IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHICAL
AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF VLADIMIR PUTIN'S
RHETORIC THROUGH HIS NEW YEAR
ADDRESSES

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HIS NEW YEAR ADDRESSES

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ABSTRACT

As leader of the Russian Federation, a state with both a large military stockpile and veto power in the United Nations, it is important to understand who Vladimir Putin is as a leader. In order to do so, we must first identify and understand the contexts of Putin's leadership. One of the ways in which we can do that is by looking at his rhetoric. This thesis looks specifically at the language and recurrence of ideas in Putin's New Year Addresses. Given the cultural significance of this holiday to the Russian people and the holiday's own significance to Putin's presidency, it is a useful genre for identifying philosophical and historical context within his speeches. This thesis not only identifies the foundational elements of this genre of speech, but it is able to identify the shifts in rhetoric and understand the context behind them.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

In order to create and maintain a cooperative international system, there must be a level of understanding of each country and their political leaders; this is especially true for Russia and Vladimir Putin as a nation with a strong military stockpile and veto power in the United Nations. Patrick Lawrence (2018) wrote, “it comes to a simple word: none of our prevailing versions of Putin has any context. There is no trace of Russian history, political culture, moral tradition, national priorities, or national identity in any of them. In conversation I call this POLO, the power of leaving out, for it is perniciously effective” (p. 3). Lawrence believes this missing context to be a major problem in our current understanding of Putin. The purpose of this thesis is to identify Putin’s narrative in his New Year Addresses and establish the historical and philosophical context of Putin’s rhetoric that Lawrence considers to be missing and bring it into the academic conversation.

As this thesis will support, there are many calls to action and philosophical ideas that present themselves in Putin’s speeches similarly to an official state ideology. However, in Putin’s “Россия на рубеже тысячелетий”/“Russia at the turn of the millennium”, which is most often referred to as the “Millennium Message” in Western discourse, from December 31, 1999, Putin established that there was no intent for a state ideology to be formed. Since then, there has not been an official state ideology for Russia. In recognition of this turn away from ideology, the actions and guiding principles outlined by Putin for the Russian people, even though they function as an ideology, will not be referred to as ideology but rather what I will call anti-ideology. This anti-ideology

will encompass the explicit and implicit directives that Putin gives to the Russian people through his references and rhetoric. Because ideology is an important aspect of leadership for any government, it is important to identify Putin's as well. The "Millennium Message" will also serve as a foundational element for this thesis to establish expectations for Putin's later addresses.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

1.2.1 Research Questions

My research questions are based on the need to identify the context for Putin's rhetoric and the analysis of such rhetoric's impact on Putin's narrative and anti-ideology for the Russian people. These questions are as follows:

Primary research question: What is the historical and philosophical context for Putin's New Year address rhetoric?

Secondary research question: How is Putin shaping the narrative of Russian politics through these speeches?

These research questions work in tandem to not only identify but understand the contexts of Putin's rhetoric and its impact on the Russian people. Furthermore, through these speeches, we can see how Putin is shaping his anti-ideology and Russian political life as he deals with current and historical events. The current and historical events that appear in his speeches are reflections of his desired image of Russia.

1.2.2 Objectives

This thesis will analyze all eighteen of Putin's New Year Addresses since serving as Russia's president for points of historical and philosophical context. I selected these New Year Addresses for the holiday's cultural significance to the Russian people, as well

as the significance of this day to Putin's presidency, since it was his first day in the office of the presidency. The celebration of the holiday also holds cultural significance from and ties the Russian people to their Soviet past, a time in which New Years replaced the traditions of Christmas. Though this tradition of New Year speeches is not new to Putin's presidency, these New Year addresses have also been revived under Putin's leadership. These New Year speeches are also one of the few, consistent times in which Putin addresses the Russian people directly, and they provide us insight for what Putin wants people to remember going forth into the new year. In a close-up shot of Putin's face in the final minutes of the outgoing year, Putin's words are the last ones heard by many Russians for that year.

I am including Putin's "Millennium Message" as an additional text to establish an initial baseline of Putin's plans for Russia, which formulated his plans and intentions for his leadership. Putin released this text on New Year's Eve of 1999, the same day of his first New Year Address and first day in office, tying into the significance of this holiday. This message outlined the goals for Putin's presidency and the aspects needed to accomplish them. This was also one of the first insights the Western world had into Putin's plans for Russia. Given the unexpected resignation of Boris Yeltsin, this message as well as the first New Year address allowed both the West and the Russian people to get an impression of this new leader.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current Perception of Vladimir Putin

Though not exclusive to Western perception, Western media and academia has repeatedly labeled Vladimir Putin as different reincarnations of Russia's past. Four of the most repeated references for Putin are to Imperial Russian czars, the Slavophile Movement, Petr Stolypin, and Stalinist Russia. In some of these cases, these labels put on Putin are a means of describing him as a leader without breaking down the components of his leadership. However, there are many facets of Putin's leadership that can be connected to ideals and ideas of Russia's past in a way that brings the past to the present. In Hill and Gaddy's (2015) *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, Hill and Gaddy explore Putin through the angle of the History Man: someone who distinctly relies on history in order to create. This identity of Putin described by Hill and Gaddy is supported through Putin's past academic pursuits and his continued use of historic elements throughout his time as president. One of the most important elements that Hill and Gaddy (YEAR) utilize is the idea of "useful history," selectively choosing historical memories or rhetoric that is deemed useful for the intended message, while casting aside history that does not fit the image Putin wants. While not using the same terminology as Hill and Gaddy, other academics have utilized the elements of the past to understand the methodology of Putin as a leader. This "useful history" is the main component of the rhetoric gathered from his speeches.

