreted as nativist in two respects. First, they promote the division between us and them and, more precisely, between natives and migrants, as the authorities seek to portray themselves as the protectors of the natives. Second, they give rise to the announcement, and sometimes enactment, of drastic measures aimed at restricting (supposedly irregular) immigration and controlling migratory flows.

Take the words of Sergey Katanandov, then head of the Republic of Karelia, in 2006. He said that “the main cause” of the anti-Caucasian riots in Kondopoga was “the fact that the representatives of another people [from the Caucasus] have behaved insolently and provocatively in front of our eyes, while ignoring the mentality of our people. Making the people of the North [*severnye liudi*] angry is not easy. So, I understand the sentiment of the people who have taken to the streets [in Kondopoga]. [...] Our aim is to make these insolent, disrespectful youths [Caucasians], leave. [...] We are not against the inhabitants of the Caucasus. On the contrary, our doors are open to honest, hard-working people, but we will not allow [them] to not respect our laws” (Tsyganov 2006, para. 29). Shortly before that statement, the local authorities had organized the transport of the Chechen community's members to the regional capital, Petrozavodsk, in collaboration with its leaders.

On the day of the riots in Biriulevo, a Moscow bedroom suburb, on October 13, 2013, the leader of the local administration (*uprava*) had, for his part, announced the creation of a patrol made up of young locals, supposed to take part, alongside the police and the Federal Migration Service (FMS),²⁷ in the “inspection of apartments and the identification of illegal migrants” (*TASS* 2013, para. 4). Despite its importance for the Russian capital’s supplies, the wholesale vegetable warehouse, which was the main employer of migrant workers in the area, was temporarily—then permanently—closed for “violation of health standards.” In addition, the Moscow police department promised a reward of a million rubles for anyone who could provide information on the killer of a young local, Yegor Shcherbakov. Two days later, Russian public television broadcasted a video of the violent arrest of the alleged murderer, who was taken by helicopter to the offices of Vladimir Kolokoltsev, Russian Minister of the Interior (*Sova Center* 2013). In the weeks that followed, Moscow authorities carried out deportations of irregular immigrants arrested in Biriulevo “for violation of migration law” (*RIA Novosti* 2013).

In Yakutsk, the mayor, Sardana Avksentyeva, and the head of Yakutia, Aysen Nikolayev, spoke to around 3,000 protesters at the “Triumph” stadium on March 18, 2019, following the rape of a Yakut woman. As, according to Nikolaev, “this case had particular resonance precisely because the insolent act was committed by migrants, Kyrgyz citizens,” he and Avksentyeva promised to strengthen the fight against irregular immigration, and to identify and deport all “illegals.” Nikolayev added that “all crimes committed by migrants will be subject to special monitoring by law enforcement. Ethnic community leaders will be held particularly responsible.” (*Sova Center* 2019a, paras. 8–9). A few days after the rioting, Nikolayev signed a decree prohibiting employers from recruiting foreign labor throughout Yakutia. However, the prohibition did not concern citizens of Eurasian Economic Union member states—that is, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Thus, the case of

Yakutsk demonstrates that nativist reactions of the local and regional authorities do not always jeopardize the official *rossiiskii* consensus, since they target foreign citizens. At the same time, the case shows that these reactions are limited by the interests of the Russian state, which is the driving force of the Eurasian Economic Union integration project.

Following the rioting in Chemodanovka on June 14, 2019 and the fire the next day in a home inhabited by Roma in the neighboring village of Lopatki, the local authorities received the public. Accompanied by representatives of the Regional Investigative Committee, the Prosecutor's Office and the Commissioner for Human Rights, the head of the rural administration (*selsovet*), Sergey Fadeev, said that "all Roma living here [around 900 people] had been transferred to Volgograd Oblast, where the local Roma community agreed to take them in. That was done by force. Now we are examining the question of the legality of their presence in our territory [...]. As yet, we do not know what to do with their property, even if it is compliant with the law. That is the next stage in our work" (Sova Center 2019b, para. 13).

