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public:*

A consequence of political alienation?

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Sympathies for Putin within the German public:

A consequence of political alienation?

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Abstract: The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has sparked significant interest in the attitudes of the German public towards the Putin regime. In this article, we analyze survey data from a German panel to investigate the factors influencing sympathies towards Vladimir Putin following his decision to launch a war of aggression. Our central argument revolves around the role of political alienation, encompassing a lack of trust of political institutions in Germany, alongside more diffuse elements such as low support for democracy as a regime, a sense of estrangement from public discourse, and an inclination towards conspiracy thinking. Using longitudinal analyses, we provide empirical evidence consistent with our argument that political alienation—particularly in terms of low political trust and a proclivity for conspiracy thinking—plays a crucial role in driving sympathies for Putin and his regime. Against the backdrop of mounting attempts by Russia and other autocratic powers to influence discourses in Western societies via certain societal segments, our findings shed light on why individuals living in democratic nations may develop sympathetic attitudes towards autocratic leaders from abroad.

Keywords: Public opinion; foreign policy attitudes; Vladimir Putin; political alienation; Russo-Ukraine war.

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1. Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russian military forces launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on orders issued by Vladimir Putin. Putin's decision has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since the Second World War and has led to extensive damages to civilian infrastructure and the environment, thereby contributing to a worldwide food crisis. The Russian invasion of February 2022 was quickly and harshly condemned by overwhelming majorities of Germany's political elite and public alike (see Mader and Schoen 2023: 531). Nevertheless, ever since the attack a significant minority expressed implicit understanding or even outright sympathies for Putin and his decision to launch the war. Such positions, often coinciding with Russian narratives, are frequently voiced in pro-Russian demonstrations across the country (N-tv 2022; Schmitz 2023), fringe conspiracy groups (Lamberty et al. 2022b; Rathje et al. 2022), by politicians of the radical right *AfD* (Schmidt 2022) or parts of the country's radical left (Pfaff 2022). Albeit being a clear (but sometimes loud) minority, the heterogenous group of Putin- and Russia-sympathizers has attracted considerable amount of public interest. Despite this, we still have little empirical evidence on who exactly holds these positions and why.

In this article, we aim to fill this gap and add to our understanding of who in Germany (still) sympathizes with Vladimir Putin and his regime. To do so, we systematize existent, but scattered evidence from research on (1) which parties, and which parties' voters, hold pro-Russian stances and (2) which individuals are susceptible to consuming and believing narratives from Russian information operations. By connecting these initial findings with psychological insights from balance theory (Cartwright and Harary 1956, Heider 1958), which holds that humans strive for consistency in social relations, we derive our general argument: We expect that one of the main drivers behind individuals still holding sympathetic attitudes towards Vladimir Putin, one of the most prominent "enemies" of the German political system, is a

profound sense of political alienation from said system. This alienation, we propose, manifests itself in feelings that go beyond low political support in the narrow sense of political trust, and extend to an estrangement from democracy as a political order, a sense of detachment from public discourses and an inclination towards conspiracy thinking. We put this expectation to the test using panel survey data from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), drawing on data from before and after the invasion of February 2022.

Longitudinal regression analyses provide empirical evidence consistent with our argument. We first show that the more alienated individuals felt before the invasion, the more positively they view Vladimir Putin (and his regime) post-invasion, with all four facets of political alienation being substantially associated with holding more friendly attitudes towards Putin. To move further towards establishing a causal effect of political alienation, we then regress change in ratings of Putin in the wake of the invasion on pre-invasion political alienation. Here, we obtain significant effects for three of the four facets of political alienation, with lack of political trust and conspiracy mentality—a potent manifestation of deep-seated *distrust* in societal and political elites—being especially consequential.

This article makes several contributions to existing research as well as public discussions on foreign policy attitudes and waning political support in Western democracies. To begin with, we provide an explanation for the publicly debated puzzle of why some German citizens still sympathize with Putin despite the suffering his decisions have caused. In doing so, we advance the understanding of the broader, but so far rarely studied question of why people living in democratic societies may hold sympathetic attitudes towards foreign autocratic leaders and regimes. In times of increasing systemic rivalries between autocracies and democracies worldwide, this question is especially urgent to address. Our answer focusses on the role of political alienation, because we believe that this is an important and novel perspective. But we do not deny the relevance of other perspectives. For example, we incorporate individuals' core

postures on foreign policy into our models, as previous research shows that these shape individuals' views on specific foreign policy issues (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Mader 2015). At the same time, this study adds to our understanding of the nature and consequences of political alienation. More specifically, we provide a comprehensive conceptualization of political alienation, encompassing facets that go beyond mere political support, and empirically test its consequences for foreign policy attitudes. Methodologically, we rely on panel data to advance identification of causal relations in a literature dominated by cross-sectional work.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We begin by discussing previous research and its implications for attitudes towards the Putin regime. After that, we turn to our conceptualization of political alienation, propose a general mechanism linking political alienation to sympathetic attitudes towards Putin, and—applying this mechanism to four different facets of political alienation—derive our four hypotheses. We then discuss data and methods, before moving to the results. The final section concludes.

2. Previous evidence on attitudes towards the Putin regime

To the best of our knowledge, sympathies towards Putin and his regime have seldom been examined in a focused and systematic way, neither for Germany nor other Western democracies. Thus, the main question of this article, who holds such sympathies and why, remains largely unanswered by the scientific community—despite growing public interest. Nevertheless, we can draw on two related strands of research to formulate expectations about the attitudinal drivers of sympathetic views towards Putin: Research on which parties, and which parties' voters, take pro-Russian positions and research on individuals' susceptibility to Russian information operations.

Regarding the first strand of research, the general theme from existing studies is that pro-Russian and pro-Putin positions are especially prevalent among parties on the left and right

fringes of the political spectrum.¹ Albeit being otherwise ideologically heterogeneous, these parties and their electorates mainly seem to share system critical, “anti-establishment”, and often radical positions (Fisher 2021; Golosov 2020; Onderco 2019). They are therefore sometimes fittingly coined the “fellow travellers” of the Kremlin’s anti-Western, and anti-democratic stances (Snegovaya 2022). In the case of Germany, pro-Russian sentiments have accordingly been most prominent among the elites and electorates of the populist radical right *AfD* and radical left *Die Linke* (Mader and Schoen 2023: 540-541; Olsen 2018: 77; Wood 2021: 778-779/781/784). After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, mainly representatives of the *AfD* and, albeit to a lesser extent, *Die Linke* continued to publicly voice understanding or even implicit support for the Russian regime (Arzheimer 2023; Pfaff 2022; Schmidt 2022). With regard to attitudes towards Putin in particular, the voters of populist radical right parties, like the *AfD*, have been shown to hold relatively positive attitudes (Huang 2020; Letterman 2018; Silver and Morcus 2021; Wike et al. 2022).

A second line of research focuses on the reach and impact of messages that disseminate pro-Russian and related anti-Western narratives among citizens in Western democracies. The Kremlin actively spreads such narratives to polarize and destabilize political discourses, and to exert influence on specifically targeted segments of society (Pomerantsev 2016; Snegovaya and Watanabe 2021). The results from these studies point in a similar direction: These narratives are mainly consumed and believed among individuals sharing an alienation from the current political system. This alienation manifests itself in low political trust and satisfaction with democracy, fringe political ideologies or a broader conspiracy mentality (e.g., Helmus et al.

¹ Much of this existing research focuses on stances towards the country of Russia rather than its political system or leadership specifically. However, previous research shows that the attitudes towards a country’s leader significantly shape more generalized attitudes towards that country (Balmas 2018; Ingenhoff and Klein 2018). This is also likely to be true in the case of Germans’ views on Russia: Vladimir Putin is unmistakably identified as the central political actor in the Russian regime and regularly portrayed as such in German discourse. Attitudes towards Putin, Russia, and its broader political regime are therefore likely to be closely related—an assumption we will verify below.

2020; Hjorth and Adler-Nissen 2019; Radnitz 2022; Snegovaya and Watanabe 2021). In survey experiments fielded in Germany, for example, Mader and colleagues show that citizens “who are estranged from today’s liberal democracies” (Mader et al. 2022: 1734) are more likely to be influenced by pro-Russian or anti-Western narratives originating from Russian sources. Likewise, observational studies indicate that disinformation in connection with federal elections (Smirnova et al. 2021) or the Covid-19 pandemic (Smirnova and Winter 2021) as well as “pro-Russian” narratives about the Ukraine war (Lamberty et al. 2022a; 2022b; Rathje et al. 2022) are most widespread among Germans who are politically alienated in these ways.

Taken together, the existing evidence, albeit being rather scattered and all but exhaustive, allows formulating a general expectation about who takes Putin-friendly positions in Germany (and in other Western democracies as well): We expect these attitudes to be especially prevalent among individuals who, for different reasons, are generally alienated from their democratic systems. This *political alienation* manifests itself in a feeling of deep-seated disenchantment from the political system and mainstream elites and discourses.

3. The role of political alienation

But how is this political alienation linked to Putin-friendly attitudes? We build our theoretical argument on psychological insights from balance theory (Cartwright and Harary 1956, Heider 1958). Balance theory holds that humans strive for consistency in social relations and, in this sense, can be seen as one application of the broader theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). The idea of balance can be applied to triads involving two persons and an impersonal entity or involving relationships between three actors (or more). A triad of three persons A, B and C is in balance when all three hold positive relations with one another—reflecting the familiar idea that “a friend of a friend is a friend”. From the perspective of person A, balance—or cognitive consonance—will also be achieved when she dislikes B, B has a conflictual relation

with C, and A likes C (see Figure 1). This captures the common intuition that an “enemy of an enemy is a friend”. Experimental psychological research has shown that we humans indeed react in this way and will come to “like someone who dislikes someone we dislike” (Aronson and Cope 1968: 12). Relatedly, research on the political domain indicates that individuals who view their political system as illegitimate view (domestic) violators of said system’s norms more positively (Hahl et al. 2018). Balance theory has also been previously employed to understand networks of relations between domestic and foreign political actors (for a recent example, see Kinne and Maoz 2023).

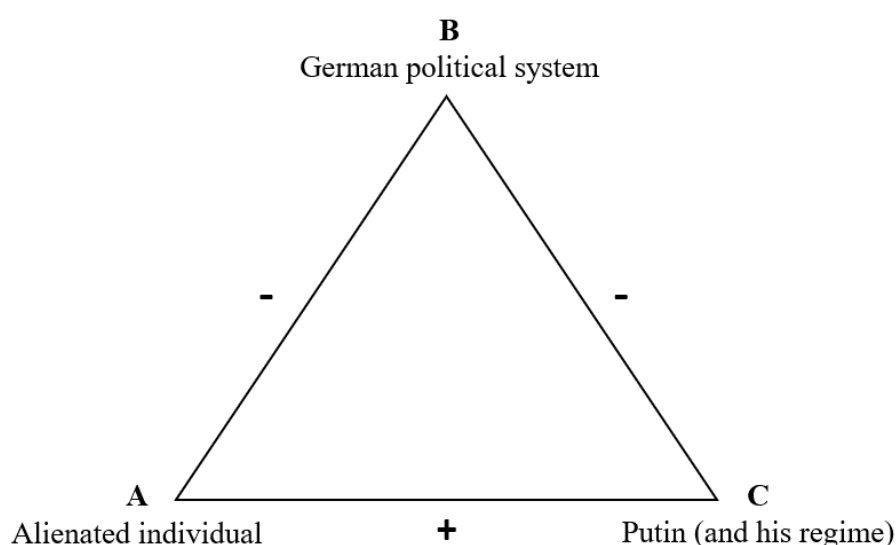


Fig. 1 Application of balance theory to sympathies towards Putin

We propose that the balance logic provides a useful theoretical foundation to understand the formation of Germans’ orientations towards Putin as well. Balance theory suggests a straightforward and intuitive mechanism for why Putin might appeal to politically alienated individuals in Germany (and elsewhere), shown graphically in Figure 1. Accordingly, individuals alienated from the German political system may think of Putin (and along with him his regime)—himself an apparent "opponent" of the system they do not support—as an ally in their alienation and subsequently feel more positively towards Putin and his regime. This “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” logic seems particularly well suited to explain why otherwise

ideologically heterogeneous groups on the fringes of the political spectrum hold more positive views towards Putin and his regime. Naturally, the balance logic can also be applied in reverse, following an equally simple “the enemy of my friend is my enemy”-logic: Individuals who feel strongly attached to the current German political system and its elites should be inclined to *dislike* Putin, as he is perceived as a symbol of opposition or even outright threat to the democratic system and liberal society they approve of.