2.2 Putin's Connections to Imperial Russia

Given Putin's tight hold on the power of the Russian government since 2000, becoming the longest leader in Russian history after Stalin, there is common sentiment

that Putin may remain in power until his death, in what Hill and Gaddy (2012) call “‘sovereign democracy’ (Putin’s strained reformulation of the czarist-era concept of autocracy with a democratic twist).” In a similar fashion, Stepanova (2015), notes the “continuity” of Russian history that Putin relies on that allows him to reach beyond the 20th century events and revive the Russian spirit from the days of imperialism.

Narodnost, or nationality, better defined as the “spirit or essence of being Russian” (Hill and Gaddy 2012), was one of the components of czar Nicholas I’s Official Nationality alongside autocracy and orthodoxy adopted from Sergei Uvarov. This slogan responded to the many questions circling the intellectual communities search for what and who Russia should be. As Hill and Gaddy (2012) note, this narodnost has become a vital part of Putin’s leadership and use of history. This leads me to believe that Putin is holding onto the importance of a Russian spirit in order to maintain a unified nation under his supervision. This concept of Official Nationality is additionally tied to the relationship between Russian leadership and the Russian Orthodox Church. For the power of the czar was tied to a divine right of the throne passed down through the royal family’s line. Though an important component to Official Nationality, this relationship between the Orthodox Church and Russian governmental power is often associated with Putin in the manner of him revisiting the ideas of the Slavophile Movement.

2.3 Putin the Slavophile

Stepanova (2015) notes this relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and Putin has impacted the values and identities of the Russian people as moral responsibility is passed from political leadership to this religious institution. Stepanova also observes Putin’s rhetoric in various addresses to the Russian people that defend this transfer of

who decides morality to the Russian Orthodox Church. This closeness and share in guidance over the Russian people are often associated with the Slavophile Movement who saw Orthodoxy as the means of completing the path to fully understanding the world around them. The Church in this case is meant to be the ultimate power. The Slavophiles charioted the idea of sobornost in which a community would be formed in active discussion to preserve the Russian spirit and harmony. This movement was important to Russians as they actively sought their place and destiny in the world.

While Putin's presidency is not under the control of Orthodox leaders, he does push an Orthodox agenda. Shuster (2016) reported on the President's pilgrimage to Greece in 2016 and relayed Putin's own thoughts on Orthodoxy's role in Russia as the axis of which Russia should be built on. As Krushcheva (2008) previously explained, "the cosmic harmony" that Christianity aligns for the Russian people stems from the understanding the Slavophiles had about the relationship between the Russian people and destiny. The other point of connection made between Putin and the Slavophiles is his relationship to the West. Poised against the Westernizers who thought Russia's achievements would come to fruition by adopting standards of the West, the Slavophiles opposed the need to look outward to find Russia's identity. A sentiment that Putin has adopted as well. As Lawrence (2018) states, Putin "has lost his illusions" of partnering with the West, and Lawrence notes now is the position that the "Western-centric thesis is fatally wrong. As Putin continues to pursue a more Russia/Eurasian centric focus, the anti-Western attitude has been construed as Slavophilism in nature.

2.4 Putin and Stolypin

The connections most often made between Stolypin and Putin occur out of Putin's use of Stolypin rhetoric, especially in his early years as president, as well as his use of Stolypin policies as models for his own Russia. As a prime minister and one of the first members of the first Russian Duma created before the end of Russian Imperialism, Stolypin supported both the monarchy and a push towards modernization, and fought against the 1905 Revolution. In his efforts for maintaining and accomplishing his goals, Stolypin led to the suppression and violence towards many Russians and his name continues to be associated with deaths and violence from his actions.

For Hill and Gaddy (2012 p. 23), Putin's effort "to accomplish the political, economic and social transformation of Russia through nonrevolutionary means" is an indication of this Stolypin effort for control alongside Putin's new "favorite quote 'We do not need great upheavals. We need a great Russia,' a paraphrase of Stolypin's famous rebuke to his fellow Duma deputies in 1907: 'You, gentlemen, are in need of great upheavals; we are in need of Great Russia.'" Other moments of Putin's early presidency include him quoting Stolypin to his General Assembly and suggesting educational ideas to spread Stolypin's ideas to Russian academics (Hahn 2015). The use and positive reflection that Putin has towards the work of Stolypin have led to his association with the man.

2.5 Putin and the Soviet Union

The Soviet past for Russia is never far out of touch when it comes to life today. This is true for the characterization of Putin's presidency as well. Academic and journalistic references to Putin as sympathetic or actively trying to recreate aspects of the Soviet

system today are quite common. These associations are motivated by the President's avoidance to speak ill of Soviet era actions and denounce the actions of the Soviet government—particularly Stalin's actions. Khrushcheva (2008) points out that Putin's "Stalinesque" qualities of firm crackdowns over oligarchs and press alike have garnered support from the Russian people—a people which largely grew up under the Soviet Union, including Putin himself. This inevitably ties Putin to all aspects of Stalin's leadership. In her text, "An Eternal Revolution of the Russian Mind", she reminds us of the Stalinist era phrase that Putin has revived—"Lock 'em up, then we'll have order." Putin has also continued to hold onto Soviet sentimentalism and often remarks on these days of Russia's past as fondly, overlooking those who suffered or were lost during this time. This selectivity plays into the idea of Hill and Gaddy's "useful history." For these reasons, the Soviet past is significant context to his addresses to the people and is a main source of historical reference for Putin's leadership.