Finally, it should be noted that the authorities also exploited anti-Western propaganda clichés in attempt to explain the outbreak of ethnic conflicts. Thus, two days after the rioting in Chemodanovka, the governor of Penza Oblast, Ivan Belozertsev, in front of the cameras at a meeting with locals, accused unidentified persons, supposedly funded by the United States, to "destabilize the situation" in the region by spreading "fake news" (Delovoi Peterburg 2019). This tendency to explain the ethnic tensions within the country by the malicious intervention of the West is likely to become widespread, given the ongoing confrontation between Russia and Western countries. Since February 2022, Putin has repeatedly accused the West of seeking "to weaken, divide and finally destroy" Russia (TASS 2022, para. 4).

The Limited Role of Radical Nationalists

The fact that antimigrant riots in Russian urban and rural areas break out spontaneously in no way precludes the participation of nationalist actors. These seek to instrumentalize popular

protest, transforming it into an organized political movement under their control. This has been observed in several cases of rioting in recent years. However, as noted in this respect by Verkhovskii (2014, 47), “the far right [*ultrapravyye*] has not been the main actor of violence, and its role was essentially political.”

In summer 2006, the DPNI leader Aleksandr Belov and several ethnonationalist activists visited Salsk (Rostov Oblast), taking part in the organization of an antimigrant protest. While Belov may have enjoyed support from local Cossack organizations, he arrived two weeks after the outbreak of violence, considerably reducing the importance of their organizational efforts. The ethnonationalists were more responsive during the events in Kondopoga (Karelia). Belov and his team arrived two days after the beginning of rioting, organizing coverage of the events on the DPNI website and discussing the organization of popular gatherings on social media. Their arrival was however preceded by violence against citizens of Caucasian origin and the destruction of their property, including several street stalls and the town’s largest restaurant, “Chaika.” Weeks later, the Prosecutor’s Office charged Belov with “extremism and incitement of hatred” (Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code, which is condemned by nationalists as discriminatory against the majority ethnic group and known as the Russian article or *rusaskaia statia*). The charges were dropped in May 2007.

The Russian authorities seem to have learned a lesson: since the early 2010s, they were seeking to stop “undesirable” nationalist activists from moving freely to localities seeing rioting. In July 2013, for example, during the riots in Pugachev (a town of around 40,000 inhabitants in Saratov Oblast), several activists of nationalist leanings, including Nikolai Bondarik, leader of the unregistered Russian Party (*Rusaskaia partiia*), Ivan Mironov of Sergey Baburin’s Russian All-People’s Union (*Rossiiskii obshchenarodnyj soiuz*), and Nikolai Kuryanovich, an LDPR State Duma deputy from 2003 to 2007, were stopped on the

road for offenses officially unrelated to their political activities (*Rossiiskaia gazeta* 2013). In other cases, the authorities seem to have adopted a different approach. In October the same year, Belov was able to travel to Biriulevo, which was agitated following the murder of Yegor Shcherbakov. There, Belov addressed protesters alongside the local authorities, encouraging “peaceful collaboration” with the latter to gain concessions as to legal and police protection of the dominant ethnicity. This strategy is referred to by certain nationalists as part of the Russian rights protection (*rusaskaia pravozashchita*) (Gromov 2014, 111–112). This suggests that Belov’s arrival was prearranged with the authorities. However, at that point he no longer enjoyed significant support among radical Russian nationalists, particularly following the ban on the DPNI in April 2011 and his controversial visit to Chechnya a few months later, where he and Demushkin met Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, praising the latter and his style of government (*NEWSru* 2011). In any case, this open collaboration between nationalist actors and local authorities failed to halt rioting after the gathering in Biriulevo.

At the same time, it is important to underscore the participation of local ultranationalists in acts of violence associated with the riots. This was observed in Kondopoga, although it remains difficult to evaluate the scale of the phenomenon (Jurczyszyn 2011a). In Biriulevo, their presence was identified by analysis of videos by the events’ participants and observers (Gromov 2014). Ultranationalists from other districts of Moscow and its environs seem to have played a decisive role in looting the Biriuzza shopping center and in the assault on the Pokrovskaia wholesale vegetable warehouse. However, the nationalist activists formed a small minority of participants in the popular gathering. As for violence and property damage, activists were assisted by aggressive young men from the neighborhood (Gromov 2014, 118).

