Defending History? The Impact of Context and Speaker in Russia

Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka

Political attempts to control how the past may be represented have flourished in the twenty-first century. Russia participates in this trend, having taken steps to legislatively and juridically safeguard the legacy of the USSR's involvement in World War II. This has institutionalized an interpretation of the fight against Nazism that was already widely held in society, making the Russian case a "hard test" for evaluating when the violation of a historical norm is deemed appropriate and what the impact of a memory law might be relative to other factors. Drawing on two vignette experiments conducted in 2021, our article demonstrates both that the discursive context in which a controversial statement about the past is made matters when respondents assess whether the person making it should be punished and that criticism of a historical norm is more likely to be accepted when it emanates from an in-group member. We also find that the state has limited ability to influence societal attitudes regarding history. Moreover, a willingness to defend state-led interventions into how the past is depicted aligns with support for the political system but the latter does not necessarily overlap with individuals' historical views, underscoring the multidimensional nature of collective memory.

In recent years, political elites throughout postcommunist Europe have attempted to forge and defend a broad-based societal consensus on how the past should be interpreted.[1] As a result, they have increasingly drawn historical distinctions between "us" and "them," rendering relations with neighbors more conflictual while situating their own nations in an unambiguously positive temporal trajectory.[2] The history-laden rhetoric that accompanied Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine illustrates the salience of these arguments. Indeed, Putin's framing of the incursion in the language of World War II demonstrates just how much Russia's leadership believes such analogies are persuasive (Krawatzek and Soroka 2022a). What remains unclear, however, is the extent to which this sort of propaganda affects the target population.

The literature on memory politics has thus far focused primarily on how elites use historical narratives. Pioneering work by David Art (2006) and Thomas Berger (2012), for instance, examined the ways in which a society's historical self-understanding constrains or enables elite maneuvering in countries such as Germany, Austria, and Japan. Likewise, Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (2014) developed an influential typology of mnemonic regimes in East Central Europe by drawing on statements made by politicians and government officials. Others have analyzed how recall of the past has changed over time at the level of the state (Dixon 2018; Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006; Mark 2011) and surveyed the ontological basis it provides for foreign policy (e.g., Bachleitner 2021), particularly among the former Warsaw Pact countries (Domańska 2022; Mälksoo 2009) and in East Asia (Wang 2012).

What has received less attention is the degree to which political leaders can affect societal understandings of the

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past. Among others, Gerber and Laruelle (2021), Gerber and van Landingham (2021), Shkliarov, Mironova, and Whitt (2021), Kitagawa and Chu (2021), and Krawatzek (2021) have contributed to shifting our focus to those who are on the receiving end of memory politics by studying the narratives that prevail across society. Our article builds on this scholarship by fielding two vignette experiments, allowing us to understand, respectively, whether Russians believe that a person who makes a historical statement that conflicts with an established mnemonic norm should be punished and whether the assessment of such a statement differs depending on the legal context and the identity of the speaker.

In post-Soviet Russia, the USSR's role in the "Great Patriotic War" (as World War II continues to be known there) stands above reproach. The societal entrenchment of this position is only partly the result of the Kremlin's long-standing effort to portray the war as the defining event of the twentieth century (Soroka and Krawatzek 2021), given that its tremendous mass-level resonance predates official efforts to enshrine it as "the central legitimating myth of the Russian state" (Sherlock 2009, 460). A 2019 poll found that 87% of Russians, when asked what event in their country's history they were most proud of, reported it was the USSR's victory in the Great Patriotic War; this figure has hardly moved in the last two decades, having stood at 86% in April 1999 (Levada-Center 2019). The centrality of the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany remains essentially unchallenged even by younger generations (Krawatzek 2021), suggesting the successful intergenerational transmission of an uncritical war narrative. But although the Kremlin today tightly controls the framing of World War II, including in school textbooks (Khodnev 2019) and the media (McGlynn 2020), Russians still hold diverging opinions about the Soviet period, depending on factors such as their political attitudes (Shkliarov, Mironova, and Whitt 2021) and family background (Gerber and Laruelle 2021; Gerber and van Landingham 2021).

Laws concerning how the past may be discussed publicly have proliferated across postcommunist Europe in recent years (Belavusau and Gliszczyńska-Grabias 2017; Koposov 2017; Soroka and Krawatzek 2019). Russia represents a particularly striking illustration of this development, with legislation passed in 2014 making it illegal to question the probity of the Soviet Union's wartime actions or to offend public sensibilities related to this conflict. Penalties are severe: fines can range up to a half-million rubles and imprisonment up to five years. Meanwhile, a 2020 amendment to the Russian Federation's 1993 constitution modified its article 67.1, which now stipulates that "defenders of the Fatherland" are to be honored and tasks the state with ensuring the "protection of the historical truth" (see Mälksoo 2021). Similarly, in May 2021 the Duma modified the 1995 law "On the Commemoration of the Victory of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945" by adding article 6.1, which forbids making comparisons between Nazism and Stalinism and denying "the decisive role of the Soviet people in the defeat of Nazi Germany and the humanitarian mission of the USSR in the liberation of the countries of Europe." The question of who should protect collective standards of remembering and whether violations should be punished is therefore of great importance for understanding contemporary Russian politics. Examining this case, moreover, allows us to better conceptualize the political dynamics exhibited in other countries where national self-understanding has come to be defined and articulated through conspicuous recourse to history.

We expect attitudes toward the violation of historical norms to differ depending on the context in which this occurs and the extent to which a controversial claim is likely to affect others. We likewise predict that "authoritative" utterances will influence peoples' views of the past and that it will matter whether the person making such an utterance is a conational or foreigner. This leads us to focus on four interrelated questions:

1. In what discursive environments are violations of historical norms more likely to be tolerated?
2. Which segments of society are more likely to oppose criticism of history?
3. Do memory laws affect views on history?
4. What types of speakers are seen as being in a position to challenge these norms?

We begin by situating our project in the social science literature dealing with historical memory and national identity. Next, we discuss our research design and present the descriptive results before explicating the factors that influence which individuals agree with—or oppose—a historical interpretation that violates the canonical version of the past. Finally, in the conclusion we consider the broader implications of these findings and suggest avenues for further research.

A Past that Binds? Motivation and Hypotheses

Historical narratives held in common, sometimes termed a society's "collective memory," have a profound impact on people's sense of national belonging. At the same time, stories about the past and the beliefs associated with them inevitably contain elements of selective forgetting and remembering, rendering history a useful tool for political elites. Since Maurice Halbwachs's seminal work spurred interest in the topic (1968 [1950]), the assumption that a common historical outlook sustains group identity has been frequently confirmed (e.g., Assmann and Hölscher 1988). Moreover, as politicians try to control the multivocal—and thus inherently contradictory—nature of remembering, narratives about the past play a critical role in facilitating the imagining-into-being and legitimation of national communities (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020).[3]

Shared traumata serve to integrate diverse modern societies (Alexander 2004). Among the Soviet Union's former satellite states in East Central Europe, this role is frequently fulfilled by recalling the injustices associated with communist rule (Mark 2011). Collective memory's political salience, however, is high not only among European societies. Wang (2012), for instance, demonstrates how the Chinese Communist Party manipulated narratives about the past to gain support for governmental reforms that were implemented in the wake of the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989. Similarly, Hashimoto (2015) illustrates how narratives about the national trauma of World War II pervade everyday life in Japan, as reflected in ongoing tensions over the country's pacifist constitution, the volatile international political situation in East Asia, and debates over remilitarization.