3. Research Design

3.1 Selection of Variables

This thesis is designed around the comparison and evaluation of frequently mentioned topics throughout the eighteen New Year Addresses Putin has given. In order to do so, I had to select topics that are important to the main ideas Putin gave in his “Millennium Message” and ones that are pertinent to his anti-ideology. The topics used in this design come were primarily inspired by Putin’s “Millennium Message” and repeated appearances in the speeches, as well as common events from these years which garnered national and international media attention, for a total of ten variables. From his “Millennium Message,” the following variables were created based on the critical points of each aforementioned main idea: assurance or advocacy for a strong state, call for unity among Russian citizens, economic successes or concerns, promotion of common values and traditions, individuals’ responsibility to support the Russian state, references to Russia’s past or future in the context of Russia’s history or destiny, and state responsibility to support Russian citizens on the individual level. The variables created from the repeated appearance in Putin’s speeches are blessing on the state and references to Russia using endeared terms, such as Motherland or homeland. While these are not directly from Putin’s plans for the nation, these references are important to the sense of identity that Putin is trying to create and preserve for the Russian people. Lastly, there is one topic included based on visibility of national events in the media nationally and internationally—violence or protests from civil society. Since a part of Putin’s message was the unity of civil society, references to these events would be a signal of his commitment to overcome internal strife amongst the Russian citizens. However, this last

variable yielded no results; so in place of the results of frequency, there will be a discussion of how this zero-result variable is impacted by and impacts the variables around it.

3.2 Frequency

What counts as a unit of “frequency” in the results is based on two factors: what was said or implied in Putin’s address and its isolation within the speech from other references. For the first factor, any explicit or overly implicit reference to one of the aforementioned variables counted as a unit of frequency. An overly implicit reference is determined by the connotations of the language used that would suggest a reference has occurred. From there, the isolation of the reference is taken into account. Isolation of references is important to distinguishing which variables are frequently mention rather than which ones take up the most space within the speech. There are two types of references that meet the isolation qualification. First, the reference to the variable is the only reference of that variable made within its paragraph, as designated by the transcript of each speech provided by the Kremlin’s website. Second, there may be more than one reference to a singular variable within one paragraph if there is a successful shift in topic between each reference. If the reference meets one or both of these criteria, then it is accepted as a unit of frequency. There is one variable exception to this criteria. For the variable blessing on the state in closing remarks, there is only the possibility for one occurrence. Therefore, a coding of 1 will indicate a “yes,” there was a closing blessing on the state or a 0 for “no,” there was not a closing blessing on the state.

4. Establishing the Baseline of Expectations

4.1 Putin's "Millennium Message"¹

On New Year's Eve of 1999, his first day as president, Putin released his "Millennium Message" and delivered his first New Year Address. These messages to the Russian people, and the world, serve as the baseline of expectations for Putin's future addresses and their content. This day also marks the start of Putin's anti-ideology and his narrative for the Russian people. Putin addresses three lessons for the Russian people to learn from in his "Millennium Message" that he reaffirms in his subsequent New Year Address: "Russian Idea," "Strong State," and "Efficient Economy." These ideas are the foundations of the topics of interest in this thesis and are the building blocks of the anti-ideology Putin has both created and sustained during his time in office and will be discussed in more detail individually.

4.1.1 The Russian Idea

The "Russian Idea" is grounded in the unity of the state and civil society. In this narrative, the success of Russia through its reforms and progress is directly tied to the accord of the Russian people. The Russian idea that Putin created comes from values and beliefs that Russia's past and continuous greatness, a strong state as the "guarantor of order," and collectivism over individualism are the pinnacles for Russian success. The problem that Putin addresses here in this message, however, is the historical context of an "official state ideology." In this moment, the forced ideology from the Soviet past is a painful reminder of what was lost in the Soviet push for power and progress. Putin built

¹ This chapter uses quotes from the English translation provided for this text from Putin's autobiography *First Person* and sourced from the University of Oregon database.

the expectations of a democratic Russia that functions from the “voluntary” adherence of society to “universal” values and traditions that are not created by a state but by the people into his message. As time has passed, Putin’s initial avoidance of a state ideology has created an anti-ideology that has been formed by the words and actions of Putin that effectively create and enforce ideological guidelines for the Russian people. The traditions and values Putin projects onto the people stem from the values and traditions he emphasizes in this “Millennium Message”. These values include “patriotism,” “belief in Russia’s greatness,” “statism,” and “social solidarity.” Though the emphasis of these ideas in his future speeches shifts, these values remain pertinent to the narrative that Putin portrays and asserts for the Russian people.

4.1.2 The Strong State

The “Strong State,” shares similar aspects to the first point. As Putin touts the initiation of stability under his leadership, he reinforces the idea of a strong centralized government. Putin identifies in this message a problem “in that tier of authority which the government belongs to. The global experience prompts the conclusion that the main threat to human rights and freedoms, to democracy as such emanates from the executive authority.” Putin’s government, under the expectations from this message to the Russian people, will not fall to the allure of totalitarian rule or dictatorship, but must remain democratic for the success and stability of the nation. The executive authority as an ever-increasing power is labeled by Putin as a pitfall of the global trend in authority, even within democracy. Therefore, Putin affirms that the strength of the state must work under the checks and balances of a diligent and united civil society. A strong state in this sense must uphold democracy and shut down its threats. This includes the role of the state as a

protector of the Russian people. Putin's acknowledgement of the Russian trend for people to act in manners that are to the benefit of the state, rather than themselves, weakens his comments about the state's duty as protector of the people. "Paternalistic sentiments have struck deep roots in Russian society. The majority of Russians are used to connect improvements in their own condition more with the aid and support of the state and society than with their own efforts, initiative and flair for business. And it will take a long time for this habit to die." Since Putin does not reject this phenomenon of Russians acting in the best interests of the central government rather, the two relationships between the state and civil society contradict each other, and ultimately one has to prevail over the other, which we will see in the results of my research.