Following the first major riots of 2006 in Kondopoga, various nationalist organizations worked to exploit them, presenting them as a symbol of the Russian people

rising up against “ethnic criminals” covered by corrupt authorities (Basmanov 2016). According to Belov, “[t]he main goal of [their] mass action [was] to pressure the state authorities for some action in the interests of the local people” (Belov 2007, quoted in Laryš 2019, 76). In doing so, they sought to provide narratives for the interpretation of the conflict, such as “migratory occupation,” “violation of natives’ rights,” and (more rarely) the “Islamic threat.” In this respect, it is interesting that nationalist actors have often used European anti-immigration and anti-Islam narratives via social networks, drawing parallels between rioting in France’s suburbs in 2005 and that in Karelia a year later (Jurczyszyn 2011b).

Since then, nationalists were seeking to implement what they called the “Kondopoga technology,” but without much success (Verkhovskii 2014, 47). There are three main reasons for that. First, while many Russians share ethnic stereotypes or agree with hate speech against immigrants and internal minorities, few are prepared to support nationalist opposition movements. The latter are widely seen as thugs, extremists, or just plain unreliable. According to Verkhovsky, many citizens are in favor of banning radical nationalist movements, precisely because they are not state affiliated. That statist orientation does not, however, stop the same people from supporting ethnocentric or chauvinistic messages when they are spread by state or para-state actors, such as Cossack militias. “Therefore, concludes Verkhovskii, ordinary Russian citizens base their hopes on the [state] power: it is up to that power to resolve all problems, and to [handle] the deportation of migrants” (Lenta 2016, para. 36). The potential of opposition nationalist actors to mobilize the population remains relatively low, even in the context of widespread mistrust of public institutions.

The gathering in Manezh Square in central Moscow on December 11, 2010, was clearly an exception to this rule. It was initially planned as a tribute to Yegor Sviridov, a young Spartak Moscow fan who had been killed a few days earlier in a fight with a group of

youths from the North Caucasus. The gathering soon broke down into an explosion of ethnoracial violence.²⁸ Between 5,000 and 20,000 protesters, accusing the police of complicity with the attackers (the latter had been released, supposedly under the pressure of the diaspora), began chanting slogans like “Russians, forward!” (*russkie, vpered*) and “F**k the Caucasus” (*e*at Kavkaz*). Spontaneous attacks followed, in the Moscow streets and metro, against people of “non-Slavic appearance,” and in the following days, a number of street fights occurred between ethnic Russians and young Caucasians. In the eyes of nationalist leaders, this was a real success for the Kondopoga technology, used in the center of Moscow, as similar violent or nonviolent demonstrations took place in other big cities including Saint Petersburg, Kursk, Krasnoyarsk, and Rostov-on-Don (Verkhovsky and Kozhevnikova 2011). However, the mobilizing capacity of nationalist actors should be put into perspective, as this major gathering was made possible by involvement of football fan groups known as firms (*firmy*), many members of which share ethnocentric and racist attitudes. Yet while “many fans are part of right-wing groups [...] it is out of the question that [ultranationalists] can mobilize supporters’ groups” (Verkhovskii 2014, 48).

Second, the increase in antimigrant riots across Russia and that of organized radical nationalism only partially overlap. While most of the anti-immigration violence was committed between 2006 and 2010 (Laryš 2019, 81), opposition nationalism, including radical nationalism, has been in profound crisis since the early 2010s. After the murder of lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova in January 2009 by members of the underground Militant Organization of Russian Nationalists (BORN in Russian) and the nationalist rally on Manezh Square in Moscow, the Russian regime had hardened its attitude toward opposition and/or radical nationalists. In the wake of the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the Kremlin’s tolerance for any political contention, especially nationalist, has further diminished (Laine 2017). While some Russian nationalists have left to fight in the Donbas conflict, the