Despite the relevance of historical narratives being globally discernible, political science has proven a relative laggard when it comes to engaging with this phenomenon. Indeed, it is only recently that the role played by such narratives, especially in establishing generational identities (Wydra 2018), has been systematically studied. Whereas earlier work centered on analyzing party documents or official speeches (Art 2006; Berger 2012; Bernhard and Kubik 2014), the newer wave of scholarship features a plethora of conceptual and methodological approaches. They include examining how present-day attitudes and behaviors are rooted in the legacies of communism (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017), assessing how the narration of history becomes a resource for populists (e.g., Kralj 2021; Elçi 2021), and interrogating the link between the attitudes individuals exhibit toward authoritarian precedents and their approval of contemporary autocrats (Shkliarov, Mironova, and Whitt 2021).

In Russia, recall of the Great Patriotic War parallels how collective traumata sustain group identities elsewhere (see Fuchs 2012; Giesen 2004; Panossian 2002). Because of the war's mythologized status, the views that Russia's leadership articulates today about it largely coincide with those held by society as a whole, with little dissent outside well-defined circles (Krawatzek and Friess 2022).[4] Victory Day, which takes place annually on May 9 and increasingly recalls the Soviet Union's triumph over Nazi Germany in an unreflectively heroic and Russocentric manner (Soroka and Krawatzek 2021), represents the most important commemorative event for 95% of Russians (VTsIOM 2020b).When COVID-19 caused Victory Day ceremonies to move online in 2020, around 60% of Russia's population still engaged with these activities and expressed largely positive feelings toward them (VTsIOM 2020a). Attitudes toward the Soviet Union's wartime leader Josef Stalin have also become more positive in recent decades, with the share of people who regard him as a "great leader" rising from 29% in April 1992 to 56% in May 2021 (Levada-Center 2021b). Simultaneously, the role Stalin played in the war's outbreak has been gradually elided,[5] with blame instead coming to be placed on the 1938 Munich Agreement and the West's appeasement of Hitler (Levada-Center 2021a).

However, although ordinary Russians share in the historical norm propounded by Moscow, it is less clear that this translates into political support for the Kremlin. It is also questionable to what degree an autocratic regime, whether Vladimir Putin's or some other, can steer collective memory to its advantage. Consequently, to understand how a heterogeneous Russian society (Greene and Robertson 2022) relates to historical attitudes, it is important to distinguish individuals by the extent to which they affirm the prevailing historical consensus—for instance, the centrality of commemorating World War II—as well as whether they approve of the current government and its institutions. One should not conflate the two, because protecting historical norms and supporting the political system are not one and the same.

Recognizing that a norm is widely held, moreover, does not imply that it will never be challenged. Given the role that groups play in establishing and maintaining social conventions, the specific setting in which a norm violation occurs should influence how such a transgression is perceived (van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019). The Russian state, for example, has responded very harshly to the dissemination of deviant historical narratives over social media. In 2014, the Perm Regional Court fined blogger Vladimir Luzgin 200,000 rubles (at the time around $5,900) because he shared a text on his VKontakte page that held that the USSR and Nazi Germany were jointly responsible for World War II. (The text also questioned "communist myths" regarding the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Stepan Bandera, its ideological leader.[6]) This desire to curtail free speech on social media is presumably grounded in the wide-reaching impact of such statements, echoing a debate that exists in Western democracies about limiting hate speech and restricting platform access for antidemocratic actors (Everett 2019; Hooker 2019).

At the same time, the Russian state has taken a very proactive stance when it comes to how history is taught to younger generations, with educators expected to use a carefully curated set of "patriotic" textbooks. Because every country wishes to transmit its approved version of the past through its school system (Hildebrandt-Wypych and Wiseman 2021), the Russian case helps us to better understand the extent to which people believe the state should punish those teaching historical interpretations that do not correspond to the official narrative. Conversely, private discussions about history remain less regulated in Russia (as elsewhere). People generally approve of free expression in the private realm, where trust and intimacy govern the exchange of information (e.g., Chang and Manion 2021).

Attitudes toward the transgression of a historical norm will thus not be uniform across society. Rather, we would expect to observe a variable effect, depending first and foremost on the extent to which a person agrees with the politics of the state that enforces the norm and, secondarily, on that person's perspective on Soviet history. Indeed, the fact that a prominent Kremlin critic like Alexander Navalny has not made history central to his discourse, but instead tries to reconcile nationalism with liberalism (Laruelle 2014), suggests that individuals who express more critical attitudes toward the state might still be supportive of Soviet-nostalgic historical views. Investigating the extent to which the situational context of a historical norm violation matters in relation to the sociopolitical self-placement of the respondent thus forms the basis for our first vignette experiment.

Based on these rationales, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: The desire to punish a historical statement that deviates from the prevailing official perspective is more pronounced in overtly public settings that have a direct impact on others.

H2: The violation of a historical norm is accepted or rejected depending on how individuals view the current political system and the Soviet past.

H2a: The desire to punish a historical statement that deviates from the prevailing official perspective is most pronounced among those who support the political system.

H2b: Positive views on Soviet history can lead either to the desire to punish or support a historical statement that deviates from the prevailing official perspective.

In our second experiment, we explore the extent to which the underlying legal context and different speakers affect ordinary Russians' reactions to the criticism of a widely shared norm. With an eye to gauging the effects of burgeoning mnemonic legislation, we evaluate whether knowing there exists a memory law that makes the statement in question illegal has an impact on how respondents view what constitutes an acceptable historical position. Most people in any society obey most of the laws most of the time (Bogart 2002). Compliance with legal statutes is the rule not only because of the punishments that accompany their violation (Schauer 2015) but also because laws coordinate interests and provide information about societal preferences (McAdams 2015). Since laws tend to reflect information about communal values, their effects are dependent on specific settings and the manner in which they prompt groups to comply (Nadler 2017, 70). Given this, we expect knowledge of the memory law to color assessments of history:

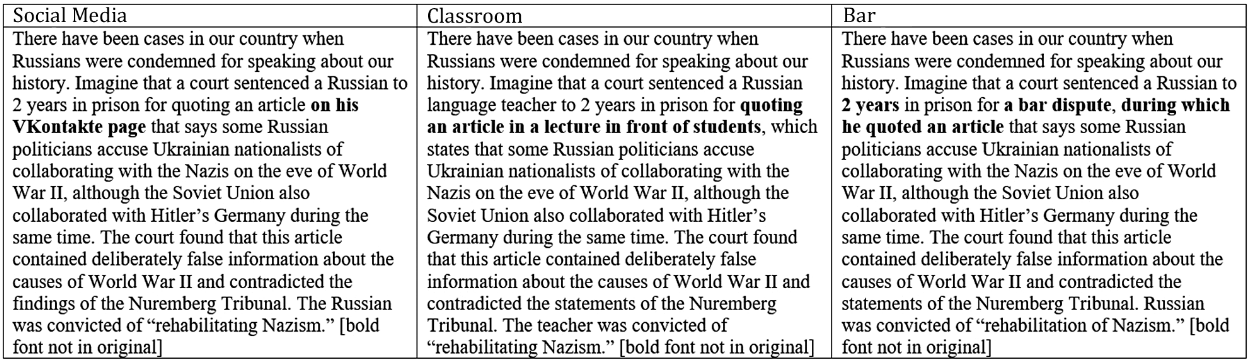
H3: Individuals are less likely to agree with an authoritative speaker who challenges the prevailing official perspective on history if a memory law is mentioned.