Whereas Putin had been in low-level conflict with the German political system even before the attack on Ukraine in February 2022, our balance argument seems especially likely to hold true *after* the attack. The subsequent war made Putin and his regime an even more visible and more threatening opponent of the German political system. Thus, we expect political alienation to be especially consequential for attitudes towards Putin after the invasion. At the same time, this means that intra-individual changes in attitudes towards Putin in response to the war should be contingent on levels of political alienation. Whereas attitudes towards Putin likely worsened significantly among those with low levels of political alienation in response to him initiating a war of aggression and thus becoming a more visible enemy of the liberal order, such downward adjustment should be less likely the higher an individual’s level of political alienation.

Although the presented evidence on the possible drivers of Putin- and Russia-friendly positions points in this direction and a simple mechanism is able to explain the linkage, to our knowledge, no substantial attempts have been made at conceptualizing the kind of political alienation that could play a role for sympathetic attitudes towards Putin and his regime—nor has the role of political alienation been studied empirically in a systematic and comprehensive manner. We suggest that a fruitful starting point for conceptualizing the political alienation in question is the well-established concept of political support (Easton 1975). Drawing on the conceptual differentiation between more diffuse and more specific forms of support, political alienation may take different forms as well. In addition to “diffuse” support for democracy as a regime

and trust in specific institutions that are core aspects of political support (Norris 2017), our conceptualization integrates additional, in a way even more deep-seated forms of political alienation, i.e., feelings of alienation from public discourse and an inclination towards conspiracy beliefs, that we suspect are also consequential. As our theoretical framework extends beyond classic indicators of the established concept of political support, we refer to political alienation as our broader umbrella concept.

At the core of our conceptualization of alienation lies a lack of political trust. Understood as a core feature of lacking support for more specific elements of the political system, especially its core institutions, this kind of alienation tends to be relatively widespread in democratic societies (Dalton 2004; Norris 1999). We expect a lack of political trust to be highly consequential for sympathies towards Putin: Following the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” logic, apparent opponents of the distrusted system should appear more sympathetic to politically alienated individuals. This is especially likely to be the case in Germany after the outbreak of the war: As discussed, Putin immediately became one of the, if not the most prominent political actor in apparent conflict with the German political system. This fact alone may well be reason enough for some citizens to hold sympathies for the opponent of the system they no longer trust. In contrast, those with high trust in German political institutions are likely to perceive Putin as an enemy of the system they do support. These trusting individuals likely followed and accepted mainstream elites’ messages that—outlining how Putin launched an unjust and unprovoked war of aggression and was responsible for war crimes—cast him into a decidedly negative light.

Moreover, low political trust has been shown to oftentimes correlate with low support for incumbent parties as well as voting for populist challenger parties on both the right-wing and left-wing fringes of the political spectrum (Hooghe 2017: 623-624; Norris and Inglehart 2019: 284-286; Rooduijn 2018). As discussed above, these parties and their electorates often take sympathetic stances towards Russia and Putin, despite their different ideologies. Our argument

is able to make sense of this pattern: It suggests that a lack of support for the existing political order is the common root of such sympathies for the Putin regime. We thus formulate our first hypothesis:

H1: The lower one's political trust, the more positive the attitude towards Putin.

Going beyond a lack of trust in institutions, political alienation can also manifest itself in a lack of support for more diffuse elements of the German political system, i.e., its democratic ideals, ideas, and norms. Diffusely alienated individuals may call into question these foundations of democratic governance and, openly or more subtly, prefer autocratic alternatives. Applying the logic from above to diffusely alienated individuals is again straightforward: Their rejection of democratic governance should make Russia, one of the most prominent and well-known autocratic systems, an “ally” in their alienation and attractive alternative to the democratic system they do not support. Putin, as the face and heart of the Russian regime, should act as a symbol for the rejection of (liberal) democracy. Intuitively, the more open to authoritarian rule individuals are, the more lenient their assessment of the autocratic Putin regime should be. We thus propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The lower one's support for democracy, the more positive the attitude towards Putin.

Alienation from the political system may well extend to a feeling of disconnect from the mainstream public discourses within that system. Such a disconnect could manifest in a feeling of one's views entirely missing representation in mainstream discourses, largely influenced by predominant democratic norms and led by institutions acting in accordance with these norms. Subsequently, alienated individuals may more readily discount or ignore messages from the mainstream public debate. For attitudes towards Putin after the war, this feeling of disconnect from societal discourse should be particularly relevant as well. Following the same “enemy of my enemy” logic, a feeling of disconnect from mainstream discourse could translate into a

feeling of disconnect from the positions articulated in it. So far, public discourse on the war in Germany has been dominated by strong stances against Putin and the war in Ukraine as an act of aggression by his regime (cf. Mader and Schoen 2023). It is therefore plausible that politically alienated individuals—who feel they are no longer part of mainstream discourse—are most likely to be unmoved by respective information and messages and are even inclined to feel sympathy for the portrayed enemies within said discourse. As a third hypothesis, we expect:

H3: The more alienated one feels from public discourse, the more positive the attitude towards Putin.

So far, we have covered three mostly passive facets of political alienation, i.e., manifestations that center on *a lack of* (1.) trust in the system, (2.) support for its democratic norms and (3) identification with its mainstream discourses. However, alienation can also take more active and extreme forms, manifesting in an even more deep-seated and wide-ranging *distrust* towards both political and societal elites in general. Distrust of this kind is different from the already discussed *lack* of political trust in that it entails not only a lack of positive expectations and feelings towards the system, but explicitly negative ones (Bertsou 2019). A potent and often discussed manifestation of this wide-ranging distrust is an inclination towards conspiratorial beliefs, or a “conspiracy mentality”—understood as “the general propensity to subscribe to theories blaming a conspiracy of ill-intending individuals or groups for important societal phenomena” (Bruder et al. 2013: 2). This worldview that suspects events to be caused by secret plans of powerful elites is predictive of beliefs in specific conspiracy theories and thus accounts for the finding that individuals who believe in one specific conspiracy theory are also likely to believe in other unrelated conspiracy theories (Imhoff et al. 2022). We follow the view that a conspiracy mentality of this kind constitutes a generalized political attitude, with the readiness

to blame current high-power groups for negative events and outcomes being a manifestation of a deep-seated *distrust* in these elites (Imhoff and Bruder 2014).

Having a conspiracy mentality seems highly relevant for attitudes towards Putin, especially after the war. Individuals with a strong conspiracy mentality should not only be more likely to attribute blame for the war and its negative consequences to current German and Western elites. They may also take the mere fact these elites in large parts condemn the attack on Ukraine as a reason to believe conspiratorial counter-narratives. Individuals with a conspiracy mentality are especially likely to be more receptive to counter-narratives on the war provided by the Kremlin as part of its information operations, which will, in turn, shape their views on the war and their attitudes towards Putin. Indeed, survey experimental results in Mader et al. (2022) show that anti-Western propaganda messages resonate (only) among Germans who score high in conspiracy theory beliefs, and observational findings reveal that Russian narratives about the war in Ukraine are widespread within the German conspiracy scene (Lamberty et al. 2022b; Rathje et al. 2022). Thus, our fourth and final hypothesis is:

H4: The stronger one's inclination to believe in conspiracies, the more positive the attitude towards Putin.

We focus our analysis on the role of political alienation, as we believe that this perspective is very well suited to explain Putin-sympathies of an otherwise heterogeneous minority in Germany, especially after the outbreak of the war. However, this focus is not to disregard other possible causes of sympathy for Putin and his regime. Another important driver of attitudes towards another country's leader and regime might be people's general foreign policy orientations. Existing research shows that these core postures significantly shape how individuals think about their country's foreign policies, including its relations to other international actors (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Mader 2015). In Europe and Germany, four core postures of this kind are typically distinguished: General attitudes on the extent of one's

country's international involvement (isolationism vs. internationalism), on cooperation with other countries and international actors (unilateralism vs. multilateralism), on the role and legitimacy of military means as a tool in international relations (militarism vs. pacifism), and on transatlantic cooperation with the U.S. (Atlanticism vs. anti-Atlanticism) (Mader 2015; Mader and Schoen 2023: 529). We expect these postures to significantly shape attitudes towards Putin and his regime as well and therefore include them in our empirical models. More precisely, we expect pacifists, multilateralists, internationalists and pro-Atlanticists to view Putin less positively, as he clearly acts as an antipode to associated international norms.

Another possible string of explanations includes ideology-related reasons for sympathies towards Putin. For instance, cultural grievances and their linkage to specific anti-Western narratives the Russian regime refers to could well play a role too (Onderco 2020). In our view, such explanations are at least partially compatible with our argument in that these kinds of specific grievances may trigger feelings of political alienation which then act as more proximate causes of pro-Putin views. Nevertheless, we control for whether individuals hold “authoritarian” or “traditionalist” policy positions and for whether they locate themselves at the extreme right (and extreme left) of the political spectrum as Putin's appeal might also be directly related to holding such positions.

4. Data and methods

Our empirical analysis draws on the panel survey of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). The GLES Panel is an online panel survey, designed to represent those eligible to vote in German national elections, with quotas for age, gender, and education. For our analysis, we

could consider data up to wave 24, carried out in May 2023.² For all analyses, we used a weight adjusting the sample of wave 21 to the German Microcensus of 2019.

Our main outcome of interest are respondents' attitudes towards Vladimir Putin. These attitudes were captured as part of a battery asking respondents: "In general, what do you think of the following countries and politicians?" Respondents could choose from a scale ranging from +5 ("I think much of him") to -5 ("I do not think anything of him"). This item allows us to capture precisely the kind of overall assessment of Putin that we are interested in, rather than evaluations of more specific traits, e.g., his personality or leadership skills. In additional analyses, we will consider ratings of Russia, drawn from the same battery, and a broader composite measure of attitudes towards the Russian regime to triangulate our findings on the determinants of attitudes towards Putin personally.

In our main analysis, we focus on ratings of Putin as measured in wave 24 of May 2023. We turn to wave 24 rather than earlier ones for three reasons. First, we are interested in who still had favorable views of Putin after his decision to launch a war of aggression with devastating consequences. Second, we prefer measuring attitudes towards Putin not in the early phase of the war, where attitudes might have been more transitory in consequence of a temporary shock, but at a later stage, where these are more likely to have been consolidated. Third, we prefer to use the most recent data available at the time of writing to speak to the current public debate.

Our empirical strategy seeks to leverage the longitudinal nature of the data to address concerns over reverse causality. It is possible that individuals' reactions to the events around the Russian invasion affected their level of political alienation: Individuals who sympathize with Putin might have become more alienated from the German political and societal mainstream in response to the broad condemnation of the Russian war of aggression, that is, sympathy for

² Specifically, we merged the preliminary single wave dataset for waves 22 (GLES 2022), 23 (GLES 2023b) and 24 (GLES 2023c) to the cumulative file containing data for waves 1-21 (GLES 2023d). Our analysis focusses on the "A" samples, containing the bulk of the panelists and available for remote access.

Putin might have led to political alienation. To deal with this, we regress post-invasion ratings of Putin on independent variables as measured before the invasion began. Specifically, we took the independent variables, including the control variables, from wave 21 of December 2021 or the latest wave before in which they had been included.

In a first set of models, we regress *levels* of (post-invasion) ratings of Putin on pre-invasion predictors. These models straightforwardly address our main question of who still sympathizes with Putin after Russia's full-scale invasion. To this end, we estimated both OLS and binary logistic regressions. For the OLS regressions, we simply used the numerical Putin rating (-5 to +5) as an outcome variable. For the binary logistic regressions, we used a dichotomous indicator of support for Putin that codes all negative answers (-5 to -1) as 0 and all neutral and positive ones as 1. While the numerical rating has the advantage of using all the variation, including variation in the degree of dislike of Putin, the logit model allows us to focus on what divides those who do not view Putin negatively from those who do.