4.1.3 Efficient Economy

The third and last main idea from the "Millennium Message" is the "Efficient Economy" and is the lesser of Putin's building blocks of anti-ideology in the context of the New Year Addresses, as it appears less frequently than its predecessors. Through this idea, Putin affirms the need for long-standing economic reform for Russia as well as the co-opting of market economy with state guidance. In this case, the economic success of the state would be a direct reflection of the strength and success of the government, which in turn relies on the actions of the individual citizens of Russia. So, here again, we can see there is tension in relationship between the Russian people and their government, which will showcase itself further within the content of Putin's later speeches as Putin addresses both the responsibility of the state to its people, but more importantly, the responsibility of each individual to the Russian state.

4.2 1999 New Year Address and Subsequent Addresses

Putin's first New Year Address reiterates many points from these previous ideas. This premier New Year speech emphasizes the need to protect Russian democracy, civil freedoms, and role of the state as protector of the people. The Russia that Putin describes in this address is one heading towards political and societal strength and unity. This speech acts as precedent for the New Year Addresses to follow. These addresses should indicate a theme of government assurance of the Russian people in years to come, if they follow in the footsteps of the first. However, as the years pass, we will see a shift in the direction of these speeches away from some of the plans Putin laid out and more towards Putin shaping the actions and beliefs of the Russian people towards his own ideological preferences. Rather than assurances, we see these speeches will call for action within society and outline Putin's anti-ideology for Russia as a strong state upheld by the collective action and unity from its people, regardless of the events and actions of the years they are concluding.

5. Results

Below are the results of each variable with their given frequencies of appearance in the New Year Addresses organized by year given. Along the x-axis, there is a jump in the time with the years of each speech to account for the four-year gap between 2008 and 2012 in which Putin was prime minister and no longer giving the annual New Year Address by the president. The return of Putin to the presidency correlates with many shifts in the frequency of data, as you will see below.

5.1 Assurance and Advocation for a Strong State

Figure 1 shows the frequency of the variable assurance or advocacy for a strong state. This variable is a direct creation from Putin's first point for the Russian people in his "Millennium Message." Despite the importance placed on this variable in

Figure 1

his debut to the presidency, frequency of mention across all the New Year addresses is relatively low compared to

other variables, and there is a distinct gap in the data from 2002 to 2006. There is also a peak in the data from the years 2007, 2012, and 2013 and then the frequency trails off and intermittently is missing from his addresses. This suggests that there may be other variables that are used in place of these direct references to strength. In his 2007 address,

Putin stated “Russian has been gaining in strength and becoming stronger.” Similar comments in 2012, such as “[Russians] rely on our own strength,” and 2013’s “it is only together than we can be truly strong.” For example, a measure of strength from his “Millennium Message” is formed from the collective nature of the Russian people, which we can see in these quotes. These variables are not mutually exclusive from one another, but can still be examined individually. As noted by Putin in his initial message of the aftermath of the former Soviet Union and the new Russia that followed, a divided people is unable to support a strong state. So, the absence of explicit expressions of strength is not an indicator of a shift away from this ideal, but that the manner in which Putin is proposing Russian is through calls to actions for Russian citizens.

5.2 Call for Unity Among the Russian Citizens

The second variable, call for unity among Russian citizens, was also mentioned frequently in his “Millennium Message” and has become a consistent topic in Putin’s New Year Addresses since his second term in office. In Figure 2, the importance of this

Figure 2

variable is noted by the frequency of at least one in all but three addresses. There are also three years in which the frequency is

the highest. Those years, 2012, 2013, and 2018, were also during years of particular

interest to Putin as 2012 and 2018 were election years, and 2013 was a divisive year in Russia's civil society following the reelection of Putin after his time as prime minister. For example, in 2018, Putin used multiple variants of the phrase “when working together.” This active verb used with “together” creates a sense of activeness needed on the audience's level as well. The call for unity in Putin's speeches is not a passive or finished moment. It is a variable of initiation.

This variable is also an indicator of a strong Russian state, and we can see here that in all but two instances, the results of figures 1 and 2 complement one another and demonstrate a consistent emphasis on the first idea from Putin's “Millennium Message.” Because of this variable's ability to reflect multiple aspects of Putin's plans and anti-ideology, it is an important variable to the results of this thesis. Though we expect calls to unity from political speeches of all natures and nations, in this case, Putin uses this variable as a vital tool in maintaining his narrative for the Russian people as his message to the state suggests the lack of this variable among the Russian people to be a direct correlation to the chaos and tragedy of the early 20th century and the 1990s.

5.3 Economic Success or Concerns

Figure 3

Next, variable three, references to economic successes or concerns, can be seen in Figure 3.

This topic was given an entire subsection within the “Millennium Message,” and yet there are multiple gaps in which there was no mention of economic success or concerns, despite the ever importance of economic growth for each nation. For example, in 2001, Putin commented on the Russian state having “maintained growth” in wake of the instability just a few years prior. It is simple passing moments in his speeches that give attention to this issue. One explanation of this is the importance of economy to the anti-ideology of Putin. Putin’s anti-ideology is founded on a strong state, which is often supported by a strong economy. However, given the greater emphasis on civil society and unity, this topic is not a foundation of his narrative because it does not directly serve the notion of civil unity.