We also investigate whether it matters that the speaker is a conational or a foreigner. Shared norms characterize the functioning of any group (Lickel et al. 2000). This applies both to smaller entities like families and street gangs (Shakur 1993) and larger collectives such as nations (Cottam and Cottam 2001). Regardless of a group's size, there is pressure to conform to, and thereby reproduce, its expectations, with violations resulting in potentially severe sanctions. This suggests that shifting a deeply held norm requires sufficient status to meaningfully influence the group.

We are especially interested in *referent* and *expert* power, which comprise two of the five bases of power identified by French and Raven (1959) in their study of leadership in organizational settings (Elias 2008). *Referent* power indicates the desire we exhibit to adhere to another person's views when we perceive ourselves as sharing similarities with them. We test for this dimension by citing a Russian in one instance and a non-Russian in the other. As a member of the national group, the former could perhaps be trusted to have the best interests of the collective in mind. If this assumption holds, the violation of a historical norm by this person should on average find higher acceptance within the group; contrariwise, group members might react particularly negatively given that the violator is expected to know about and support the norm. In analogous fashion, a transgressive statement about history made by a foreigner may be perceived as especially offensive and inappropriate (or else as uninformed and therefore irrelevant). Alternatively, this speaker could be regarded as less partisan by dint of being an outsider, and thus the statement may be viewed as bringing in a corrective perspective, perhaps one that even transcends the fray of domestic politics. *Expert* power, meanwhile, relies on special knowledge of, or attributed expertise in, a particular field. In our study, expert power is salient for both types of speakers because, if the statement that diverges from the national group norm has any chance of being considered appropriate, the person making it must be perceived as being competent to address the historical matter at hand.

We anticipate either compliance or rebellion—meaning agreement with or rejection of the controversial statement—in reaction to the violation of the norm by an authoritative speaker. We expect to encounter rebellion among those who feel themselves to be most integrated into the group, because they have the greatest incentive to be protective of the norms that are being questioned. Conversely, we expect higher levels of sympathy to be exhibited

Figure 1
Vignettes for Varying Contexts



Social Media	Classroom	Bar
There have been cases in our country when Russians were condemned for speaking about our history. Imagine that a court sentenced a Russian to 2 years in prison for quoting an article **on his VKontakte page** that says some Russian politicians accuse Ukrainian nationalists of collaborating with the Nazis on the eve of World War II, although the Soviet Union also collaborated with Hitler's Germany during the same time. The court found that this article contained deliberately false information about the causes of World War II and contradicted the findings of the Nuremberg Tribunal. The Russian was convicted of "rehabilitating Nazism." [bold font not in original]	There have been cases in our country when Russians were condemned for speaking about our history. Imagine that a court sentenced a Russian language teacher to 2 years in prison for **quoting an article in a lecture in front of students**, which states that some Russian politicians accuse Ukrainian nationalists of collaborating with the Nazis on the eve of World War II, although the Soviet Union also collaborated with Hitler's Germany during the same time. The court found that this article contained deliberately false information about the causes of World War II and contradicted the statements of the Nuremberg Tribunal. The teacher was convicted of "rehabilitating Nazism." [bold font not in original]	There have been cases in our country when Russians were condemned for speaking about our history. Imagine that a court sentenced a Russian to **2 years** in prison for **a bar dispute**, **during which he quoted an article** that says some Russian politicians accuse Ukrainian nationalists of collaborating with the Nazis on the eve of World War II, although the Soviet Union also collaborated with Hitler's Germany during the same time. The court found that this article contained deliberately false information about the causes of World War II and contradicted the statements of the Nuremberg Tribunal. Russian was convicted of "rehabilitation of Nazism." [bold font not in original]

for the critical speaker among group members who are already at odds with the collective and who might therefore feel themselves more able to accept the violation. The following two hypotheses are formulated on this basis:

H4: A norm-violating historical statement will be considered more appropriate if the speaker is recognized as a member of the national group.

H5: Individuals are more likely to reject an authoritative speaker who challenges a widely held historical interpretation if they support the prevailing official perspective on history or the political system.

Research Design

We fielded an online survey ($N = 2{,}110$) across Russia in January 2021 that examined societal attitudes toward the past. It asked about historical figures and events, how the past should be recalled, and respondents' political orientations. Two sets of vignette experiments are central to the analysis presented here.[7] Our initial vignettes examined what punishments were appropriate to impose when a widely held historical norm was breached in different hypothetical scenarios. For this experiment the sample was randomly split into three groups that were balanced to reflect the underlying sample composition.

The first group of respondents read a text that maintained the Soviet Union bore some responsibility for the violence of World War II by collaborating with Nazi Germany. The vignette specified that this claim was published on a well-known social media site, and that the person disseminating it received a prison sentence of two years.

Respondents were given a choice of agreeing with the punishment, stating that the punishment should have been even more severe, or stating that no punishment should have been applied; "don't know" and "refused" were also options. Our second and third variants of the vignette retained the historical statement but altered the discursive context in which the violation of the norm took place (figure 1).

Another set of vignettes examined whether specification of the existence of legal protection for a historical norm makes a difference in how respondents assess a critical statement and whether the speaker being a member of the in-group (i.e., a conational) or out-group (i.e., a foreigner) matters for their assessment (table 1). Respondents in the control group read the following text:

> Before her death in December 2018, Russian Human Rights activist **Lyudmila Alekseeva** underlined once again in an interview that the Russian nation must not continue to venerate a distorted, exclusively heroic image of the Red Army's contribution to the Great Patriotic War. Instead, the country also needed to come to terms with the fact that some soldiers committed unnecessary violence against the civilian population and that the Soviet regime was oppressive and committed violence against its own population. [bold font not in original]

In the first treatment (T1), a reference was included to the 2014 memory law that made her statement illegal[8]:

> Before her death in December 2018, Russian Human Rights activist **Lyudmila Alekseeva** underlined once again in an interview that the Russian nation must not continue to venerate a distorted, exclusively heroic image of the Red Army's contribution to the Great Patriotic War. Instead, the country also needed to come to terms with the fact that some soldiers committed unnecessary violence against the civilian population and that the Soviet regime was oppressive and committed violence against its own population. **Her call directly violates a Russian 2014 Memory Law ("Yarovaya Law"), passed to protect the dignity of the Russian nation.** [bold font not in original]

In the second (T2) and third (T3) treatments, the authoritative figure was changed. Here we cite the well-known British historian Antony Beevor, who has urged Russians to adopt a more self-critical attitude toward the past and written about violence against civilians committed by Red Army soldiers (2002; 2012). In T2 we replicate

Table 1
Research Design Vignette on Violations of a Historical Norm in Russia under Varying Circumstances

		Person	
		National	**Foreigner**
Law	**Specified**	Treatment 1 (T1)	Treatment 3 (T3)
	Not specified	Control	Treatment 2 (T2)

the control condition and only change the person's name, whereas in T3 we also add mention of the law (as in T1).