In a second set of models, we regress *change* in ratings of Putin on pre-invasion predictors. To do so, we computed the difference in individuals' ratings of Putin in May 2023 vs. December 2021 and estimated OLS regression with this outcome variable. With a mean of -1.45 ratings of Putin worsened on average. But with a standard deviation of 2.45 there still is a lot of variation. 6.7% of respondents even gave a higher rating of Putin in May 2023 compared to December 2021 (see Figure A1 in the online appendix). Via these models, we ask whether (pre-invasion) political alienation is predictive of how respondents updated their views of Putin in response to the Russian invasion. Our theoretical argument suggests that the deterioration in ratings of Putin we observe on average was concentrated among individuals with low levels of political alienation. Thus, the more politically alienated an individual pre-invasion, the less negative (or: more positive) should be the value on the difference variable. By studying variation in Putin ratings within individuals over time, we aim to move an additional step closer

towards establishing a causal effect of political alienation on ratings of Putin. At the same time, by looking at only the difference these estimations do not take into account that politically alienated might have viewed Putin already more positively before the Russian invasion of February 2022 and to some degree just continued to do so. For this reason, we present results both from the level and the change model.

Our central independent variables are measured as follows, with further details listed in online appendix A. We measure lack of political trust in German institutions by absence of trust in the Bundestag, the federal constitutional court and public broadcasting (each recorded on a 5-point scale). While deliberately covering different types of institutions, as is common when measuring political trust (Marien 2017), the three trust items load well on a single scale. We used their reversed mean as an encompassing measure of lack of political trust. Lack of diffuse support for democracy is captured via an item that asks for agreement with the statement whether “under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government” recorded on a 5-point scale. To measure alienation from public discourse we draw on agreement with the statement that “People like me are no longer allowed to express their opinions freely in public.” Finally, conspiracy mentality is measured by four items following Imhoff and Bruder (2013) with an exemplary item reading “Most people do not recognize to what extent our lives are determined by conspiracies hatched in secret.” We used the mean agreement with the four (highly correlated) statements.

Distributions and pairwise correlations of these variables are shown in online appendix A. Notably, alienation from public discourse and especially lack of support for democracy are right skewed with few respondents (fully) agreeing with the statements. The four measures all correlate positively with one another, in support of the view that they all capture facets of political alienation. But with correlations hovering between 0.20 and 0.55 these are not

exceedingly high, corroborating that the items do in fact measure separate but related facets of a broader political alienation.

In all specifications, we additionally control for a set of socio-demographic attributes: age group, gender, education, residence in Eastern Germany and whether respondents speak Russian at home. We also interacted the age groups with Eastern Germany to capture possible effects of socialization in the GDR.

Further control variables are entered in a second step to gauge whether effects remain robust when accounting for rivaling explanations of holding sympathies for Putin. Following Mader and Schoen (2023), we constructed mean indices of (anti-)Atlanticism, isolationism, unilateralism (the reverse of multilateralism) and pacifism. Again, we measured these before the invasion (i.e., wave 21) to avoid endogeneity problems. As a measure of holding authoritarian policy positions, we include a factor capturing a preference for a restrictive immigration policy, opposition to measures for gender equality, and opposition to climate protection. Finally, we consider an individual's self-placement on the left-right, distinguishing between extreme left, left, center (reference category), right and extreme right. To ease model interpretation, we re-scaled all independent variables to range from zero to one.

In the models for change in ratings of Putin, we additionally control for individuals' pre-invasion ratings of Putin, as measured in wave 21. This is crucial to capture regression-to-the-mean effects which stem from the bounded nature of the rating scale. The potential for decreases in ratings of Putin was by design much greater when individuals initially rated him favorable. For respondents who had already rated him at -5, no further decrease was possible. This relationship is captured well by including the lagged level of the Putin rating as a linear and squared term in the regression equation (see Figure 2 below).

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive results

We begin our empirical investigation with a descriptive look at ratings of Putin over time. In Figure 2, we show how respondents rated Putin in December 2021 (bottom right panel) and May 2023 (top left panel).

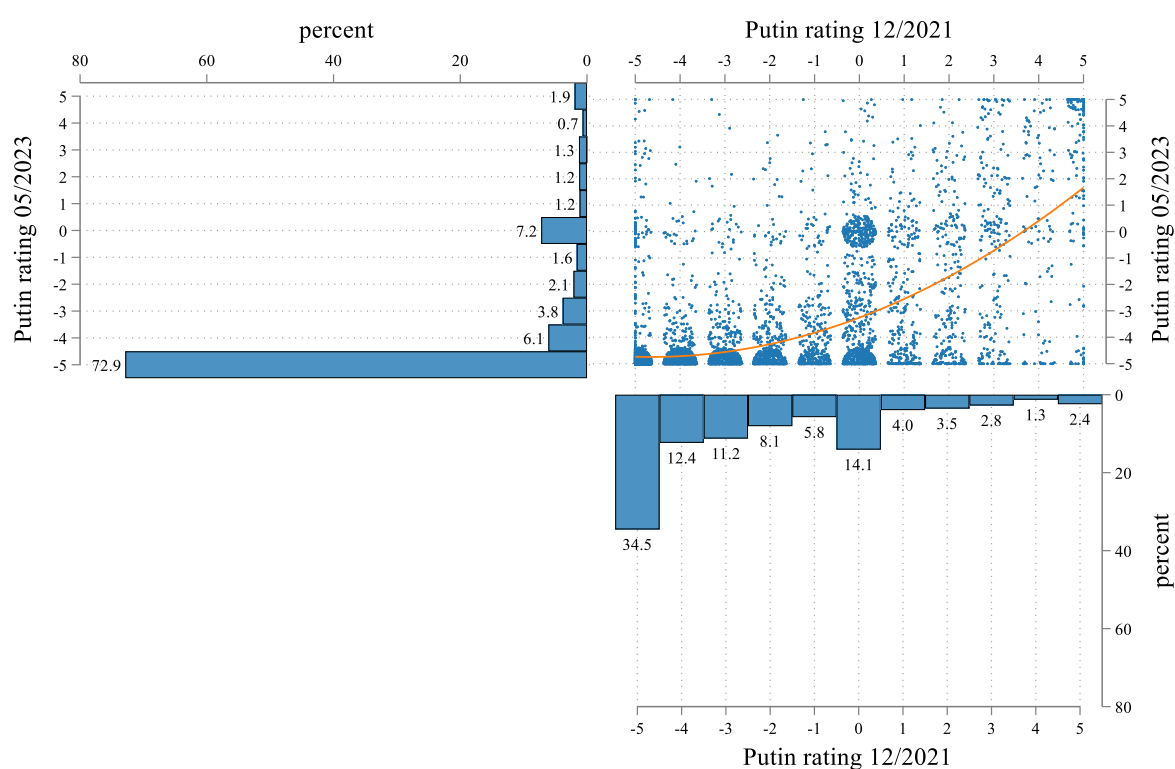


Fig. 2 Ratings of Putin in December 2021 and May 2023. Observations held constant over time (n=7,389). Scatterplot with quadratic fit curve added

While Germans overwhelmingly held negative views of Putin even before the invasion of February 2022, the ratings had markedly deteriorated further in May 2023. Still, 13.5% of German respondents viewed Putin at least neutrally in May 2023, with 6.3% indicating a positive rating.³

³ It is, however, possible that the actual number of respondents with an at least neutral view of Putin in the German electorate is a bit higher. Social desirability could well have influenced response patterns, especially in post-invasion waves.

Figure 3 provides first insights into the role of political alienation. It shows mean ratings of Putin over time in groups with different levels of political alienation, measured via the four indicators. In all waves and for all indicators, there is a sizable gap in mean ratings of Putin between those with lower vs. higher levels of political alienation. Unsurprisingly, attitudes toward Putin became more negative after the Russian invasion of February 24, 2022, in every group. As to the size of the decreases, the much higher pre-invasion levels within the alienated groups imply that the potential for decreases in ratings of Putin was much larger in these groups. Despite this, there is no pattern of convergence. In case of lack of political trust, and more tentatively for conspiracy mentality as well, the gap has become even notably larger over time: The difference in means between those with high and low lack of political trust increased from 1.1 in December 2021 to 1.7 in May 2023. In Figure A3 of the online appendix, we show that a similar tendency applies to ratings of Russia, which have also decreased amidst the Russian invasion, and where the difference in means between those with high and low lack of political trust increased from 0.6 pre-invasion to 1.4 in May 2023.

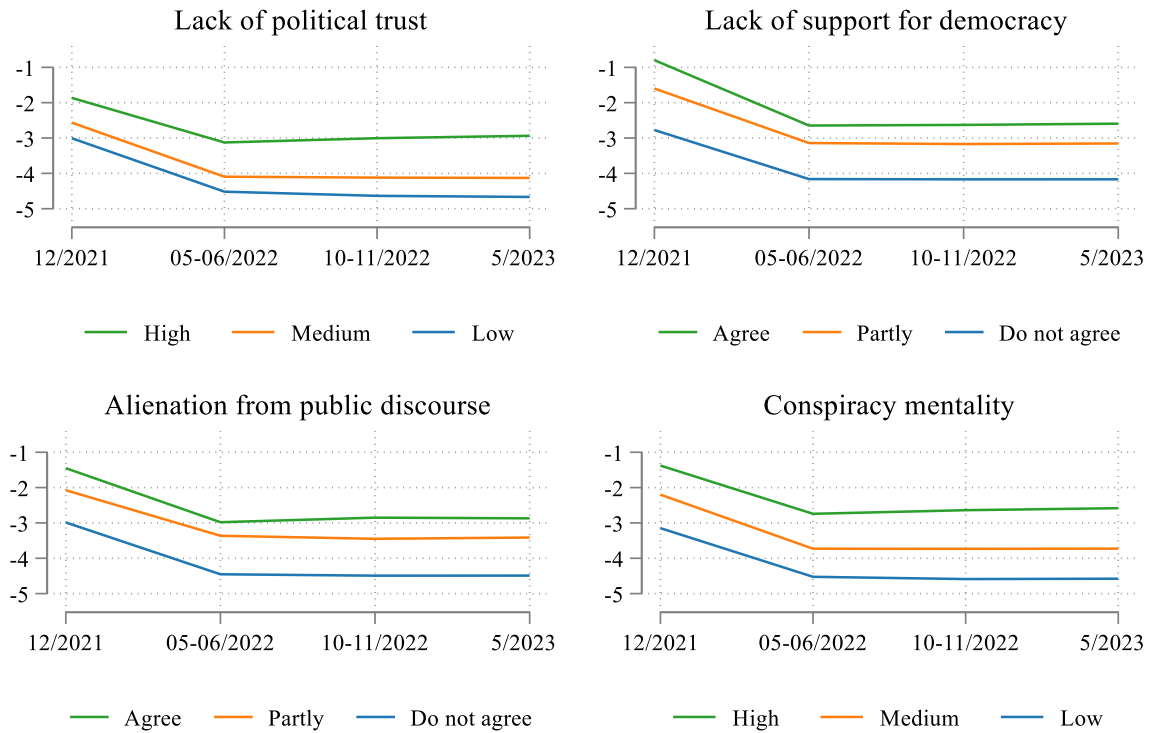


Fig. 3 Mean rating of Putin across waves and facets of political alienation. Observations held constant over time. Political alienation variables are measured pre-invasion and collapsed into three categories as follows: lack of political trust & conspiracy mentality: values ≤ 0.25 coded as low, values ≥ 0.75 coded as high, values in between coded as medium; lack of support for democracy & alienation from public discourse: partly and fully (dis-)agree combined

These descriptive patterns support previous findings of a considerable negative turn in public opinion towards Putin and Russia after the attack, both in Germany (Graf 2022) and across Western societies (Wike et al. 2022). Mader and Schoen (2023: 539-541) found this negative turn to be slightly more pronounced among supporters of mainstream parties than parties on the fringes in Germany. However, several studies in the immediate aftermath of the attack also found indications of a *growing* convergence in views of Russia and Putin between individuals positioned on the left and right of the ideological spectrum as well as supporters of different parties in several Western societies (e.g., Asadzade and Izadi 2022; Bordignon et al. 2022; Poushter and Connaughton 2022; Wike et al. 2022). The patterns identified above show that convergences of this kind have *not* occurred between groups with different levels of political alienation in Germany. This is a first hint that political alienation may play a crucial role for sympathetic stances toward the Putin regime, especially after the Russian invasion of February

2022. Next, we study the relation between alienation and attitudes toward Putin more thoroughly through regression analyses.

5.2 Regression analysis of levels of ratings of Putin

In Figure 4, we present the results of our first set of regressions for levels of (post-invasion) ratings of Putin in May 2023. The left-hand side presents coefficients from OLS regressions using the gradual Putin rating as an outcome variable. The right-hand side shows—using the binary indicator as an outcome—average marginal effects (AMEs) on the probability to view Putin favorably, calculated from binary logistic regressions. In both cases, we start with the specification with only the socio-demographic controls in addition to the alienation variables (in blue) and then add the foreign policy postures, authoritarian policy positions, and left-right self-placement as further control variables (in orange).