5.4 Promotion of Common Values and Traditions

Figure 4 shows the results from the variable promotion of common values and traditions. Like the variable call for unity, the promotion of common values and traditions are foundational elements for Putin’s main points of the “Russian Idea” and the

Figure 4

“Strong State.”
These topics are crucial to his ability to secure his narrative and plans for Russia. Some of the rhetoric from

Putin in this category have been “we simply need to...love...respect...defend truth and

justice...and help those in need of support” in his 2016 address. Listing values from the united “we” perspective is one of the ways in which this variable commonly appears.

Though this topic was mentioned in more than two thirds of his addresses, there is a trend of increasing frequency after 2014, during his third term in office, and more than half of these mentions have occurred in the past five years. This indicates the increasing importance of common values and traditions among the Russian people as the country faces increasing divides within the population about desires for the future of Russia. So, it is crucial for Putin’s anti-ideology to continue this emphasis on common values and traditions.

5.5 *Individuals’ Responsibility to Support the State*

The results from the variable individuals’ responsibility to support the Russian state and are striking in Figure 5 as it has the highest frequency of all the variables and is a variable absent from his first three addresses. This phenomena was a highlight in

Figure 5

Putin’s
“Millennium
Message” for its
ability to remain
ambiguous in
intention.
Phrases like
2019’s “we can

and must do everything for Russia” find themselves across many of Putin’s speeches.

In his “Millennium Message”, Putin remarked on the Russian predisposition to follow this line of thinking, and he refused to pass judgement on it, despite his previous assertion of the state’s responsibility to the Russian people. His non-remark on the phenomena has become less ambiguous since that first speech given it has the highest maximum frequency as well the most frequency. The attention to this variable in Putin’s speeches implies a strong relationship between this concept and the narrative of Putin’s Russia. As a result, the responsibility of the individual to the state is evident to be a core element of Putin’s anti-ideology.

5.6 Reference to Russia’s Past or Future in the Context of Russia’s History or Destiny

Many philosophers and politicians have believed that Russia draws strength from its history and destiny of power. This theme in turn shows up within Putin’s addresses most often born out of the successes of the Soviet Union and the “1000-year history” in

Figure 6

association with the Russian adoption of Orthodox Christianity. One particular image that is repeated is the military

victory of World War II and its ability uphold the idea of destined strength and power. Mentioned in all but two years, this variable is the most consistent of the project as

evident in Figure 6. This emphasis on time is a key point in the path to understanding the anti-ideology that Putin has created and the context of his rhetoric. It also supports Putin's process for choosing what historical elements to incorporate into the Russian narrative. As he chooses pieces of Russian past to include, he does so with the intention of including what is "useful history" to him and his plans. He then uses these moments of the past to assert Russia's destiny, which suggests the inevitability of Putin's plans for Russia, as long as Russians follow the plans that he lays out for the people.

5.7 State Responsibility to Support Russian Citizens on the Individual Level

The last of the variables taken from the content of Putin's "Millennium Message" is state responsibility to support Russian citizens on the individual level. This idea made a significant preview in his initial message and was considered a top priority for his

Figure 7

leadership. However, mention of this topic only occurs in five years' speeches noted in Figure 7. The emphasis placed by Putin on

this idea as the foundation for democracy's stability in Russia suggests that there should be more occurrences of these references in his subsequent speeches. Instead, of the variables with data, this comes in last in terms of frequency with one of the lowest peaks in number of references at a two in frequency. Compared to Figure 5 and the individuals'

responsibility to the state, the explicit and implicit references to the importance of the state, and what is owed to the state, consistently outnumber explicit and implicit references to the people and what the state owes them. These results show that there was a change within Putin’s expectations for the new Russia after his initial address and “Millennium Message” as the state responsibility to support Russian citizens on the individual level almost disappears from the results, particularly after third term begins. The trend of variables either increasing or disappearing after the third election is evident in many of these variables and shows a dynamic shift in the narrative of pre- and post-return of Putin to president after his time as Prime Minister. This leads us to a variable where the results have once again picked up after Putin’s third election and is related to the importance of the state within the new dynamic Putin pushes between the people and the government—the closing blessing on the state.

5.8 Closing Remarks: Blessing on the State

The next variable is the blessing of the state in closing remarks. Since this is a yes or no variable, coding of 0 in frequency is no and 1 is yes. Exactly half of the New Year Addresses end with a blessing on the nation, seen in Figure 8. Of those nine, seven

Figure 8

have been in his addresses since his third term as president. Which follows the general trend of many of these

variables where frequency has risen since his reelection in 2012. In many of these cases, the blessing on the state is the last words out of Putin’s mouth. By ending with the state, rather than the people, Putin is effectively placing the state above the people. The words spoken at the end of speeches are often the words most remembered, so by doing so, just as in Figure 5, Putin is reaffirming the individuals’ role to the state as its source of strength, power, and protection.

5.9 Reference to Russia Using Endearing Terms

Following a similar path to the previous results in Figure 8, Figure 9 for the

Figure 9

third election. On most of these occasions, the endearing terms translate to the Motherland or Mother Russia. These terms personifying the Russian state as a “mother” were popularized under the Soviet Union, though it had existed prior, and places a parental role on the state. This term not only implies a protectorate role of the state, but a submissive role of the citizen as they would have as the child in a parent-child relationship. The consistent use of endearing terms after 2012 go hand in hand with the consistency and increase of ideas founded in Soviet phenomena, including the strive for

collectivist behavior on behalf of the state and the individuals' responsibility to the state, used in Putin's New Year Addresses. This variable is even more important within the greater context of mapping the trends of Putin's speeches after his third term in office.