regime launched a wave of repression targeting nationalist activists to weaken this once-growing movement (Laryš 2019, 77–81). The best-known figures of radical Russian nationalism—including Demushkin, Belov, and Maxim Martsinkevich, a neo-Nazi and anti-LGBT activist nicknamed “The Spiker” (*Tesak*)—have at various points found themselves behind bars. Belov and Demushkin were released in 2018 and 2019, respectively, but they are no longer engaged in nationalist activities. Martsinkevich was found dead in his prison cell in Chelyabinsk in September 2020. Others have preferred to leave Russia—these include Belov’s brother Vladimir Basmanov (Potkin), leader of the Nation and Freedom Committee, and Daniil Konstantinov, founder of the Russian-European Movement that brings together Russian political émigrés living in Europe (Yudina 2020). The state’s repressive policy has succeeded in forcing many nationalists back into the shadows and suspending their militant activities, which led to a decrease in the number of recorded hate crimes (Arnold 2019). In this context, Vladimir Zorin, a former Russian Minister in charge of nationalities policy and a member of the Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations, declared with satisfaction that the Russian state had managed to take ethnic conflicts “off the street” (Zorin 2018). However, this statement was made in June 2018, before the appearance of new cases of nativist riots and other ethnic conflicts (e.g., Chechnya-Ingushetia territorial tensions following a change in the border agreement signed in September 2018).

Finally, antimigrant rioting is not always correlated with Russian ethnonationalism. Thus, in the 2000s, a rise of interminority xenophobia and racism was observed in Russia, essentially directed at immigrants on behalf of the longer-standing occupants of territories. It was especially prominent among titular nationalities in Russia’s republics (Alexseev 2010). While non-Russian minorities are generally less hostile to those considered nonnative than the dominant ethnic group is (Alexseev 2010, 116; Gorshkov 2011, 211–212; Gorodzeisky and

Glikman 2018), they can also be the instigators of ethnic and/or antimigrant violence, as shown by the riots in Yandyki in August 2005 and Yakutsk in March 2019.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to demonstrate the relevance of the nativism concept for analyzing the contemporary Russian context. This reflection has been based on two main examples: that of ethnonationalist discourse—on the part of para-state and non-state actors—and that of a series of antimigrant riots in various Russian regions. I have argued that it is productive to combine two perspectives on nativism: one focused on nationalist actors who promote the defense of native populations, their interests, and their values and the other on essentially popular expressions of the nativist phenomenon. Thus, the nativism framework establishes a link—which is missing in large portions of academic literature—between expressions of nationalism, whether organized or popular, and othering of migrants (Schenk 2021).

The application of the concept of nativism to the analysis of the Russian case has at least two research implications. First, nativism helps better set out the links between the other key concepts—nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. Nativism is a form of nationalism—in this case, Russian ethnonationalism—which adopts a defensive posture of the practices and values of the local and/or national community in the face of migratory flows. Drawing on widespread xenophobia, it takes an ethnoracial dimension when new arrivals are given an ethnic attribute, a hierarchy is established, and/or the incompatibility of cultures is implied. I also identified another form of nativism—multiethnic rather than ethnocentric—as observed in Russian official discourse and policies in connection with the statist conception of nationalism promoted by the Russian leadership (Laruelle 2009). The Russian nativist stance toward Ukrainians, especially those depicted as culturally Russian or Russian speakers, has

indeed been boosted by the full-scale war against Ukraine launched by the Putin regime in February 2022.

Second, the concept of nativism as an analytical category is worth using more widely in empirical studies, thus opening the Russian context to international comparisons through a double prism. On one hand, the appearance and potential rise of nativism as an exclusionary ideology and form of politics in Russia can be understood in line with similar processes in other parts of the world, including Asia and Africa (Tudor 2019; Abidde and Matambo 2021). Although the Russian state keeps ethnic tensions under control while suppressing organized ethnonationalism, the latter has developed a relatively coherent nativist ideology comparable to that of European national populists and capable of mobilizing the population. Its mobilization potential, which can fuel ethnic violence, would increase in the event that the central government is weakened or regime change occurs. In that case, nativist riots could become (much) bigger.

On the other hand, the spread of antimigrant riots, as a particular form of ethnic conflicts, in Russia may also become the subject of cross-country analysis in light of growing migration and the authorities' reactions to them. In the Russian context, labor immigration from the southern peripheries of the former Soviet space and internal migration from the North Caucasian republics will remain a significant factor for the foreseeable future. All that may support the revival of nationalism as a form of contentious politics in Russia and heighten popular expressions of nativism, giving momentum to the agenda to protect natives and their interests in years or decades to come. Therefore, the Russian authorities will likely continue to instrumentalize these trends while seeking to manage internal ethnic tensions.