All four facets of political alienation are positively associated with more positive views of Putin, both in the OLS models as well as the logit models and across both types of specifications. As hypothesized, the more someone feels politically alienated the higher their rating of Putin, or respectively, the higher the probability that they have a neutral-to-positive view of Putin. While the magnitude of the coefficients tends to decrease when adding the attitudinal control variables in the second specification, they remain both statistically and substantively significant when accounting for foreign policy postures, authoritarian policy positions and left-right self-placement. As compared to specifications with only the socio-demographic predictors (see Figure B1 in the online appendix), taking political alienation into account improves the model fit substantially (from $R^2=0.06$ and Pseudo- $R^2=0.10$ respectively), and adding the additional control variables further improves the model fit only slightly.

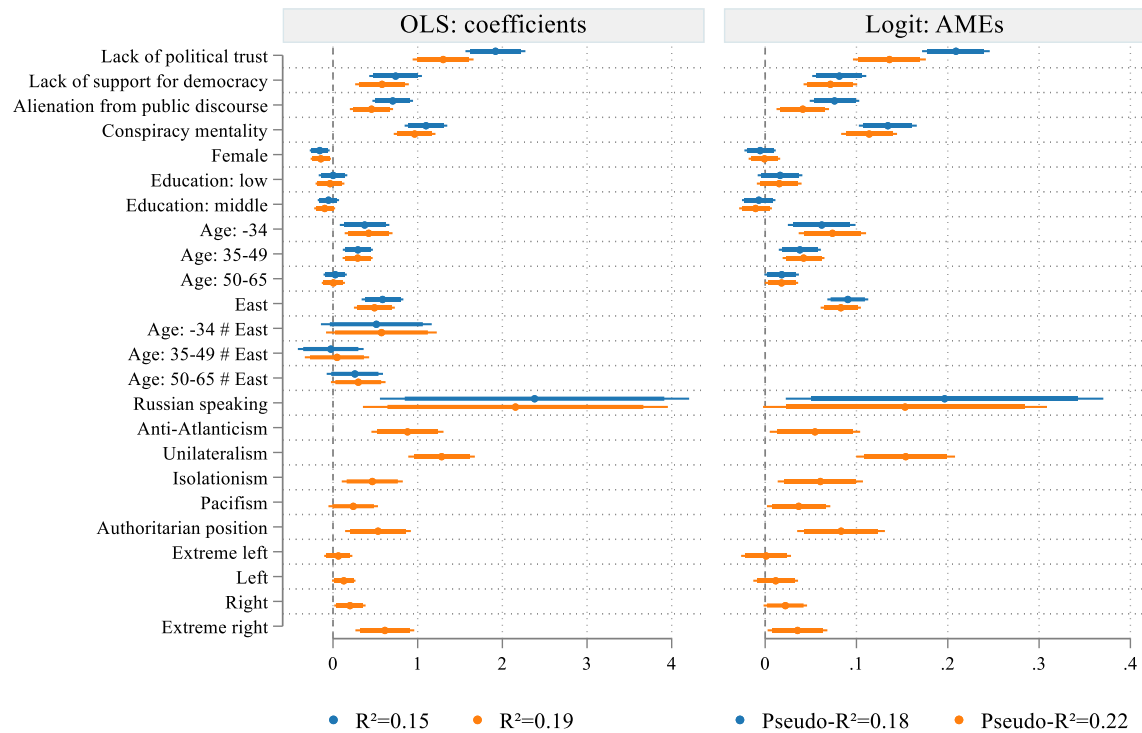


Fig. 4 Predicting ratings of Putin in May 2023. Left-hand side: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. Right-hand side: Average marginal effects with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals from binary logistic regressions (outcome variable: Putin rating of -5 to -1 coded as 0; Putin rating of 0 to +5 coded as 1). Pseudo- R^2 on the right-hand side refers to McKelvey & Zavoina. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1. $N=6,820$

According to the fully specified OLS model, moving from the low to the high end of political alienation increases predicted ratings of Putin by 1.3 for lack of political trust ($H1$), by 0.6 for lack of support for democracy ($H2$), by 0.5 for alienation from public discourse ($H3$) and by 1.0 for conspiracy mentality ($H4$). Similarly, according to the fully specified logit model, the predicted probability of a neutral-to-positive stance towards Putin increases by 14 percentage points for lack of political trust, by 7 percentage points for lack of support for democracy, by 4 percentage points for alienation from public discourse and by 11 percentage points for conspiracy mentality. Importantly, these effects may add up when individuals feel alienated along more than one facet. To illustrate this for the logit model, we considered two extreme scenarios, one in which all alienation variables take the minimum value zero and one in which they all take the maximum value of one and computed predicted probabilities of holding a

Putin-friendly attitude. In the former scenario this probability is vanishingly small (2%), in the latter the chance is slightly higher than equal (52%).⁴ If we set each of the variables to their 10th, 50th and 90th percentile values, we get probabilities of 3%, 7% and 23% respectively—all else equal.

From the socio-demographic control variables, speaking Russian at home stands out, though with a large margin error due to the small number of Russian speakers. While lower education is associated with more Putin-friendly views in the model with only socio-demographics (see Figure B1 in the online appendix), these associations disappear when accounting for political alienation. In addition, Putin is viewed more positively among younger respondents and by Eastern Germans (of all age groups). Of the foreign policy postures, rejecting multilateralism (i.e., unilateralism) and cooperation with the USA (anti-Atlanticism) as well as a preference for Germany to focus on its domestic problems (isolationism) are associated with rating Putin more positively as expected. Pacificism exhibits a weaker effect and, if anything, is associated with more positive ratings of Putin. Paradoxical as it is, we reason that pacifists may be more hesitant to take confrontational attitudes towards an obviously violent dictator and regime out of heightened fears for military escalation. In addition, holding more authoritarian policy positions is associated with rating Putin more favorably as are extreme right-wing self-placements, whereas there is no such tendency for the extreme left.

In online appendix C, we show that one obtains similar results when considering attitudes towards the Putin regime more broadly. To that end, we draw on six items from wave 23 (October-November 2023), including ratings of Putin and Russia and policy orientations towards the relationship with Putin, cooperation with Russia, the annexation of Crimea and the

⁴ In Figure C1 of the online appendix, we present analogous findings from a logit model with a stricter definition of pro-Putin views, coding only those with an explicitly positive rating (+1 to +5) as Putin-friendly. The results are similar. Though, naturally, the predicted probabilities (1% and 27% respectively) are lower, especially in the second scenario.

Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.⁵ These items load well on a single scale (Cronbach's alpha: 0.85). Using the resulting factor score as a measure of attitudes towards the Putin regime at large leads to very similar results as when we solely look at ratings of Putin personally. As shown in online appendix F, results are also similar when using ratings of Putin in waves 22 (May-July 2022) and 23 (October-November 2022) instead of those from wave 24 (May 2023). In all these additional models, we find all four political alienation variables to be significantly associated with Putin-friendly views, with lack of political trust and conspiracy mentality exhibiting somewhat larger effects than lack of support for democracy and alienation from public discourse.

5.3 Regression analysis of change in ratings of Putin

In a next step, we turn to change in ratings of Putin amidst the war, calculated as difference between post-invasion (wave 24) and pre-invasion (wave 21) ratings of Putin. Again, we show results from two specifications, a model with only the socio-demographic controls (in blue) and a model with the attitudinal controls in addition (in orange). The coefficients from the OLS regressions are shown in Figure 5. In this case, the coefficients are virtually the same whether we include the additional attitudinal controls or not. The four alienation variables are all positively signed, three of them exhibit statistically significant effects—with lack of political trust showing the largest effect, followed by conspiracy mentality and then alienation from public discourse.

⁵ We resort to wave 23 because wave 24 does not contain three of the items.

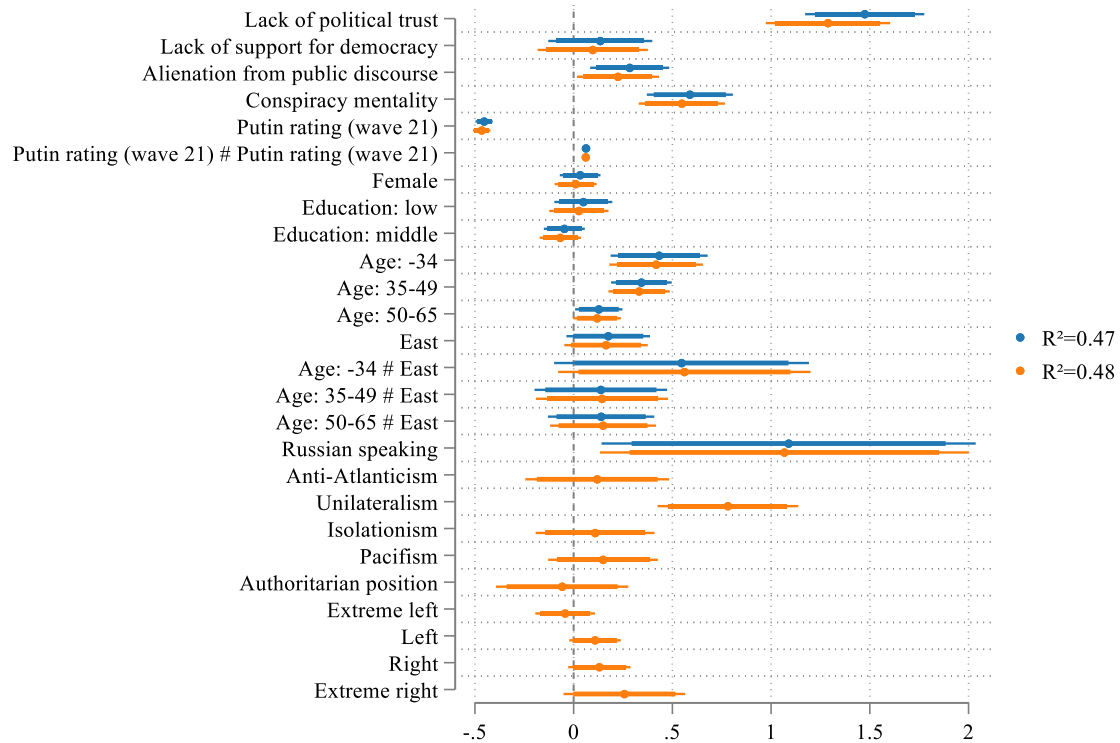


Fig. 5 Predicting change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and May 2023. Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1, except for pre-invasion rating of Putin in wave 21 (measured on a scale from -5 to +5). N=6,773

Given that ratings of Putin deteriorated overall (see Figure 2 and Figure A1 in the online appendix), it is more natural to think about how the predictors prevent a downward adjustment of attitudes toward Putin—rather than to think about how they tend to increase the amount of upward adjustment.⁶ According to the fully specified model, this downward adjustment was, on average, 1.3 scale points smaller among those completely lacking political trust (compared to those with maximum trust), 0.55 scale points smaller for those with maximum values on conspiracy mentality (compared to those with minimum values on conspiracy mentality) and

⁶ As the statistical model treats upward and downward changes symmetrical and identifies the effects of interest from both, this distinction is irrelevant for the statistical model and purely a matter of the convenience of the interpretation. When we relax the symmetry assumption and estimate separate models for upward and downward changes in ratings of Putin, we find the effects to be largely symmetrical (see online appendix G). In particular, lack of political trust and conspiracy mentality both decrease the tendency for downward adjustments and increase the tendency for upward adjustments. The same holds for alienation from public discourse, but the effect is only statistically significant for decreasing downward adjustment.

0.22 scale points smaller among those fully agreeing that people like them would no longer be allowed to freely express their opinions in public (compared to those not agreeing at all). Again, the effects may accumulate when individuals score high on more than one measure of political alienation. If we consider the two extreme scenarios—one in which all alienation variables take the minimum value zero and one in which they all take the maximum value of one—and compute the predicted change in ratings of Putin we get values of -2.34 and -0.19 respectively, with the latter not being statistically different from zero. If we set each of the four variables to their 10th, 50th and 90th percentile values, we obtain predicted values of -2.1, -1.6 and -0.5 respectively. These results indicate that the less (more) politically alienated individuals felt before the invasion, the more (less) their rating of Putin changed into a negative direction amidst the war initiated by Putin.