Respondents were then asked to answer questions related to their perceptions of the historical episode under consideration. First, they were asked whether they thought it appropriate for the specified figure to bring this perspective into the debate. Next, they were asked whether they themselves sympathized with the opinion of that person. Their level of agreement or disagreement was indicated on a four-point scale.

It was challenging to identify a credible authority who had made this sort of statement in Russia. Given how serious an intervention into free speech the 2014 memory law is, making such a statement might have significant legal and financial repercussions. We therefore needed to ensure that we would not harm the individual associated with it. Nonetheless, we could not pick a random person or use an arbitrary name, because doing so might give respondents the impression that the survey was not a serious undertaking. It was also not possible to have a pure control group (i.e., one without any speaker serving as a baseline), because the statement was so controversial that it needed to be personalized to prevent problems from arising with the authorities. We eventually selected Alekseeva (d. 2018) on the Russian side, whose critical stance toward Soviet history was no secret. Not only was Alekseeva a recognized voice when it came to the question we were interested in but she had also been frequently assailed by state officials for her dissonant historical positions. Accordingly, if respondents agreed that such a polarizing figure should be allowed to criticize the past, it is likely that they would be even more willing to allow a less controversial one to do so. As with specifying the law in a context in which the historical norm being legislated is already widely accepted (and where, consequently, we would expect fewer people to question the probity of the legislation), mentioning Alekseeva also contributes to making this a "hard test" of our hypotheses. Beevor, meanwhile, has published similar statements in books translated into Russian, so his views were already public knowledge. He also had the advantage of being a non-U.S.-based scholar, which was important given we were concerned that the prevalence of anti-American sentiment in Russia might unduly bias respondents.

To conduct this research, we partnered with an established polling firm that has extensive experience working across the former Soviet Union. Individuals surveyed ranged from 18 to 65 years of age, lived in communities of more than 20,000 inhabitants, and were selected according to a quota sample meant to ensure they were representative of the underlying population in terms of gender, age, and place of residence. Respondents were drawn from actively managed consumer panels, which included continuous controls to verify their reported income, place of residence, and other relevant socioeconomic data. After agreeing to participate in the survey, individuals were randomly assigned to one of three groups for the first vignette and one of four groups for the second. The assignment reproduced the survey's demographic quotas and was randomized through the survey platform, so the likelihood of being placed in a specific group was the same for each respondent within the set quotas.

In principle, responses across the two studies should reflect how these individuals relate to the Russian state and the historical views they hold. We categorized respondents according to their attitudes toward key Russian institutions (president, Duma, army, police, and judiciary), whether they rely on state-controlled television as their primary source of information, their approval of political protests, their attitudes toward Stalin, and the extent to which their associations with the Soviet era are positive, negative, or mixed. Based on a correlation analysis (see online supplementary material), we identified four main categories of individuals: (1) those who approve of Russian state institutions and are opposed to political protests; (2) those who express positive attitudes toward Soviet history, including Stalin; (3) those who express negative attitudes toward Soviet history, including Stalin; and (4) those who do not articulate a clear historical view.

Furthermore, we considered demographic variables related to socioeconomic status as control variables, including age, gender, education level, wealth, and whether the respondent was employed in the public or private sector (if applicable). In addition, a dummy variable was used for respondents residing in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Given that the assignment to the groups was done on a random basis, we included demographic controls not because of concerns about achieving balance across experimental conditions but rather to better understand whether (and, if so, the degree to which) these variables predict variance in the dependent variable (Mutz and Kim 2020). Men, for instance, are known to be more likely to embrace the militaristic vision of history propagated by the Kremlin, whereas residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg are more likely to be critical of the official version of history. In contrast, the effect of age is less intuitive given that older respondents can be anticipated to express nostalgic views about the Soviet past at higher rates, whereas younger respondents were more recently exposed to the highly biased and one-sided teaching of history that now takes place in Russian schools and universities.

Punishment and Critical Historical Statements across Contexts: Descriptive Findings

A Desire to Penalize Deviant Narratives

Examining our punishment scenarios, which all specified two years of imprisonment for the infraction, we see that majorities across the three scenarios did not think the "transgressor" should have been punished at all, whereas a small minority believed that the punishment should have been even more severe (table 2). However, around one-quarter of respondents in each scenario stated that they did not know how to respond, suggesting either apathy or a lack of interest in the question, despite (or perhaps because of) the politicized nature of historical representations in contemporary Russia.[9] Overall, the differences between the contexts are significant, albeit not in line with what we expected.

Respondents were much more likely to want to punish the person who posted the controversial material on social media than the teacher who referenced it in class or the person who mentioned it in a bar. This contradicts our intuition, which was that introducing the deviant historical statement into the classroom would prove the most problematic scenario. Instead, the percentage of those who wanted to punish the teacher was roughly similar to those who wanted to punish the speaker in the bar, whereas a desire for punishment, at times even a more severe one, was most clearly evinced in the case of the social media poster. This suggests respondents may be thinking about the potential scope of the controversial statement's dissemination—possibly even beyond Russia's borders—in making their assessments.

As such, private interactions and the educational setting are revealed to be arenas associated with greater freedom of expression, whereas the online sphere is presumably seen as being more public and, consequently, as a discursive setting to be regulated more closely. This is remarkable, especially given that the last two decades have witnessed a near-constant political discourse regarding the need to shape what Russia's youth think about history through the classroom. At the same time, it reflects the reality of social media surveillance in Putin's Russia. For instance, Matvei Iuferov, a 19-year-old student, uploaded a short video to Instagram in November 2021 that featured him drunkenly urinating on the portrait of a World War II veteran. Although Iuferov quickly removed the recording and apologized (the veteran's son did not seek damages), he was nevertheless convicted of "rehabilitating Nazism" and sentenced to prison for a three-year term (Zurman 2021).

The Impact of Speaker and Law

Differences in respondent approval are also glaringly manifest when we distinguish between the conditions under which the statement that challenged an exclusively positive depiction of Russian history was made. In table 3 we report the mean values on a scale from 1 to 4, ranging from "no, never" to "yes, fully" (a higher value indicates greater agreement with the question posed).