5.10 Mention of Internal Violence or Protests

The last variable is the mention of internal violence or protests. As previously stated, this variable yielded no results. Despite the multiple instances of political protests or dissident activity in Russia within Putin's timeframe as president, often in response to Putin's leadership, there were no mentions of these events. If we interpret Putin's speeches as teachable moments, then we can conclude that Putin sees no valuable lesson to be occasioned by these events. They are not part of his "useful history" as Hill and Gaddy would say. As a New Year Address, Putin often mentions events of the outgoing year in moments of reflection. However, the specifics of the years are only mentioned if as they are found useful for Putin's Russian idea. This includes the triumphs of the 2014 Sochi Olympics or the rallying horrors of the early 2000s global terrorist attacks and the more recent Covid-19 pandemic—events that promote common unity of the people. Any event that does not or cannot be used to uphold and assert the unity of the Russian people has been left out of his addresses and follows the zero result for this variable.

6. Discussion

6.1 General Findings

As the central source of governing power in the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin is able to exert control over the public's perception of the state. One of these methods is the inclusion and exclusion of topics within his own speeches. His annual New Year Address is no exception to this manipulation of perception. Given New Year's Eve's significance to the Russian people and its significance as a day of reflection, it is a perfect vessel to generate Putin's crafted narrative. Putin's narrative for the Russian people is that Russia is a strong state founded in the unity of the Russian people, the Russian people's individual actions for the betterment of the state, and strength of Russia's history and destiny.

Putin's anti-ideology is founded in the establishment and maintenance of a strong central state. Putin asserts a strong state through the ideals of a common unity among the Russian people and the dependence of individual actions to be for the betterment of the state. In establishing these values for Russia, Putin has utilized ideas from Imperial Russian Official Nationality, the Slavophile movement, Petr A. Stolypin, and the Communist Party. One of the pillars of the strong state and unity that Putin often refers to during his speeches is the "thousand-year history" of Russia. This is in reference to the introduction of Orthodox faith to the Russian people. The Slavophile movement and Official Nationality promoted the idea that Orthodox faith was not only Russia's uniter, but the means for Russian power and success in the world. The common traditions and values that Putin asserts for the Russian people align with the traditional values of the Russian Orthodox Church.

However, when it comes to a central state power/government, Putin diverges from the Slavophile movement. The Slavophiles, as a whole, did not support a strong government in Russia, and those in the movement who did recommend a centralized state supported one that was only there to serve the needs of the people. Putin, on the other hand, has inverted this practice. In his “Millennium Message,” Putin mentioned the history of the Russian people acting on the individual level in manners that would support the betterment and strength of the central government. Putin tied this quality to the Soviet Union under the Communist Party. This form of government strength is also reflective of Stolypin at the turn of the 20th century and his practice of restricting and eliminating public dissent. Since the “Millennium Message”, in most of his New Year Addresses, especially those delivered since his third term as president, Putin has reinforced the need and desire for the Russian people to give strength to the government through their individual choices and actions. As one of the most utilized topics in his speeches, Putin has clearly noted this idea as an importance to his anti-ideology.

Furthermore, Putin maintains the anti-ideology through careful inclusion of useful history and current events. As the public face and main source of political power in the Russian government, what Putin includes in these New Year Addresses shapes the narrative of Russian politics. Putin does not include domestic actions, such as protests and riots, that show division among the Russian people in these speeches. The only strife and violence that find their way into his rhetoric are when those issues are international concerns. This includes terrorism and the more recent Covid-19 pandemic. By selecting only events from the previous year that demonstrate a strong and unified state, Putin is

silencing opposition and reinforcing his Russian idea. I am supporting these claims through their frequency of mention in Putin's speeches.

6.2 Rhetoric of the Strong State

Advocating and assuring the citizens of your country that your state is strong is not out of the ordinary for any political leader; Putin just does so through his manipulation of the appearance of Russia to his people. Despite the many challenges that Russians have faced in the last 21 years, Putin's New Year Addresses have portrayed a stoic state. In eleven out of the eighteen addresses Putin has either explicitly or implicitly assured the Russian people that the Russian state is strong or heading towards strength. In Figure 1, we can see the frequency of this topic mentioned in his speeches. In particular, the years 2007 and 2013 provide the highest number of references to strength. Both of these years held major events in Russia's political system. 2007 was the last year of Putin's second term and the upcoming election in 2008 introduced a new Russian leader, Dmitrii Medvedev. While we know now that Putin kept his political power as Prime Minister under Medvedev, the Russian people did not know this would happen. Putin needed Russia to appear strong and a symbol of his stabilization of the country. Then when Putin returned to the seat of the president in 2012, he emphasized the strength of the nation for the next two NYE Addresses in 2012 and 2013. As it was important when he left office, he needed Russia to appear strong under his care once more.

One of the topics in question within Putin's addresses was protests which is an indicator of conflict and strife within civil society. Despite the numerous political protests throughout Putin's presidency, these events are not mentioned once in his NYE Addresses. It is as if these events did not happen, and were not impactful to Russian life

and government. In 2007, 2012, and 2013, all years with high references to a strong state, there were large-scale protests. In 2007, protests against the upcoming election sparked civil activity in major cities, including Moscow. The Snow Revolution from 2011-2013, protesting the results of the 2012 election in which Putin won and returned as president, gained international attention and still was not mentioned in either of his speeches from those years. This glaring gap in the data suggests that the primary purpose of these speeches is not to reflect on the year as it passes, but to mold each year into the desired narrative of Putin to push his anti-ideology onto the Russian people.