Notably, even more so than in the level models, the facets of political alienation seem to matter to different degrees. The effect is clearly largest for lack of political trust, as the perhaps most obvious and direct expression of political alienation. We also obtain a substantial effect of conspiracy mentality as an expression of active distrust in political and societal elites. We reason that these two variables play a particularly vital role in shaping how people updated their views of Putin amidst the war because they influence most strongly whether citizens align with and are swayed by mainstream messages concerning the events, as well as their openness to believe counter-narratives. While the same could be said about alienation from public discourse, its smaller effect may reflect the methodological limitation that this measure is based on just a single item. In contrast, the absent effect for lack of support for democracy in the change model indicates that diffuse support for democracy was not relevant for how individuals updated their views of Putin in light of the Russian invasion. Yet, low support for democracy had been strongly associated with more positive ratings of the autocrat Putin already before the invasion and, given persistence in ratings of Putin, continues to do so thereafter (see Figure 4 above).

Overall, though, we can conclude that political alienation before the invasion is strongly predictive of how views towards Putin evolved in the wake of the Russian invasion.

In contrast, few of the attitudinal controls are predictive of change in ratings of Putin. The only statistically significant finding is that the stronger the preference for multilateralism over unilateralism the larger the downward adjustment in the rating of Putin. As a result, the explained variance increases barely (from an R^2 of 0.47 to an R^2 of 0.48) when incorporating the additional attitudinal controls.

Again, we conducted several robustness checks. First, we introduced party identification, measured pre-invasion, as an additional control variable (see online appendix E). It is conceivable that individuals updated their views of Putin in response to cues by the parties they identified with. This indeed appears to be the case. In particular, identifying with the AfD is associated with a less negative change in ratings of Putin by 0.7 scale points, likely in a reaction to the cues sent out by the party (see Arzheimer 2023). Most importantly, however, our main results remain similar, suggesting that individuals updated their views in response to their own feelings of political alienation and not only or even mainly in response to party cues. Second, we looked at change in ratings of Russia instead (see online appendix D). The results are similar, though in this case all four alienation measures are statistically significantly associated with more positive (less negative) changes in ratings. Third, we studied change in ratings of Putin for the earlier post-invasion waves (see online appendix F). Again, the results are similar, though the effects tend to get a bit weaker the less time we give for opinion updating to take place.

6. Conclusion

Ever since Vladimir Putin's decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022 there has been considerable public interest in the question of why a heterogeneous minority

of Germans continued to voice understanding or even sympathies for the Putin regime. In this study, we have proposed an answer that centers on the role of political alienation, arguing that citizens who are alienated from the German political system, from democracy itself, from public discourse and are inclined to believe in conspiracy theories are most likely to (still) hold sympathetic views towards Putin and his regime. Theoretically, we have grounded our argument in balance theory, proposing that a simple mechanism of cognitive dissonance reduction according to which an enemy of an enemy is a friend can account for why politically alienated citizens sympathize with Putin—and non-alienated individuals dislike Putin.

Drawing on the GLES Panel that brackets Russia's full-scale invasion of February 2022, we have provided empirical evidence in line with our expectation from two sets of longitudinal analyses. First, we have linked political alienation measured before the invasion to post-invasion ratings of Putin and showed, in line with our hypotheses, that all four facets are significantly predictive of more positive ratings. Second, we have tested whether political alienation measured before the invasion also predicts how ratings of Putin changed amidst the Russian invasion, expecting that politically alienated individuals saw less reason to adjust their views of Putin downward in light of the events—or that some even saw reasons for an upward adjustment. Here, we found three of the facets of political alienation to be significantly associated with smaller downward (or: larger upward) adjustments in ratings of Putin: Those alienated from public discourse, lacking in political trust and with a conspiracy mentality were less likely to adjust their rating of Putin significantly downward, with the latter two variables playing a bigger role. We reason that a lack of institutional trust and conspiracy mentality, i.e. strong *distrust* in political and societal elites, are especially significant for the evolvement of attitudes towards Putin in the wake of the invasion because these variables shaped most strongly whether citizens followed and were persuaded by mainstream messages on the events and whether they were inclined to believe counter-narratives. We also showed that our findings

extend to attitudes towards the Russian regime as a whole and hold for several other robustness checks. Overall, our results comprehensively point to political alienation as one important motive for why German citizens (still) sympathize with Putin.

Despite this significance, our study is, of course, not without limitations and may be extended in several ways in future research. Most importantly, we have focused on four central facets of political alienation that we suspected to be especially consequential given evidence from related research, but there may be others which also matter. These may be considered in future research. At some point, though, it will become difficult to disentangle the separate impact of different facets of political alienation given their empirical interrelation and that similar mechanisms are likely to apply to them. Although we could establish distinct effects of a lack of political trust and conspiracy mentality here, for example, it deserves again to be noted that these attitudes tend to go together ($r=0.47$ in our study). Nevertheless, future research could test our argument on other manifestations of alienation and also regarding different dimensions of orientations toward Putin (cf. Ingenhoff and Klein 2018). In our view, the most important follow-up question, however, is whether and how our argument and findings travel to other contexts. We therefore especially encourage future research to probe our argument in other political and national contexts or on attitudes towards other autocratic regimes and their leaders.

For now, our results establish a link between political alienation and sympathy for an autocratic leader abroad. The political alienation prevalent in some segments of the German population seems to not only affect attitudes immediately related to national political matters, but political worldviews that go beyond the national arena. As the conflict between the Putin regime and the democratic world continues, this could well add to existing political and societal polarization—a possibility that seems especially relevant against the backdrop of increasing attempts by Russia and other autocratic powers to influence precisely these alienated segments of the population in democratic societies. The results of this study indicate that dealing with this global

challenge is one of many good reasons to better understand and address rising political alienation at home.

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Appendix to
Sympathies for Putin within the German public:
A consequence of political alienation?

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Appendix A: Information on measurement and descriptive results

Table A1: Coding of variables

Variable	Coding	Measured in wave (if applicable)
Lack of political trust	Mean index of trust in the Bundestag, the constitutional court and public broadcasting scaled from 0 to 1. Items measured on a scale from 1 (do not trust at all) to 5 (trust fully). Cronbach's alpha is 0.87 (wave 21) and 0.86 (wave 23).	wave 21 (December 2021)
Lack of support for democracy	Agreement with the statement "Under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government" measured on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (fully agree). Recoded to 0-1.	wave 21 (December 2021)
Conspiracy mentality	Mean index of agreement (scales from 1 to 7) with the statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most people have no idea how much our lives are determined by secretly forged plans. - There are certain political circles that pursue secret plans and have a lot of influence. - Most people do not recognize to what extent our lives are determined by conspiracies hatched in secret. - There are secret organizations that have a significant influence on political decisions. Cronbach's alpha is 0.95 (wave 16) and 0.96 (wave 23). Recoded to 0-1.	wave 16 (May 2021)
Alienation from public discourse	Agreement with the statement "People like me are no longer allowed to express their opinions freely in public." measured on a scale from 0 (do not agree at all) to 4 (fully agree). Recoded to 0-1.	wave 17 (July 2021)
Female	0: male 1: female	
Education	0: low (school completed without degree/Hauptschulabschluss) 1: middle (Realschulabschluss) 2: high (Fachhochschulreife/Abitur)	wave 21 (December 2021)
Age group	in 2022 (2022-year of birth) 0: -34 1: 35-49 2: 50-65 3: 66+	
Eastern Germany	Current residence in state 0: west (Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Niedersachsen, Bremen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bayern, Saarland) 1: east (Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thuringen)	
Russian speaking	1: speaks Russian in household 0: does not speak Russian in household	Coded from kpx_4131o, kp15_4131o, kp16_4131o
Foreign policy postures	Mean index of agreement (1 to 5 scales) with the respective two statements. Recoded to 0-1. <u>Anti-Atlanticism</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On foreign policy issues, Germany should act in harmony with the USA. (reversed) 	wave 21 (December 2021)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Germany should pursue its interests vis-a-vis the USA with more confidence. <p><u>Unilateralism</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- In international crises, Germany and its allies should agree on a common position. (reversed)- Germany should take care of its security primarily on its own. <p><u>Isolationism</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Germany should focus on its domestic problems.- Germany should play a more active role in global politics. (reversed) <p><u>Pacifism</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use of military force is never justified.- War is sometimes necessary to protect a county's interests. (reversed)									
Authoritarian position	<p>Factor score from three position items (each measured on a scale from 1 to 7; with higher values indicating more authoritarian position):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Immigration (wave 21): "Let's turn to the issue of immigration. Should it be easier or more difficult for foreigners to immigrate? What is your opinion on this issue?"2. Gender equality (wave 17): "Now we would like to know what you think about state measures for the equality of women in society. Some think that state equality measures by no means go far enough, others think that they already go much too far today. What is your opinion on state measures for the equality of women in society?"3. Climate protection (wave 17): Some say that the fight against climate change should definitely take precedence, even if it impairs economic growth. Others say that the economic growth should definitely take precedence, even if it impairs the fight against climate change. What is your personal view on this issue? <table><tr><th>Variable</th><th>Loading</th></tr><tr><td>Immigration</td><td>0.74</td></tr><tr><td>Gender equality</td><td>0.73</td></tr><tr><td>Climate protection</td><td>0.79</td></tr></table> <p>Note: The table shows factor loadings from a principal component factor analysis. Factor has an eigenvalue of 1.70 and explains 57% of the variance in the individual items.</p>	Variable	Loading	Immigration	0.74	Gender equality	0.73	Climate protection	0.79	<p>wave 21 (December 2021)</p> <p>wave 17 (July 2021)</p> <p>wave 17 (July 2021)</p>
Variable	Loading									
Immigration	0.74									
Gender equality	0.73									
Climate protection	0.79									
Left-right position	<p>In politics, people often talk about "left" and "right." Where would you place yourself?</p>	<p>wave 16 (May 2021) (Note: Left-right self-placement was also included in wave 19, but we draw on wave 16 to minimize missing</p>								

		values. Otherwise, we would lose respondents who did not participate in wave 19; whereas we need wave 16 for measuring conspiracy mentality in any case.)
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Figure A1: Histogram of change in Putin rating (May 2023 vs. December 2021)