Respondents reacted strongly to the identity of the person making the statement when asked whether they thought it is appropriate to bring such a perspective into the debate. On average, if the speaker was a foreign academic, our survey takers were significantly more likely to state that they did not think this perspective should be tolerated, regardless of the mention of the 2014 memory law.

However, if the law was specified when citing the foreigner, people on average thought that the statement was more appropriate (going against our expectation). This might have to do with understandings concerning to whom such laws apply and what outsiders know about Russian history. Conversely, respondents were less likely to think the statement was appropriate when the law was specified for the conational (consistent with our expectations). Nonetheless, the effect of mentioning the law was small compared to the identity of the speaker.

When asked whether they themselves thought that it is appropriate to critically engage with one's own history, there was no real difference across speakers when the law was specified. In contrast, among people who were not

Table 2
Descriptive Results: Vignette on Different Forms of Punishment for a Deviant Historical Statement in Russia

Appropriate punishment?	Social media	Classroom	Bar
Yes, it is appropriate	30.0%	20.3%	18.7%
No, the punishment should be even more severe	5.2%	4.4%	4.8%
No, he shouldn't have been punished at all	39.0%	50.3%	51.0%
Don't know	26.0%	25.0%	25.5%

Table 3
Descriptive Results: Vignette on Violations of a Historical Norm in Russia under Varying Circumstances

		Person	
Do you think it is appropriate for […] to bring this perspective into the debate?[a]		**Alekseeva**	**Beevor**
Law	**Specified**	2.22 (T1)	2.08 (T3)
	Not specified	2.30 (Control)	2.00 (T2)

		Person	
Do you agree with […] yourself that it is necessary to critically engage with one's ownhistory?[b]		**Alekseeva**	**Beevor**
Law	**Specified**	2.28 (T1)	2.28 (T3)
	Not specified	2.38 (Control)	2.18 (T2)

[a] A two-sample *t*-test was performed to compare the responses for the control against the treatment means. There was a significant difference between the control and T2 ($p < 0.001$) and T3 ($p < 0.001$) but not between the control and T1 ($p = 0.1374$).
[b] A two-sample *t*-test was performed to compare the responses for the control against the treatment means. There was a significant difference between the control and T2 ($p < 0.001$) but not between the control and T1 ($p = 0.03677$) or T3 ($p = 0.03225$).

reminded about the existence of the 2014 memory law, there was a higher level of agreement concerning the permissibility of critical interpretations of the past when the speaker was a conational.

On the whole, we see that it matters who the authoritative voice is when it comes to disagreeing with an established mnemonic norm. The effect is highly significant and points in the expected direction, suggesting there is some degree of "protecting the national honor" when the critical statement is made by a foreigner that does not apply when it comes from a conational. This finding is consistent with prior research about how in-group and out-group criticism is received (e.g., Hornsey, Oppes, and Svensson 2002).

Context and Position in Russian Society: Multivariate Analysis and Discussion

Punishing the Transgression of a Historical Norm

Regarding violations of historical norms, our multinomial logistic regression demonstrates the relevance of specific discursive settings (table 4). The high level of approval for punishment in the case of a statement diffused via social media is statistically significant even when controlling for other variables. Meanwhile, punishing a statement made by a teacher in a classroom and by an individual in a bar is much less likely to be considered appropriate.[10] There is also a statistically significant difference among those who think that the punishment should have been more severe, with the largest number of respondents in this category desiring harsher punishment for a transgressive statement made via social media. In line with the first hypothesis, this study thus confirms the importance of the discursive context for how respondents evaluate violations of a historical norm.[11]

As indicated in our discussion of the descriptive results, we anticipated that there would exist a hierarchy of punishments that respondents deem appropriate, with a heightened desire for punishing the norm-challenging statement in public settings (H1). Although this expectation is robustly confirmed for the social media scenario, distinctions in respondents' assessments of the semi-public teaching context and the strictly private interaction in the bar are not nearly as apparent. The relative unwillingness to censor the classroom is quite counterintuitive, given that since the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third term as president in 2012 schools have been increasingly tasked with providing a "patriotic" upbringing (Kratochvíl and Shakhanova 2021; Tsyrlina-Spady and Stoskopf 2017). Indeed, advocating for the militarization and nationalization of education, which places history at its center, has emerged as a key element of the Kremlin's political program (Bækken 2019). Meanwhile, controversial conversations that take place in private elicit the lowest level of approval for punishment.

We likewise expected that those who support state institutions (and consequently the regime) would be more in favor of punishing the deviant statement (H2a). Similarly, we thought that having positive views about Soviet history might either favor approval of punishment or encourage opposition to it, because respondents could exhibit nostalgia for the Soviet era but still oppose the current political situation (H2b). In fact, our analysis demonstrates that respondents who reported high levels of loyalty to the state are the most likely to demand an even greater punishment and the least likely to report that no punishment should have been administered. This verifies that Russians who approve of the state and its institutions are maximally inclined to support the regime taking a proactive role in shaping public discourse about history.

Table 4
Results of Multinomial Logistic Regression

	Dependent variable:					
	1		2		3	
	multinomial log-linear					
	Punishment “Yes, it is appropriate”		Punishment “No, even more severe”		No punishment at all	
	(1)	(1a)	(2)	(2a)	(3)	(3a)
***Reference category*: Statement on social media**						
Classroom	–0.349*	–0.349***	–0.162	–0.087*	0.326*	0.392***
	(0.157)	(0.101)	(0.272)	(0.036)	(0.138)	(0.099)
Bar	–0.484**	–0.566***	–0.101	0.017	0.296*	0.373***
	(0.158)	(0.104)	(0.264)	(0.037)	(0.137)	(0.099)
Political profile and historical views						
Critical of Soviet history	0.288	0.195	0.220	–0.017	0.726***	0.561***
	(0.177)	(0.111)	(0.297)	(0.033)	(0.151)	(0.080)
Affirmative of Soviet history	0.738***	0.622***	1.178**	0.923***	0.395*	0.288***
	(0.209)	(0.063)	(0.406)	(0.015)	(0.166)	(0.076)
Political loyalty	–0.061	–0.172**	0.491	0.537***	–0.700***	–0.769***
	(0.150)	(0.061)	(0.293)	(0.008)	(0.123)	(0.081)
No clear historical view	–0.634***	–0.520***	–0.408	–0.353***	–0.348**	–0.413***
	(0.150)	(0.119)	(0.252)	(0.046)	(0.126)	(0.101)
Historical interest	0.544***	0.529***	0.224	0.161***	0.257***	0.265***
	(0.090)	(0.092)	(0.149)	(0.042)	(0.074)	(0.076)
Demographic variables						
Age		–0.031		–0.191***		–0.011
		(0.023)		(0.034)		(0.020)
Age squared		0.0004		0.002***		0.00004
		(0.0003)		(0.0004)		(0.0002)
Gender male		0.423***		0.911***		0.427***
		(0.088)		(0.033)		(0.092)
Living in Moscow or St. Petersburg		–0.027		–0.429***		0.017
		(0.071)		(0.011)		(0.092)
Employed in state sector		0.223		0.425***		–0.039
		(0.120)		(0.055)		(0.108)
Education		0.008		0.013		0.093
		(0.060)		(0.096)		(0.052)
Wealth		–0.017		–0.0003		0.020
		(0.033)		(0.055)		(0.029)
Constant	–1.815***	–1.120***	–3.464***	0.240***	–0.254	–0.665***
	(0.381)	(0.003)	(0.684)	(0.001)	(0.308)	(0.004)
Reference Category	Don’t know	Don’t know	Don’t know	Don’t know	Don’t know	Don’t know
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,740.945	3,668.792	4,740.945	3,668.792	4,740.945	3,668.792
Observations	2,085	1,612	2,085	1,612	2,085	1,612

Note: The question asked was: “In your opinion, does this punishment suit his actions?”
$^{*}p < 0.1$,$^{**}p < 0.01$,$^{***}p < 0.001$.