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Notes

¹ The 2020–2021 census data, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, gives similar results if one counts the number of ethnic Russians from those who reported their ethnicity. These data are less reliable because of the low quality of the census. For instance, if in 2010 the number of those who did not indicate their “nationality” was 5.6 million, in 2021 it was 16.6 million.

² The term “nativism” has already been employed by Tuminez (2000, 189–191) in application to the Soviet/post-Soviet Russian context. However, Tuminez only deployed it to describe the nationalist thinking that had emerged since the 1960s among the Village Prose writers (including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn), who deplored the physical and moral degradation of the Russian people and advocated the rebirth of Russian national consciousness after the fall of the Communist regime.

³ Since the 2000s and particularly the 2010s, the term “racism” has been used in Russian academic discourse to analyze social attitudes, practices, media, and political rhetoric. It is clear, however, that “no field of research into racism and xenophobia has yet formed [in Russia], and discussions on this theme currently remain essentially the preserve of NGOs and human rights defenders” (Demintseva 2013, 6).

⁴ More precisely, these are areas seen as *no longer* politically dominated by Russians and where their demographic presence has fallen considerably compared with the Soviet period. These regions may include the republics of the North Caucasus, which have become, as

Trenin (2011, 51) puts it, “something like Russia’s ‘inner abroad.’” The term “inner abroad” (*vnutrennee zarubezie*) is also part of the rhetoric of Russian ethnonationalists.

⁵ As contemporary nationalist actors typically refuse to identify as nativists, it remains a technical term. To use Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) classification, it is an “analytical category” and not (or very rarely) a “category of practice.”

⁶ See the slogan of the National Rally in France: “We are at home!” (*On est chez nous*), expressing defensive nationalism in face of immigration (Taguieff 2015, 42–43).

⁷ For Krastev (2020), the “demographic anxiety”—that is, the fear that the ethnocultural majorities are shrinking—is a major reason explaining the rise of right-wing illiberal populism in (Eastern) Europe.

⁸ This call echoes the media campaign “Stop Feeding the Caucasus,” launched in 2011 by Russian ethnonationalists and then supported by opposition politician Aleksey Navalny (Laruelle 2014).

⁹ This shows that nonnatives are not always foreign citizens. Here lies a difference between the nativist phenomenon in Russia and in Western countries. In the USA and Europe, it is mainly targeted against transoceanic migrants.

¹⁰ Systemic nationalists are those who willingly cooperate with the Putin regime. They tend to espouse an imperial vision of the nation. Nonsystemic nationalists reject the regime as antinational or even criminal. They are generally ethnonationalists or white supremacists.

¹¹ In November 2020, this organization changed its name to become the Tsargrad Society, taking the name of a TV channel created by Malofeev in 2015. Several figures of empire-oriented nationalism, like Yegor Kholmogorov or Aleksandr Dugin, and movements such as Aleksandr Borodai’s Union of Donbas Volunteers joined the new organization (Sova Center 2020).

¹² For example, President Putin has described the slogan’s users as “idiots” and “provocateurs” (Sova Center 2003). Elsewhere, in response to Zhirinovskiy’s statement that migrants from Central Asia should not be allowed into Russia, Putin said that “caveman nationalism, with the slogan ‘Russia is only for the Russians,’ only harms Russians and Russia” (RBC 2021).

¹³ There were more than 6,300 by July 2020.

¹⁴ In the Russian Constitution, the word *korennoi* (“native” or “indigenous”) is used only once, referring to the “indigenous small peoples” of the North, Siberia, and the Russian Far East (Art. 69). Each of those groups comprises less than 50,000 people.

¹⁵ In the meantime, the Society.Future movement, founded by the young “national democrat” Roman Yuneman, has formulated its own project of constitutional reform, which includes many “Russian amendments.” In particular, the updated text of the constitution contains numerous references to the rights of ethnic “Russians and all other native peoples of Russia” (<https://ob.community/constitution/>).

¹⁶ In April 2014, President Putin signed an Act (Federal Law No. 74-FZ from April 20, 2014) requiring a test for the issuance of a work permit or temporary Russian residence permit.