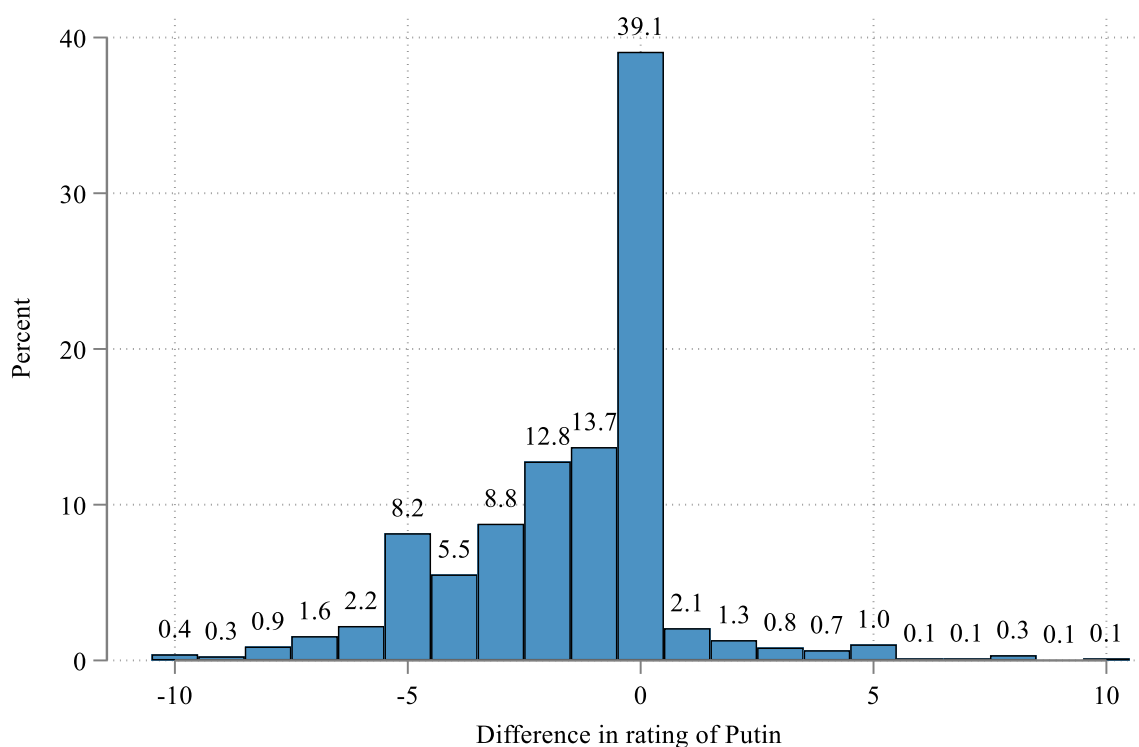


Figure A2: Mean rating of Russia across waves and facets of political alienation

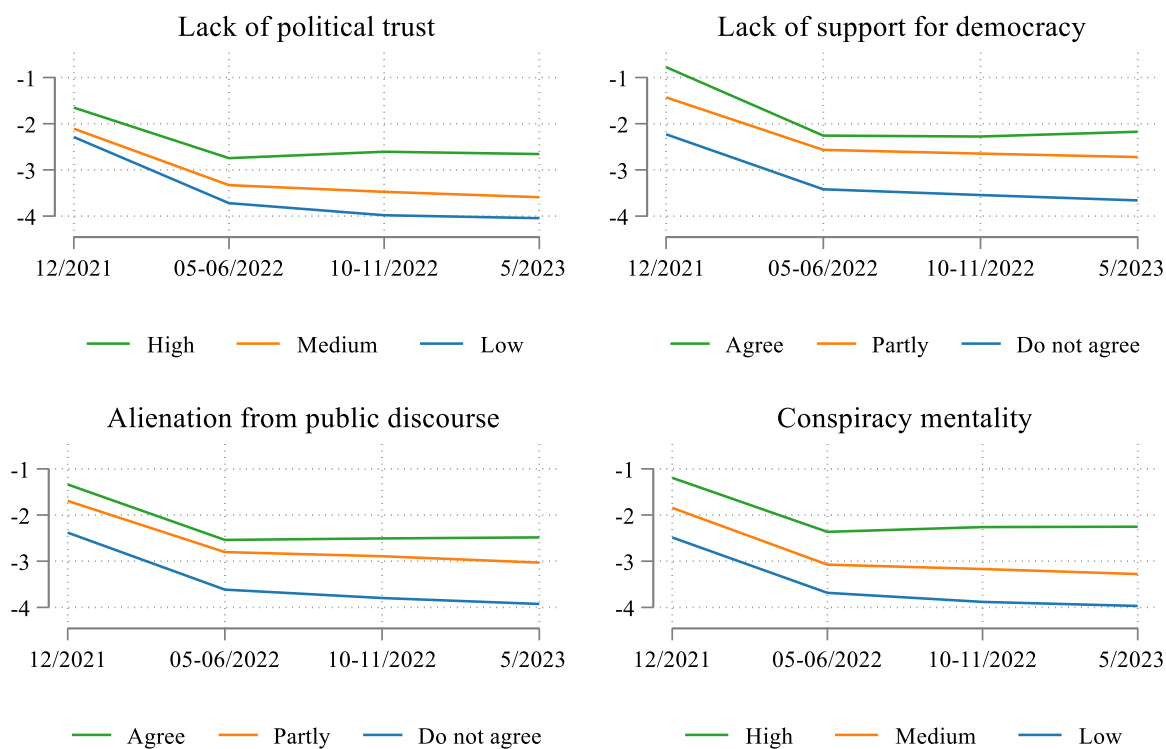


Figure A3: Histograms of political alienation variables

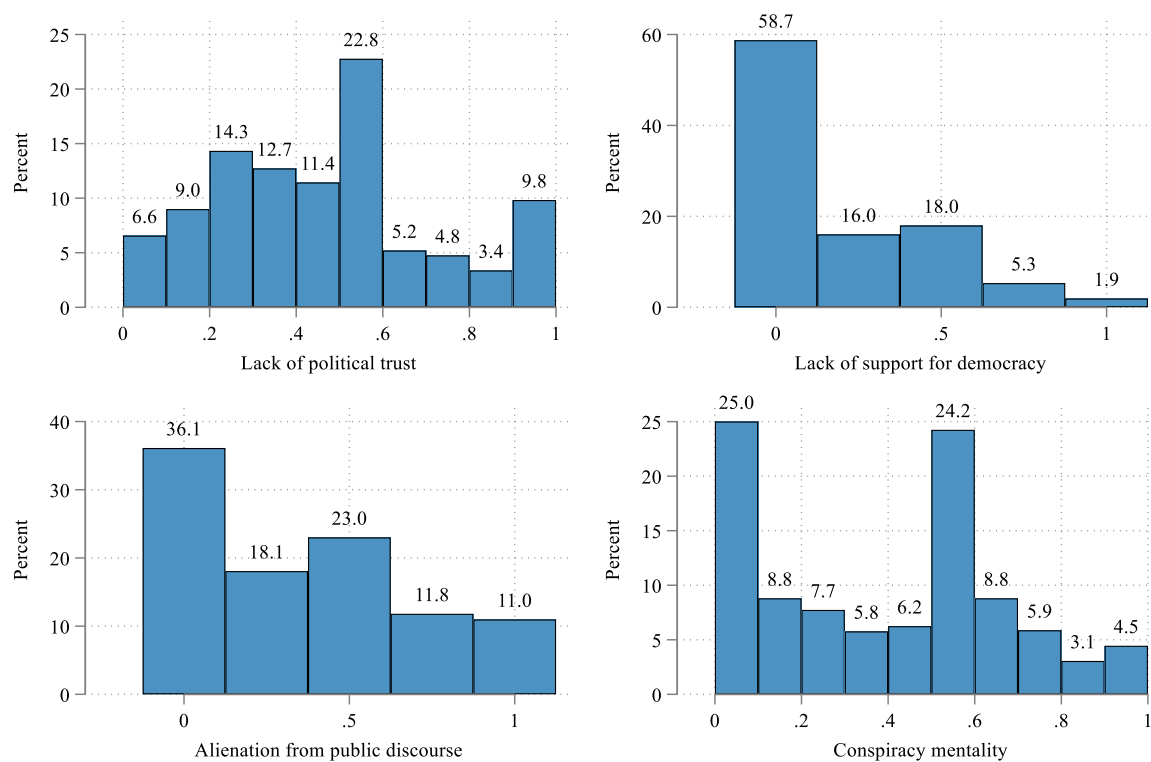
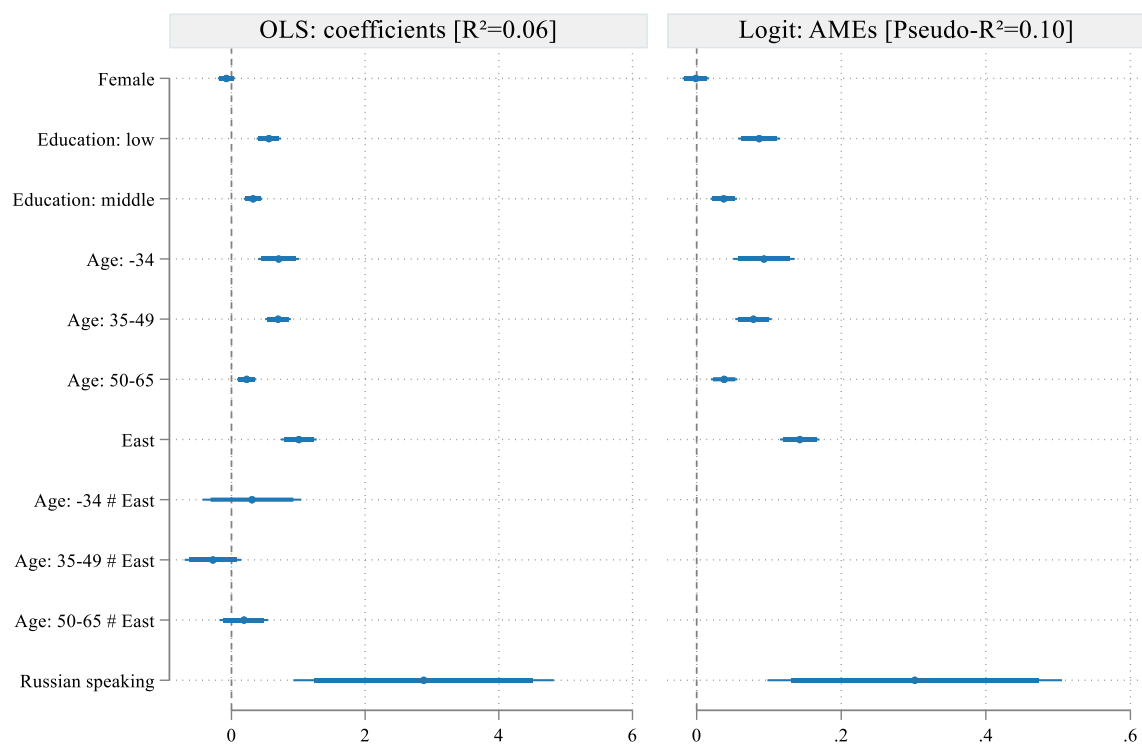


Table A2: Pairwise correlations between political alienation variables

	Lack of political trust	Lack of support for democracy	Conspiracy mentality	Alienation from public discourse
Lack of political trust	1.00			
Lack of support for democracy	0.22	1.00		
Conspiracy mentality	0.47	0.27	1.00	
Alienation from public discourse	0.53	0.30	0.46	1.00

Appendix B: Socio-demographic models

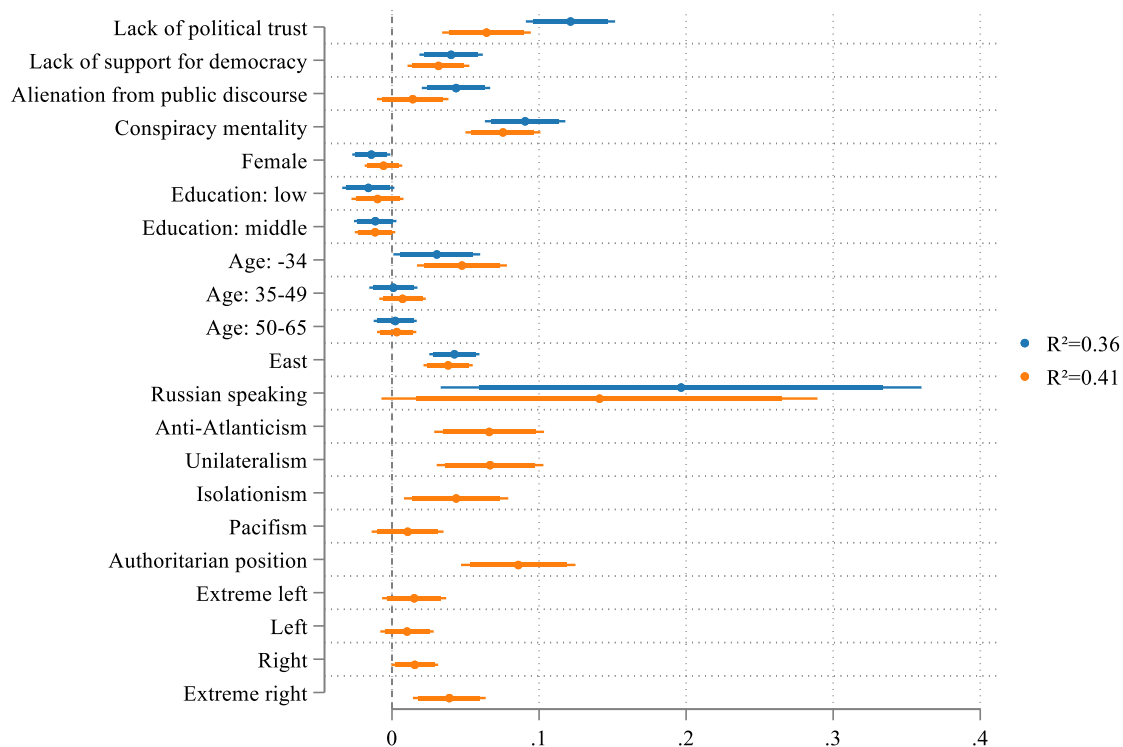
Figure B1: Predicting ratings of Putin in May 2023 with only socio-demographic variables



Note: Left-hand side: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. Right-hand side: Average marginal effects with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals from binary logistic regressions (outcome variable: Putin rating of -5 to -1 coded as 1; Putin rating of 0 to +5 coded as 1). Pseudo- R^2 on the right-hand side refers to McKelvey & Zavoina. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1 and measured pre-invasion. $N=6,820$.