However, the picture is more complex when it comes to respondents who view the Soviet legacy positively; it appears that the Kremlin cannot easily convince individuals who uphold the historical view propagated by the state to also approve of the punishment. Some of the respondents who praise Stalin, or the Soviet era more generally, desire a higher degree of punishment, whereas others would like to see no punishment at all or agree with the specified punishment. This finding supports our intuition that there is a distinction to be made between being positively inclined toward the Soviet era and supporting the present-day political system.

In turn, survey takers critical of Soviet history provide the most consistent response, insofar as they have the highest likelihood of agreeing that no punishment should have been administered. Characteristically, this segment of society also does not desire the punitive intervention of the state in historical discourse. In other words, the affirmation of official history does not necessarily overlap with political loyalty, whereas its rejection signals a more negative attitude toward the political status quo. Individuals without clear views on history, meanwhile, are always more likely to select the reference category of "don't know."

Those who express a higher degree of historical interest are also more likely to believe that the punishment was appropriate or should have been even more severe relative to not knowing how to respond. It seems that the more some Russians immerse themselves in the past, the more they become convinced that Russia's history ought to be defended. At the same time, an increase in historical interest also heightens the chances of arguing that no punishment should have been administered. Furthermore, a small share of the respondents with high historical interest indicated that they consider freedom of speech to include the freedom to critically engage with controversial historical topics. This finding illustrates the contradictory implications of historical interest on preferences for self-critical debates and demonstrates that paying attention to the past in Russia may be correlated with nationalistic and defensive postures.

In terms of age, people older than 55, along with those in their thirties, are the most willing to state that the punishment was appropriate across all three scenarios. The former group represents the last fully Sovietized generation, whereas the latter cohort comprises individuals whose primary socialization occurred during the 1990s, a period known as the "wild 90s" that today serves as a negative foil for Putin's regime (Malinova 2021). Remarkably, individuals who state that there should be no punishment at all also tend to be primarily in their thirties, reflecting the contradictory lessons that Russians draw from the 1990s.

Moreover, we would expect men to exhibit a greater propensity to claim that the punishment should have been even more severe, reflecting the heroic-masculine historical narrative that prevails in Russia and the country's comparatively rigid gender norms (Riabov and Riabova 2014). Consistent with this, we find that males are significantly more likely than females to desire additional punishment or to agree with the punishment proposed in the vignette. And although wealth and education overall do not play a meaningful role in respondent preferences, we do find that individuals residing in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia's two most cosmopolitan cities, are less likely to approve of more severe punishment. In contrast, those who work in the state sector have a higher likelihood of approving of more severe punishment, illustrating the ideological convergence of this part of society with the state.

Memory Laws, Speakers, and the Assessment of Historical Statements

With respect to the relevance of the authoritative speaker and the presence of legislation concerning how one may publicly discuss the past, we distinguish between two dependent variables: whether a respondent considers the statement to be appropriate and whether a respondent agrees with the statement (table 5). We are specifically interested in ascertaining whether agreement with the enforcement of such a norm is limited to those who support the political system or whether the law serves to bring Russians who are critical of their country's leadership but supportive of the historical outlook that it embraces closer to those who are in power.

Contrary to our assumptions and the intent of the Russian state, knowledge of the existence of a memory law does not matter for how respondents assess whether a statement is appropriate (H3). This finding implies that the elite-led imposition of legislation intended to prevent violations of norms concerning how to interpret the past and "protect" the historical sensibilities of Russian citizens is not having its desired effect.

Meanwhile, the identity of the speaker matters when it comes to the extent to which a historical statement is considered appropriate (H4). It also makes a difference for the personal evaluation of the scenario that respondents report. A member of the in-group who challenges the mnemonic norm has a higher likelihood of garnering support for their transgressive evaluation, whereas a challenge from a member of an out-group is more likely to result in support for the norm. This is an important finding and underlines the limits of imposing a critical historical discourse from the outside. If the potential for such discourse exists, it would seemingly need to be initiated by members of the in-group.

Championing a pluralistic approach to Russia's history might seem out of reach in the current political climate. However, there was a time not so long ago when this was still possible. The late Soviet period was characterized by a self-reflective examination of Stalinist-era violence, most prominently embodied in the establishment of Memorial, an NGO that focused on documenting Stalin's repressions. This introspective approach to the recent past persisted throughout the early post-Soviet years, a time when dialogue with other European partners on controversial historical topics was not perceived as a zero-sum game (e.g., Soroka 2021). But with the Great Patriotic War now occupying a sacrosanct status in the Russian commemorative calendar, the need to defend a sanitized version of history that exalts both the nation and the state has gained importance.

Turning our attention to relevant political and historical attitudes, the more respondents trust the political system, the less likely they are to tolerate discourses that violate the official historical narrative. This confirms the prediction in H5. As in the first study, political loyalty is a highly systematic predictor of views on the dissenting historical statement.

Table 5
Results of Logistic Regression for Different Vignettes

	Dependent variable:			
	ordered logistic			
	Appropriate Statement		**Personal Agreement**	
	(1)	**(1a)**	**(2)**	**(2a)**
Treatment conditions				
Law specified	–0.012	–0.044	–0.023	0.028
	(0.081)	(0.093)	(0.081)	(0.092)
Foreign speaker	–0.486***	–0.493***	–0.219**	–0.215*
	(0.081)	(0.093)	(0.081)	(0.092)
Political profile and historical views				
Critical of Soviet history	0.709***	0.782***	0.539***	0.540***
	(0.105)	(0.122)	(0.105)	(0.122)
Affirmative of Soviet history	–0.331**	–0.224	–0.393**	–0.368*
	(0.121)	(0.143)	(0.123)	(0.145)
Political loyalty	–0.802***	–0.780***	–0.628***	–0.608***
	(0.090)	(0.103)	(0.089)	(0.102)
No clear historical view	0.317***	0.284**	0.026	0.075
	(0.094)	(0.109)	(0.094)	(0.108)
Historical interest	–0.193***	–0.178**	–0.003	–0.108
	(0.055)	(0.065)	(0.055)	(0.065)
Demographic variables				
Age		–0.023***		0.006
		(0.004)		(0.004)
Gender male		–0.300**		0.040
		(0.097)		(0.096)
Living in Moscow or St. Petersburg		0.399***		0.239*
		(0.115)		(0.114)
Employed in state sector		–0.083		–0.171
		(0.097)		(0.097)
Education		0.075		0.115**
		(0.040)		(0.040)
Wealth		0.0004		0.028
		(0.022)		(0.023)
Observations	2,110	1,630	2,110	1,630