In order to maintain his image and narrative of a strong Russian state, Putin ignored events, such as protests or gaining popularity of opposition leaders, of those years that would suggest otherwise, effectively ignoring a Russia with political division. Maintaining a united Russia was an important factor into his plans for the Russian people in his “Millennium Message.” This idea is a visible trend for the variable call to unity. The 2012 and 2013 results show a peak in the frequency of this topic. Another peak occurs again in 2018, year of Putin’s most recent election. Similarly to the results of the strong state, these years were ones of inherent division within the nation over the results of Putin’s reelections. Another variable that supports this strive for unity is the promotion of common values and traditions. While people living within one nation are bound to share common ideals, this emphasis on common values and traditions with the repeated calls for unity indicate that individualism should not exist within Russian society, and that self-sacrifice for the betterment of society and the state as a whole is the expected and rightful action of the individual.

6.3 Rhetoric on the Relationship Between the Citizens and State

The most impactful results from these New Year addresses is the relationship between the state and its citizens. In Figures 5 and 7, there is a large disparity between the frequency of asserting the citizens responsibility to act in the interests of the states and the opposite of the state acting in the best interests of each and every one of its citizens. Starting in his 2002 speech, year after year, Putin called repeatedly called on his people to monitor their actions for the sake of the state. While he never denounced this practice in his “Millennium Message,” he had stated that the practice was an almost inherent trait among the Russian people at this point. He used the longevity of this phenomena to further his own anti-ideology. The repetition and emphasis placed on this dynamic between the people and the state reject the ideals that were used in his initial communication with the country as president. When upholding and renewing the Russian desire for democracy, Putin had made a commitment for the state to serve its citizens. Despite these early words, this topic had a frequency of equivalent to 15% of the number of times individuals were told to act in a manner supporting the state. Clearly, the latter idea held more significance within the New Year Addresses and the direction of Russian life.

6.4 Shifts in Rhetoric

There has clearly been a shift in Putin’s direction for the Russian people given ideas and foundations described in his first interactions as president versus the content of the New Year Addresses he has given since 1999. Factors like economic action that were emphasized then are of low priority within the subsequent speeches. Other issues that should be considered given the attention of international media, like protests, which are a

reflection of national and civil unity were left out. In their places, Putin fills his speeches with initiatives of common action to support the state, which has effectively been under his control and oversight since 1999. Despite his rejection of a state ideology, the manner in which he has presented the public with information and requests has created a new standard of expectations from Russian citizens as an anti-ideology.

7. Philosophical and Historical Context

7.1 Significance of these Contexts

One of the reasons that it is so important for this project to establish the philosophical and historical context of Putin's New Year's Eve speeches is that the information that he uses to create his anti-ideology is not new. In fact, the ideas that Putin upholds within his “Millennium Message” and New Year Address that he uses to shape his narrative for the Russian people have been gathered from the thoughts of previous intellectuals and politicians. The politicians and intellectuals that Putin draws from in these texts and speeches are the Slavophiles, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and Petr Stolypin and his actions within Russia’s First Duma. His ideas on the relationship between the state and its citizens, the historical strength of the nation, and his ability to silence actions and ideas within his words originated elsewhere. Putin just has the ability to use that history and background to his advantage when formulating his Russian narrative.

7.2 Historical Destiny

Since this section is focused on the historical context of Putin’s rhetoric, it seems appropriate to start with the context of Russia’s historical destiny. The reason that history is so significant to Putin’s New Year Addresses is his commitment to providing historical context in a purposeful and useful manner as he leads Russia. The idea that Russia has a pre-destined strength and future for greatness most notably comes from the relationship between Russia and Orthodox Christianity. In multiple of Putin’s addresses, he referred specifically to this relationship through the discussion of Russia’s “thousand-year history,” which refers to the adoption of Orthodox Christianity in Russia beginning

in the late 10th century. The introduction of Orthodoxy to the Russian people was used as a means of uniting the Russian people, who were divided under the supervision of local princes and noblemen. This introduction of Orthodoxy turns into a vital aspect of the czar's and royal family's divine right to rule. This connection between Church and state does not break and becomes part of the Official Nationality of the Russian people. So, as Putin relays the Russian Orthodox church as a source of values and traditions, not only is he alluding the unifying aspects of the religion, but also his personal divine right to lead the Russian people.

This history of Orthodoxy also serves as a foundation of Putin's narrative throughout his speeches belonging or often attributed to the Slavophile Movement. The Slavophile Movement asserted that Russia's destiny lies with Orthodox Christianity. During a time when Russian thinkers were debating what it means to be Russian, and what Russia's relationship to western Europe should be. The Slavophiles wanted Russia to know not to turn to the West for answers, but to turn towards itself to find its strength and power. This destiny of Orthodoxy has been a source of continuity and was so strong that it survived the atheist state ideology of the Soviet Union. So, when Putin revives the ideas of the Slavophiles, he is telling the Russian people that Russia needs to look within itself to find its strength, that Russia was and always will be a great nation, that Russians need to hold onto common traditional values, and that this will all secure Russia's future.

This was not the only idea that Putin borrows from the Slavophiles. In his "Millennium Message," Putin states that the role of the state is to protect its citizens and serve the Russian people. While not all Slavophiles were convinced of a necessity of a central government, there were a few, like Khomiakov and Samarin, that accepted the

centralized state and acknowledged its importance to the Russian people as a means of serving the Russian citizens, bringing the Russian people together, and maintaining peace. This authority is bestowed upon the government by the Russian people who ultimately hold the power and moral authority. So, by utilizing these ideas from the Slavophiles, it is to be understood by the Russian people that the state is at the behest of the people, and that civil society's duty is to hand over this limited power to a government that is fit to provide these services to society. Despite this viewpoint's position within Putin's first New Year Address, the results of frequency has shown that this idea has fallen out of favor with Russia's leader. Instead, what we find now is a role for the state that has been adapted and manipulated to better serve the interests of Putin and his anti-ideology for Russia. So, despite the labeling of Putin as a Slavophile in national and international media, these New Year Addresses show a shift in the expectations of Putin and how he draws on historical and philosophical thought before him.