Appendix C: Binary logistic regressions with *stricter definition of pro-Putin attitude*

Figure C1: Predicting positive ratings of Putin in May 2023 with higher threshold for pro-Putin attitude ($\geq +1$)



Note: Average marginal effects with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals from binary logistic regressions. Outcome variable: Putin rating of -5 to 0 coded as 1; Putin rating of +1 to +5 coded as 1. Pseudo- R^2 refers to McKelvey & Zavoina Pseudo- R^2 . All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1. $N=7,876$.

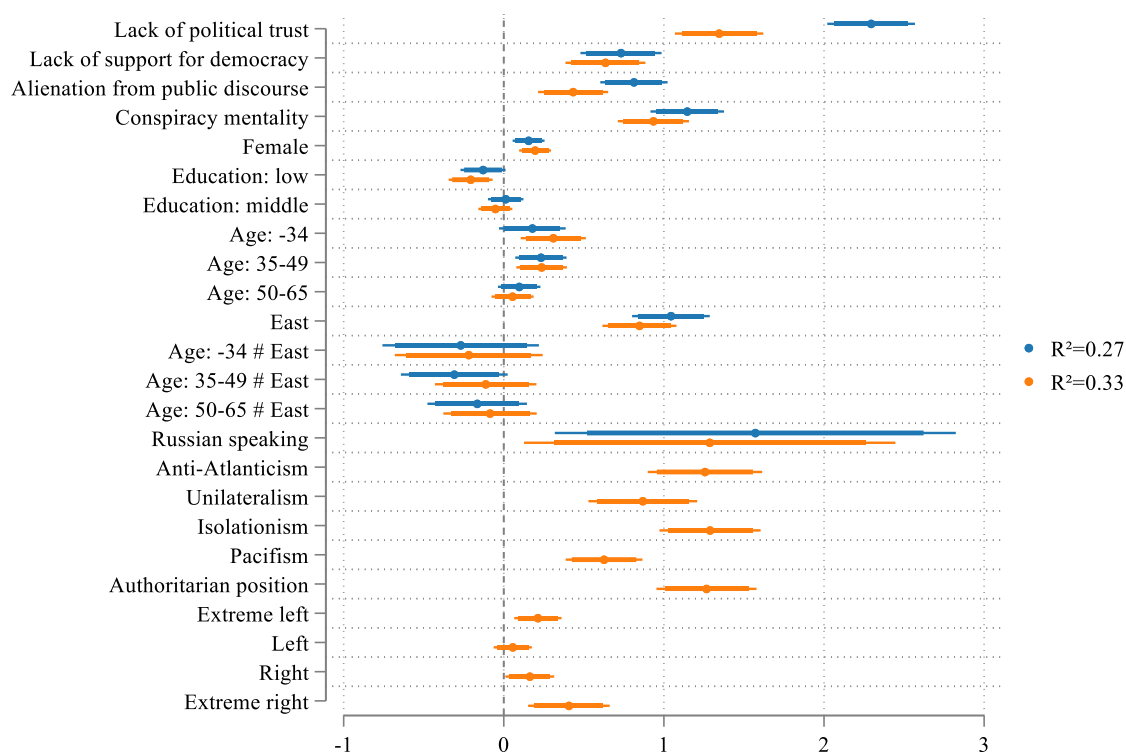
Appendix D: Predicting attitudes towards *the Putin regime and Russia*

Table D1: Factor analysis of attitudes towards Putin and Russia in wave 23 (October-November 2022)

Variable	Loading
In general, what do you think of the following countries and politicians? Vladimir Putin	0.80
In general, what do you think of the following countries and politicians? Russia	0.78
The German government should strive for a good relationship with Vladimir Putin.	0.82
Germany should rely less on cooperation and more on confrontation with Russia.	-0.70
Germany should accept Russia's annexation of Crimea for the time being.	0.79
The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany should not be put into operation.	-0.75

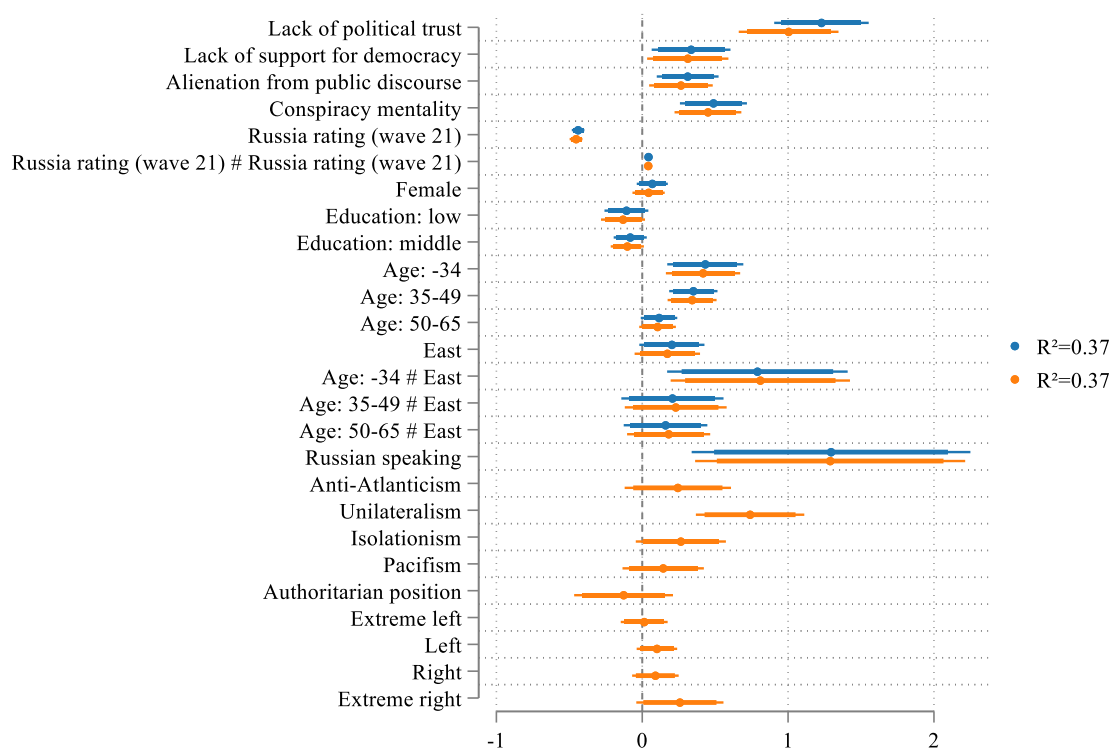
Note: The table shows factor loadings from a principal component factor analysis. Factor has an eigenvalue of 3.60 and explains 60% of the variance in the individual items.

Figure D1: Predicting attitudes towards Putin regime (factor) in October-November 2022



Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals; outcome variable scaled from 0 to 10. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1. N= 7,276.

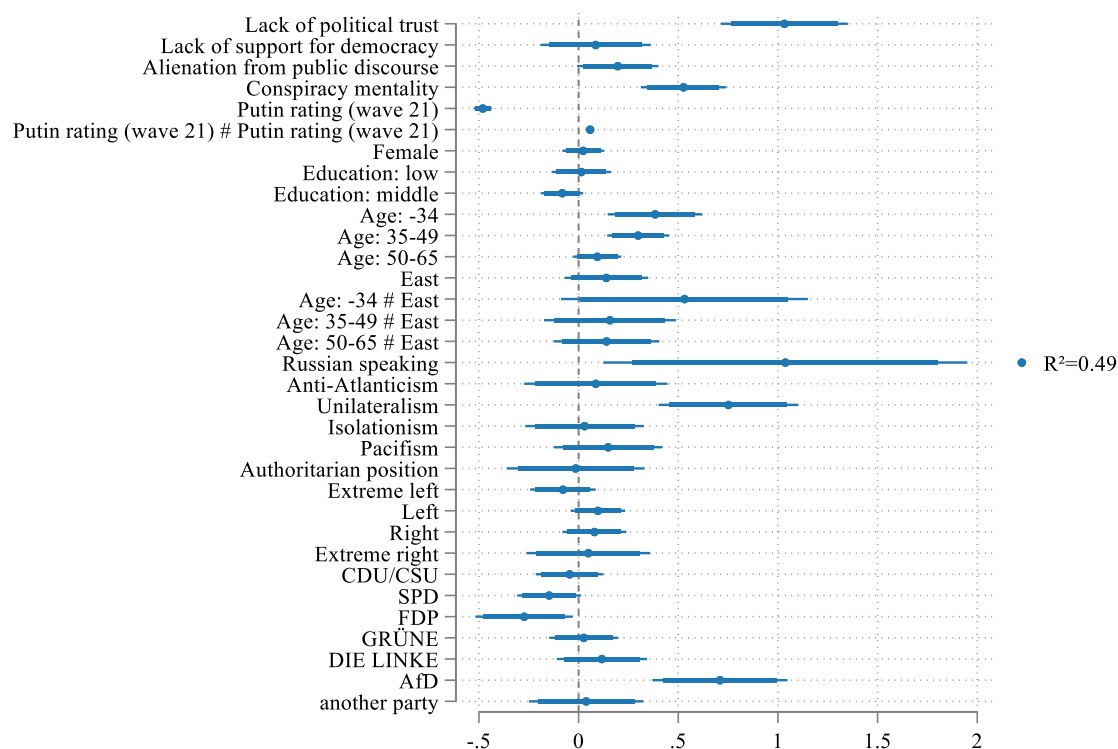
Figure D2: Predicting change in ratings of Russia between December 2021 and May 2023



Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1, except for pre-invasion rating of Russia in wave 21 (measured on a scale from -5 to +5). N=6,757.

Appendix E: Predicting change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and May 2023 with additional controls for *party identification*

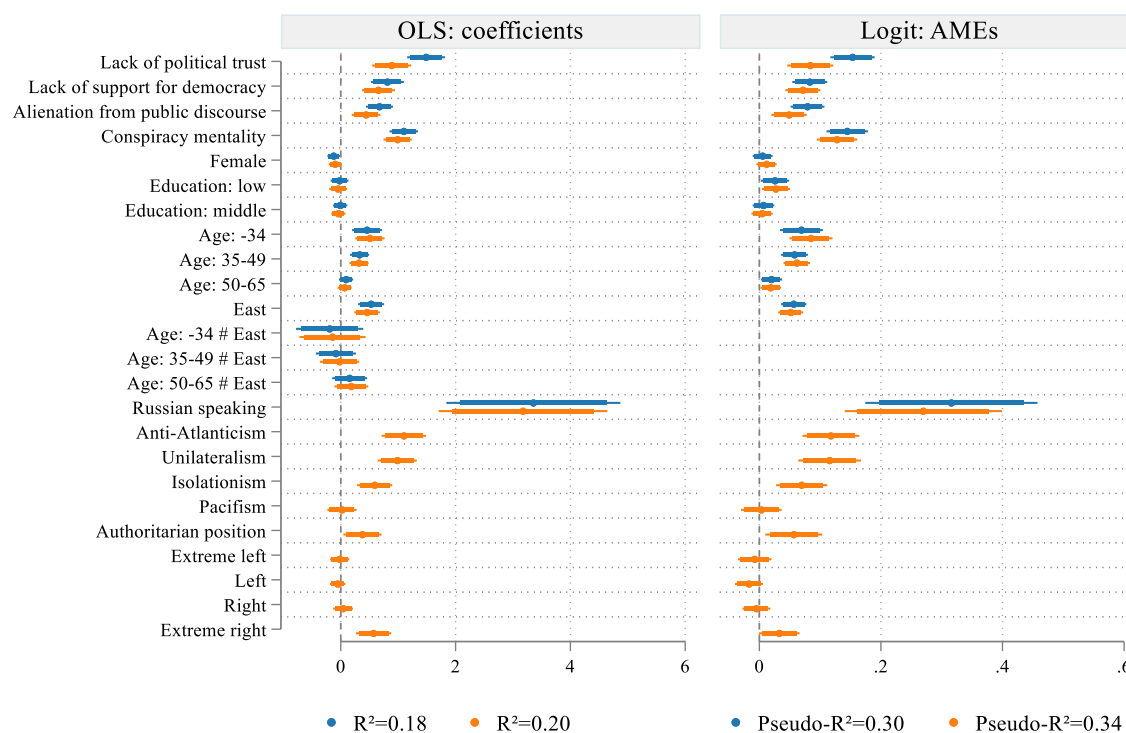
Figure E1: Predicting change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and May 2023 with additional controls for party identification



Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1, except for pre-invasion rating of Putin in wave 21 (measured on a scale from -5 to +5). N=6,770.