Note: Dependent variable coded on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 signifying greater agreement. The questions asked were “Do you think it is appropriate for Lyudmila Alekseeva/Antony Beevor to bring this perspective into the debate?” and “Do you agree personally with Lyudmila Alekseeva/Antony Beevor that it is necessary to critically engage with one’s own history?”
$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Relative to the permissibility of deviant historical interpretations of World War II, the perceptions that respondents hold regarding other aspects of Soviet history are bound to matter. Aiming to identify their relevance, we evaluated respondent views on Stalin and the USSR. We find that those who express clearly critical opinions about the Soviet past are significantly more likely to agree with the person who made the controversial statement and to consider it appropriate. Meanwhile, respondents with positive views concerning the USSR are more likely to disagree with the critical historical statement but only if we do not control for other variables. At the same time, they are consistent when it comes to their personal disagreement with the statement. Finally, those with a higher historical interest are less likely to support the critical statement. This might seem counterintuitive at first blush, but it confirms the role that history plays in the previous study, where it also indicated a more pronounced “patriotic” stance.

Turning to sociodemographic variables, younger people are more likely to approve of the statement problematizing the Red Army’s legacy, implying that tolerance for dissenting views is age dependent. Moreover, a gender effect is apparent, with women more likely to believe that the vignette statement was appropriate. As for the economic sector that respondents are employed in, we see no statistically significant effects. However, individuals with higher levels of education, as well as those living in Moscow or St. Petersburg, are more likely to express agreement with the critical historical statement.

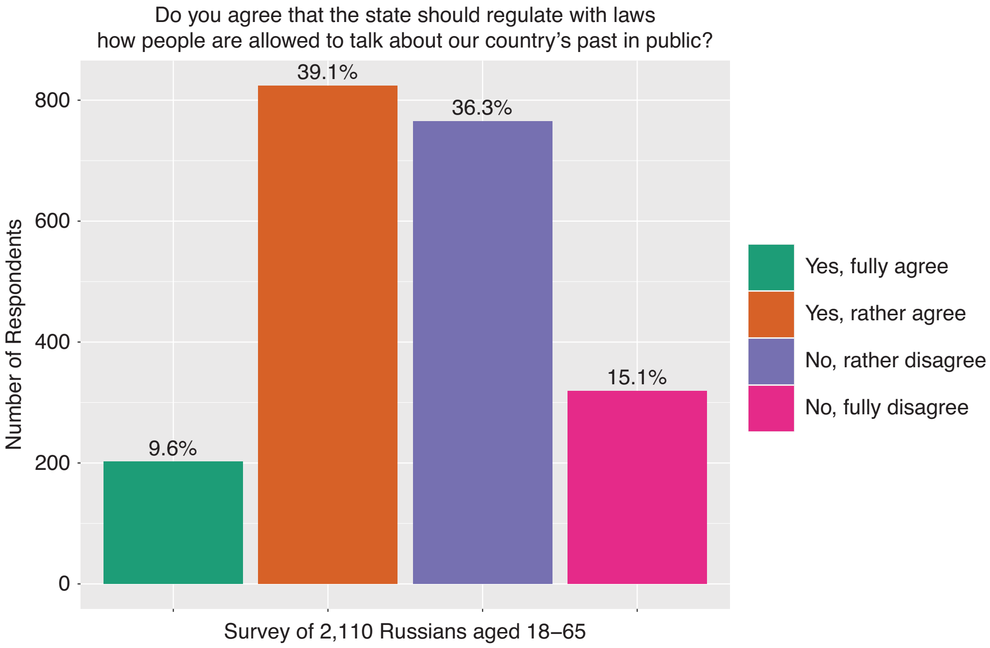
A Desire to Regulate the Past through Legal Means

To understand opinions on memory laws directly and assess the extent to which the findings are driven by the ways in which the treatment was administered, we asked respondents about the desirability of legislating historical discourse. Respondents were split in their views on whether such laws are needed, with around half valuing the protection of history more than the protection of free speech (figure 2). The preceding analysis demonstrates that knowledge of the existence of a memory law does not substantively affect how people evaluate a controversial historical statement. Nevertheless, approximately half of Russians deem such laws desirable. Limitations on free speech are in line with public discourse, which prominently underscores the dangers of "falsified" historical accounts and the obligation of the current generation to honor their debt to those who fought against German fascism.

Illustrating the reasoning for limitations on free speech is the address given in 2009 by Sergei Shoigu, who was at the time Minister of Emergency Situations, to a group of veterans; in his speech, he stated that legal restrictions on speech were needed "to protect our history, the deeds of our fathers and grandfathers" (RIA Novosti 2009). Similarly, Irina Yarovaya—the head of the Duma's Committee on Security and Anti-Corruption and closely involved in pushing through the finalized text of the 2014 law—claimed that this measure was needed because even though Russia (she did not say "Soviet Union") suffered the greatest number of casualties in World War II, it did not yet have *négationnisme* laws similar to those of Austria, Belgium, and Germany. She added that in a world where attempts were being made to revive nationalist movements and "Banderism," there was a need for a law that would "work proactively" to protect Russia's narrative concerning the Great Patriotic War (TASS 2014).

Views concerning the desirability of imposing restrictions on free speech when it comes to history do not depend on age, gender, or socioeconomic variables. However, respondents who profess a higher level of trust in state institutions tend to favor stricter regulation of historical discourse. Those with an above-average interest in the past and those who recall the Soviet period favorably are similarly more inclined to believe that the state should manage historical discourse. Conversely, individuals with negative views of Stalin and the USSR, along with residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, are more willing to allow for critical assessments of the past. The same holds true for those who report higher levels of trust in online media and higher levels of political involvement, which may be capturing, in part, people who are more likely to protest the government's stances.

Figure 2
Views on Memory Laws in Russia



Memory laws, of course, are only one of the numerous possible restrictions that may be imposed on free speech relative to history. There exist myriad other mechanisms that the state can deploy to control narratives about the past. We find only a small cohort who would argue that historical topics as a whole should not be subject to free speech protections. No more than 5% of respondents take this most restrictive view, with the overwhelming majority of those surveyed either stating that freedom of speech should always include the ability to discuss controversial aspects of history (40.5%) or that some limitations ought to apply but that these should not be of a universal nature (54%).