Where the shift in state responsibility to the people ends, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union begins. The most significant of his inspirations is the ideological structure of the Soviet Union. Under the Soviet Union, there was a great push for the country to grow in strength and be perceived as a world power. While this is not a viewpoint that is special to the Soviet Union, the means of strength to which Putin often alludes to within his New Year Addresses are from this time. For example, the military successes of the Soviet Union during World War II is a repeated topic of historical strength. This success was also in his foundational "Millennium Message" as a means of pointing out that the Soviet Union was not a period of Russian history that was all bad.

These justifications are important to establish when using many of the tools from that time. Though Putin has commented on the unnecessary loss of life under the leadership of the Communist Party, particularly under Stalin, Putin has been careful not to condemn all of the time Russia spent under Communist control. This factors into Putin's reliance on creating a state ideology for the Russian people even though he does not label it as ideology himself.

7.3 The Role of the State

Putin also uses the historical context of the Soviet Union as a means of supporting and promoting individual actions for the benefit of the state. In fact, his "Millennium Message" points out the Soviet Union as a proponent of the phenomenon of state priority over the Russian people. So, by the persistent emphasis of this phenomenon in his New Year Addresses, Putin is relying on the established context of the Soviet Union to further his narrative of what Russian life is and should be. This Soviet context is also present in the repeated calls for a collective form of unity. The frequency of calls for unity and the manner in which unity is used to pressure actions for the collective signal the remnants of the communist past. By reigniting the ideals of the Soviet Union, Putin is able to lead and push Russians into the direction of his choosing without completely tearing down the system of democracy in place.

Similar to the inspiration from the Communist Party, Putin has adopted the ideas of Petr Stolypin as well. Stolypin stood firm to a Russia that holds onto its traditions and history. Putin repeatedly calls on the Russian people to uphold their common traditions and values as a means of preserving the Russian way of life. This is not the extent to which Putin draws from Stolypin. Though Putin refrains from the specific language of

Stolypin in these New Year Addresses, his usage of Stolypin rhetoric in other genres of speeches colors his connection to the politician. As a man of favor from the tsar and as a member of Russia's first Duma in a time of change for Russian political life, Stolypin preserved the deference to the leader. Despite how he may have felt about policies or actions, for Stolypin, the tsar got the final say. That context is present within Putin's leadership, even from just his New Year Addresses. What Putin recalls of the year and what message he gives to the Russian people is ultimately his own decision. The Duma is not there to decide on what Putin can or cannot say—the ultimate authority lies with Putin himself. Despite this centralized government position, Stolypin insured and pursued a united relationship between the Russian people and their leader, which we see actively in Putin's rhetoric today.

7.4 Control of Information

This deciding factor on rhetoric and the spread of information is another design from the past. Both Stolypin and the Communist Party were masters at carefully organizing information and who is allowed to share it. Putin's New Year Addresses as a moment of reflection of the prior year do not always accurately depict the reality of Russia, as we would expect from any political speech. News and actions that reflect poorly on the leadership or insinuate a divided Russia with an un-civil society are effectively removed and executed from this form of Russian media. Though there are accusations and indications that Putin and the government has stopped Russian dissidence through unlawful imprisonment and assassinations, these are not the moments that occur in his New Year speeches. Instead it is a form of verbal suppression. In a manner similar to the way the Communist Party had strict control over media, publishing,

and pronouncing material fit for consumption and similar to the way Stolypin controlled access to information and stopped political opposition, Putin stifles the news and information. By not acknowledging the actions of those who are against his narrative and his ideas for Russian people withing his addresses, he is silencing them. By stripping them of their voice and relevance within this intimate day and moment for the Russian people, their words and actions are discredited. In effect, Putin becomes the only voice. This is how he promotes his anti-ideology. Through a collective voice, Putin asserts that the idea of conflict is unnecessary. The Russian people and the state are organically united and conflict is issue that can be resolved through his plans for the people.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Impact of this Context

The results of this thesis show us a glimpse into the historical and philosophical context that Lawrence said was missing from the discussions of Putin that help us to better understand his leadership and what his anti-ideology is. The results also reaffirm some of the characterizations of Putin and put into perspective the ways in which he emulates the leaders of Russia's past. Though we may think "why does this matter, doesn't every leader use the ideas of those before him?" This project is able to show how those ideas are broken down and used in this genre of speech—New Year's speeches. A genre that is dear to the Russian people and Putin himself, but also one that capitalizes on reflection and promises made for the new year. In these final moments of the year, we can see what Putin deems important for Russians to take into the next. By tracking the frequencies of topics, we can track importance and direction of what Putin intends for the Russian people and what he is trying to accomplish. Based on the trends from this study, we can see Putin's increasing emphasis on a unified people in Russia and their responsibility to serve the state. These two variables could possibly share what reactions we would expect from Russia towards international or national events. If the Russian people follow the united subservient society that these speeches propose, then can expect to see unwavering support for Putin and the Russian state's actions, even when they defy the personal feelings of each individual, and we should not expect any major upheavals in leadership.

8.2 Opportunity for Growth

The trends in the data collected in this thesis could lead to greater opportunities to understanding the narrative of Putin. First, we could apply these same principles to other genres of speeches and look at their own influences. These collections could then be compared to see if certain genres—like addresses to the people or to the Duma—differ in approach and context. However, I think the biggest opportunity for growth in this project is to map the shifts between Putin’s first two and last two terms as president. The results of this project already show changes in what Putin relays in his speeches. This could be crucial to understanding who Putin is as a leader based on the path he has taken.

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