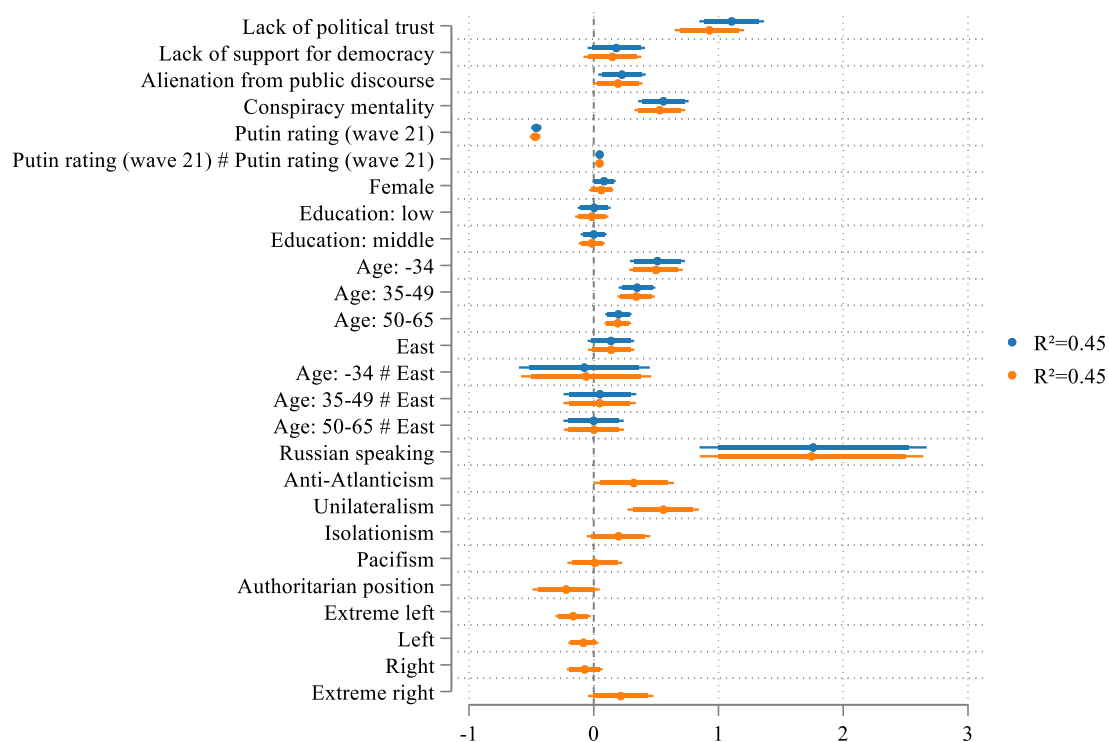
Appendix F: Regressions of attitudes towards Putin in different waves

Figure F1: Predicting ratings of Putin in May-July 2022



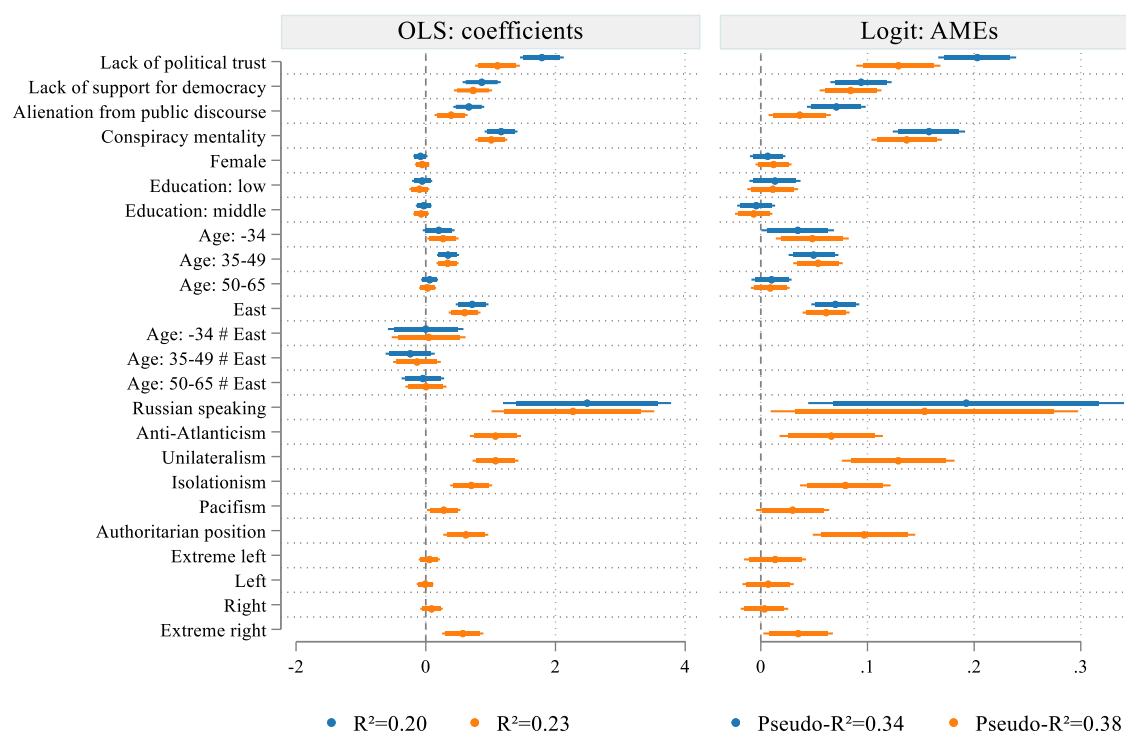
Note: Left-hand side: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. Right-hand side: Average marginal effects with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals from binary logistic regressions (outcome variable: Putin rating of -5 to -1 coded as 1; Putin rating of 0 to +5 coded as 1). Pseudo- R^2 on the right-hand side refers to McKelvey & Zavoina. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1 and measured pre-invasion. $N=8,028$.

Figure F2: Predicting change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and May-July 2022



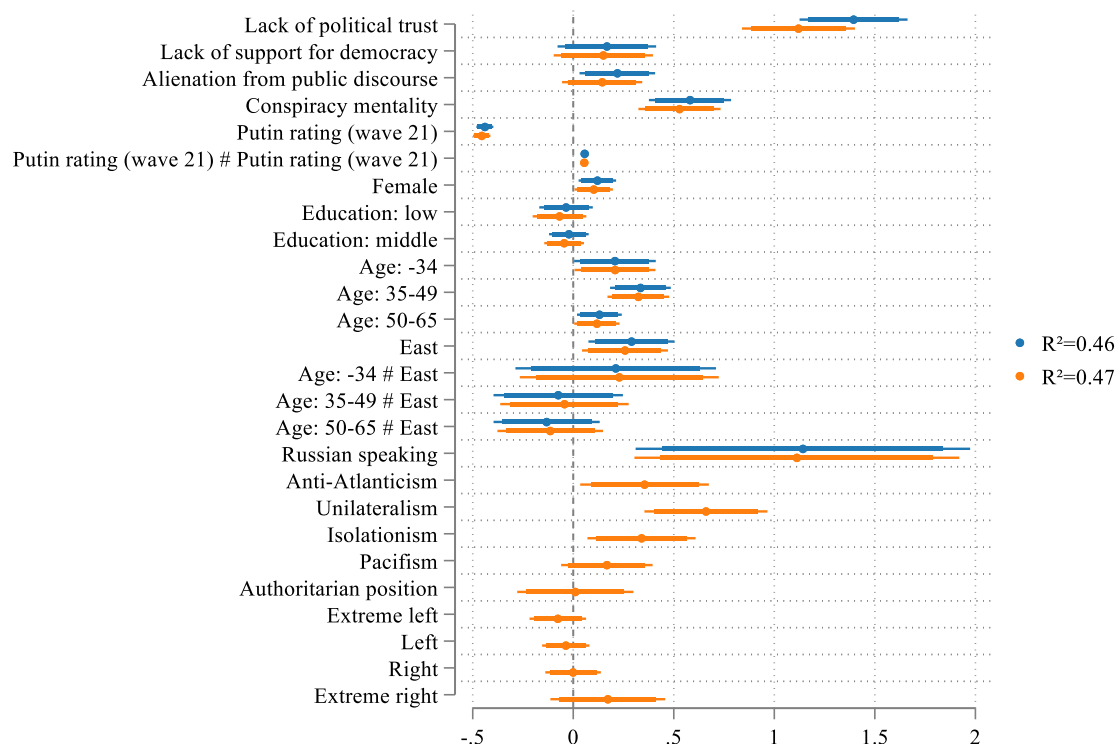
Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1, except for pre-invasion rating of Putin in wave 21 (measured on a scale from -5 to +5). N=7,971.

Figure F3: Predicting ratings of Putin in October-November 2022



Note: Left-hand side: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. Right-hand side: Average marginal effects with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals from binary logistic regressions (outcome variable: Putin rating of -5 to -1 coded as 1; Putin rating of 0 to +5 coded as 1). Pseudo- R^2 on the right-hand side refers to McKelvey & Zavoina. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1 and measured pre-invasion. $N=7,361$.

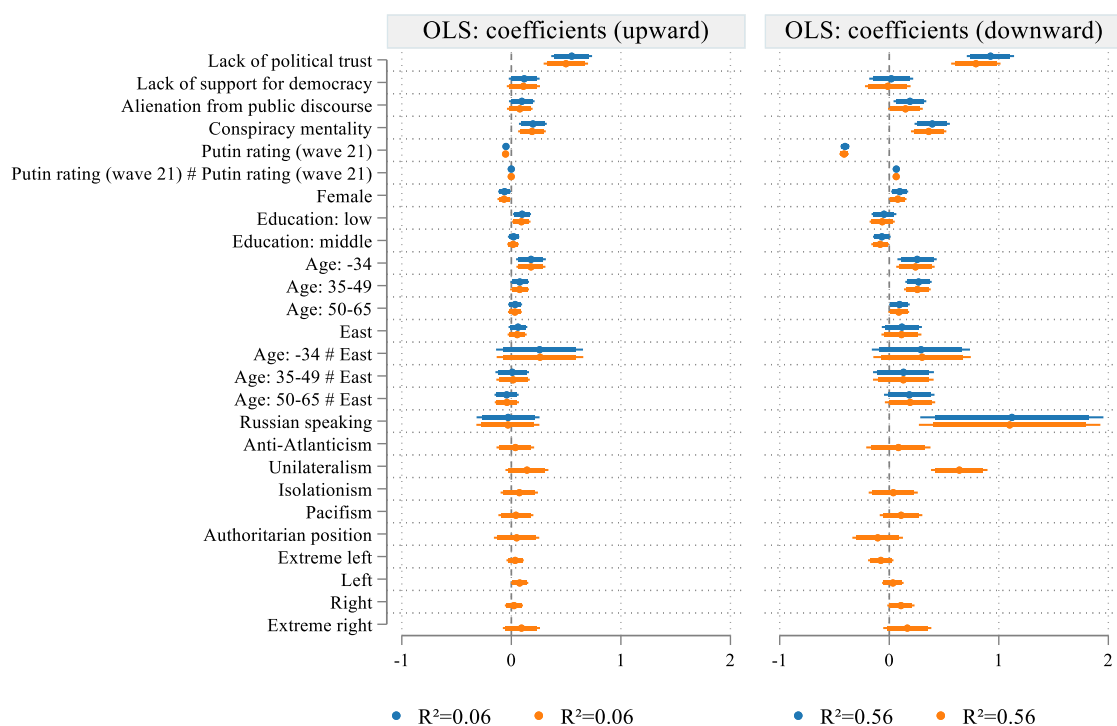
Figure F4: Predicting change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and October-November 2022



Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1, except for pre-invasion rating of Putin in wave 21 (measured on a scale from -5 to +5). N=7,306.

Appendix G: Predicting *upward* vs. *downward* change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and May 2023

Figure G1: Predicting upward vs. downward change in ratings of Putin between December 2021 and May 2023



Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions with 95% (thick) and 90% (thin) confidence intervals. All independent variables scaled from 0 to 1, except for pre-invasion rating of Putin in wave 21 (measured on a scale from -5 to +5). The dependent variable on the right-hand side "counts" only positive changes, setting all negative changes to zero. The dependent variable on the right-hand side "counts" only negative changes, setting all positive changes to zero. N=6,773.