¹⁷ The claim to defend the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine from right-wing extremists has been mobilized by Putin’s regime and Russian state-dominated media since 2014 (Putin 2016; see also Batta 2021).

¹⁸ However, since the early 2010s Russian administrative bodies have been paying more attention to “balanced” coverage of mob violence in the media space. One example is the Guild of Interethnic Journalism (*Gildiia mezhetnicheskoi zhurnalistiki*), established in 2003 and chaired by journalist Margarita Lyange, who is also a member of the Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations created in 2012. In 2013, the Association presented to the State Duma a “code of ethics” for journalists covering ethnicity-related topics, including ethnic

conflicts. The code provided a series of recommendations, which include the reflection on different points of view, consideration for the local context, and the quote of those who participated in the conflict with the utmost care (Lenta 2013). In order to counteract the reproduction of negative ethnic or religious stereotypes in the media space, the Association regularly organizes competitions and trainings for journalists working in different regions of the country while increasing the number of its regional branches. In parallel, the Russian state introduced restrictions on the spreading of “fake news” in the traditional media and on the Internet, making circulation of disinformation punishable by administrative fines (Arnold 2019).

¹⁹ According to the Center for the Study of Ethnic Conflicts study based on an open-source and expert survey, 570 “ethnically motivated conflict actions of varying degrees of intensity (from posting xenophobic content on the Internet to mass clashes with weapons and fatal results)” were observed throughout Russia from September 2013 to March 2014 (Grozdia gneva 2014).

²⁰ For a discussion of such cases using the examples of protests in Lyublino (Moscow) in 2005 and Khotkovo (Moscow Oblast) in 2010, see (Arnold 2016, 112–115, 118–119).

Another case is the anti-Caucasian march, held in December 2010 in Rostov-on-Don, which was attended by over 2,500 people. The march took place under the slogans “Rostov is a Russian (*russkii*) city” and “Rostov is not the Caucasus” (Shapovalov 2010). For a discussion of variation in ethnic violence across time and space and riot non-occurrence, see (Horowitz 2001, 467–521; Varshney 2002).

²¹ Sources: (Arnold 2016; Arnold 2019; BBC 2021; Gazeta 2007; Grozd’ia gneva 2014; Kommersant 2016; Memorial 2006; Semenenko 2015; <https://www.sova-center.ru/>).

²² The rioting in Yandyki came in the context of animosity between youths of Russian and Kalmyk origin, on one hand, and those of Chechen origin on the other, to a backdrop of socioeconomic inequalities between the communities. Riots in Kondopoga broke out following an altercation in a local restaurant, the property of members of the Chechen

community. In Demyanovo, violence occurred around a sawmill belonging to a businessman from Dagestan. In these conflicts, the subject of local resource distribution was therefore highly present. In Sagra, Roma and Caucasians were accused of participation in drug trafficking. Finally, in Biriulevo, people of Caucasian and Central Asian origin were suspected of illegal economic activities, including drug trafficking.

²³ In Kondopoga, the young Azeri assaulted by Russians called on the local Chechen community, who were joined by people from Dagestan. Conversely, anti-Chechen riots in Yandyki were supported from neighboring Kalmykia and by local Cossack organizations.

²⁴ In Biriulevo, protesters accused administrations and law enforcement of fostering the arrival of migrants, of “covering” (*pokryvat*) the supposedly criminal activities of the nonnatives (arms or drug trafficking, for example) in exchange for bribes, or else of turning a blind eye to their crimes (Levada Center 2013b).

²⁵ Certain riots may contain elements of an ethnic fight (as in Moscow in the aftermath of the gathering of December 11, 2010) or a gang assault (as in Sagra, where a group of people of Caucasian origin took part in an attack on the village). In this respect, these are hybrid forms of ethnic violence (Horowitz 2001, 26–28).

²⁶ In the 2022 Global Peace Index (<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/-/>), Russia was ranked among the least peaceful countries (160th place out of 163).

²⁷ In 2016, the FMS was reorganized and renamed the Directorate for Migration Affairs, attached to the Ministry of the Interior (MVD).

²⁸ For a detailed description of events, see (Arnold 2016, 119–124).

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