Strikingly, those who favor some limitations on free speech concerning history tend to believe that one has to avoid offending other members of the nation. This reason—the most prominent one reported by far, given by more than 40% of those who desire restrictions—is largely in line with the approach in countries such as Germany and France, where the potential harm in free speech is seen as a greater threat than not maintaining the absolute value of free speech (e.g., Tsesis 2009). This mode of thinking presupposes that the dignity of victims and their descendants needs to be honored (Waldron 2014), but it is not an approach that is prominent in Russian public discourse on history. Rather, it is the second most frequently chosen reason—namely, that the national honor should protected—that aligns most closely with the way Russia's leadership relates to the past. Meanwhile, the small number of respondents who think that historical topics should be entirely excluded from free speech protections overwhelmingly justify their stance on the grounds that open debate could hurt people's feelings or discredit the national honor.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the conditions under which the most central and widely accepted mnemonic norms may be challenged. Russia was especially relevant to examine in this respect because World War II is recalled there in a narrow manner, both legally and socially. Consequently, Russian society is predisposed to oppose violations of well-attested interpretive standards, making the case a "hard test" for our hypotheses. Thinking about the implications of this project and how it may be extended to other contexts, four elements stand out.

First, our research emphasizes the importance of the discursive context for assessing reactions to a transgressive historical statement. Social media is the sphere respondents want to see regulated most closely, although the reasons for this are not yet entirely clear and invite further study. Does this desire for punishment reflect fears about the wide reach of social media, or is it instead predicated on limiting the amount of allegedly false information that circulates online? The realm of education, meanwhile, may be relatively open to entertaining conflicting opinions and plurality of thought on historical topics. However, although respondents generally do not want to punish teachers who repeat norm-violating accounts in the classroom, this does not tell us whether state-led attempts to regulate what is taught will silence diverse opinions among educators or influence the views of the student body.

Second, the legitimacy of the law-producing state matters if the statutes it promulgates are to be obeyed. In both democratic and authoritarian contexts, laws have an audience; for them to exert their information-coordinating function, citizens must be willing to integrate the content they embody into their belief sets. Our findings suggest that, when it comes to the acceptance of memory laws, there may be important differences among regime types. Specifically, in today's autocratic Russia mnemonic legislation does not appear to function as intended, despite the existence of societal support for imposing curbs on free speech. This finding deserves further scrutiny.

Third, our analysis highlights that external disapproval of unnuanced and jingoistic narratives concerning the past is unlikely to be effective. Its findings strongly suggest that, to be regarded as valid, criticism of the Red Army's activities during the Great Patriotic War would have to emerge from within Russia itself, given that outside criticism provokes a defensive stance. This has relevance for dealing with a country like Turkey, which has had difficulties being accepted into the European community in part because of its refusal to recognize the Armenian genocide. It also has implications for countries such as Belarus, Poland, and the Baltic states, which rightly portray themselves as nations brutally victimized by Nazi Germany but often fail to acknowledge that some of their conationals collaborated with Hitler's forces and participated in the killing of Jews during World War II. Extending this research further, future surveys could devote more attention to non-European regions where contested historical recall features prominently in relations between neighbors and societal subgroups, notably East Asia and South America.

Fourth, although it is obvious that authoritarian regimes will find it easier to promote an official historical position and criminalize divergent views, this does not mean that the populace will blindly accept the narrative on offer. Our data suggest that the Russian state at best has a limited ability to shape mass-level perceptions regarding the past and its present-day interpretation, principally among those who are predisposed to support the political system. Moreover, given a widely popular historical norm—one where societal views even among dissidents are largely congruent with the official state narrative—there still exists variation in how the past is interpreted and disagreement over whether dissenting views deserve to be heard. We must therefore distinguish between those who are loyal to the political regime and those who support a positive interpretation of Soviet history, because these individuals may not be one and the same. Similarly, it should not be assumed that interpretations of history correlate with sociodemographic variables and ideological self-positioning in a predictably monotonic and unidimensional fashion.

These observations potentially have wide-ranging relevance for how scholars think of state efficacy in the mnemonic realm. Nonetheless, there is still much about the dynamics associated with memory politics that we do not fully comprehend. More attention needs to be focused on understanding how historical narratives are received (the "demand side") relative to how they are produced by political elites (the "supply side"). We are thus hopeful that our findings will motivate additional research across various geopolitical and institutional contexts. The past clearly matters for the political present, but how exactly it exerts its effect remains a topic in need of careful and systematic study.

Supplementary Materials

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit http://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722004169.

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Notes

1 See Adler (2005); Adler and Weiss-Wendt (2021); Bernhard and Kubik (2014); Koposov (2017); and Miller and Lipman (2012).

2 For example, on February 20, 2022, Russian president Vladimir Putin's press secretary, Dmitrii Peskov, stated, "Russia throughout its history has never attacked anyone" (TASS 2022). Peskov's claim is demonstrably false, but it fits the Kremlin's historical narrative of Russia being a continually besieged state that has "more than once saved Europe from itself" (Lavrov 2014).

3 A similar process has also been evinced in calls to construct a pan-European identity in the early 2000s (e.g., Pestel et al. 2017).

4 On the societal development of the cult of the Great Patriotic War, see Dubin (2004).

5 The Red Army entered Poland on September 17, 1939, in accordance with the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, less than three weeks after the start of the German invasion.

6 The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was a World War II-era paramilitary organization implicated in the ethnic cleansing of Poles and Jews on the territory of Ukraine. The xenophobic views and fascist ideology of Bandera and the group's other leaders are widely known.

7 For the Russian-language versions of the vignettes, see the online supplementary material.

8 Officially known as Federal Law No. 504872-6 "On Counteracting the Rehabilitation of Nazism, Glorification of Nazi Criminals and Their Accomplices," this legislation modified the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation by introducing article 354.1, which prohibits questioning the Nuremberg Tribunal's findings (this is significant because this body did not consider Soviet war crimes). It also made it illegal to "spread intentionally false information about the Soviet Union's activities during World War II" and to be "disrespectful" of societal memory about the war, and prohibited the public desecration of the "symbols of Russia's military glory." Intriguingly, this statute specifically refers to the war as World War II and not the Great Patriotic War, which allows it to be used against those who criticize the USSR's September 1939 occupation of Poland. For more details, see Koposov (2017).

9 Respondents might also simply not care about history in general (see Gerber and Laruelle 2021).

10 In the regression model we selected "don't know" as the baseline because the response categories are discrete and unordered. Given distinct categories, this allows comparing the effect relative to the baseline of being indifferent to, or uninformed about, the question. Why respondents select "don't know" can vary, but Naylor and O'Loughlin (2021) identify two legitimate reasons. The first is lack of information about a topic, which is frequently evinced by respondents with lower levels of education and by women, whereas the second is an inability to decide among different plausible options. In our study, women and individuals who indicated that they were not interested in political topics and history were the most likely to select "don't know" as their response. This concurs with the profile of the "apathetic" that Carnaghan (1996, 335) identified as one of the three reasons why Russian (and Soviet) respondents chose "don't know" (this comprised the most prominent category in her analysis, particularly for female, less educated, and very young or very old respondents).

11 This interpretation holds up when simple average marginal effects (AMEs) are estimated from the multinomial logit model, as reported in the online supplementary material.

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