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Becoming Banal: Incentivizing and Monopolizing the Nation in Post-Soviet Russia

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ABSTRACT

While new regimes often seek legitimation by forging banal ties between state and nation (or ‘banalization’), there have been few attempts to explain how nationalism becomes banal, to account for variations in the process across different types of regimes, or to establish clear criteria for identifying successes or failures in banalization. This article presents an original theoretical framework for understanding banalization as a social and political process involving attempts to either incentivize or monopolize national expression, depending on the type of political regime. Drawing on interviews and focus groups conducted during 2014-2016, a case study of post-Soviet Russia fleshes out the process and outcomes of banalization across different kinds of regimes from the 1990s to the present. It further suggests the value of examining banalization as a regime process in accounting for the ways that the successes or failures of banalization influence their successors’ pursuit of legitimation.

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Introduction

Whether accounting for populist electoral revolts or the enduring appeal of autocrats, today’s politics are dominated by the need to reconcile the power of state-led nationalisms with citizens’ everyday experiences. This can seem a jarring shift from just a quarter century ago, when the most pressing concerns appeared to be the threats to the state posed by the spread of globalization from above and ethnic mobilization from below. Yet, rather than fading from international politics, nationalism has moved steadily from the margins to the mainstream and into the daily lives of citizens.

If scholars have been slow to appreciate this development, perhaps it is because we have become accustomed to viewing nationalism as primarily a contentious form of political action rather than as a way of legitimating the status quo and preserving the social dominance of ethnic

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majorities. Much research on nationalist politics continues to be characterized by formalistic approaches, focusing on policies and doctrines, institutions, organized movements, and elite articulations of the nation. However, such approaches can only partially explain the success or failure of state-led nationalisms as forms of legitimation insofar as they require an understanding both of institutional approaches as well as citizens' informal, everyday practices.

A critical step towards linking top-down and bottom-up perspectives in accounting for the success or failure of state legitimation is to bring political regimes explicitly into the picture. Democracies, hybrid regimes, and autocracies each influence—and are influenced by—elites and citizens in their everyday lives. All regimes seek to forge banal ties between state and nation as a form of legitimation, though to date scholars have only focused on banal nationalism as the product of nation-building and time, with today's status quo as the outcome. This understanding is unsatisfying as it does not describe the political mechanisms in play, how those mechanisms and state capacities vary among regimes, or the implications of their success or failure. This article proposes a theoretical framework for modelling the distinctive variations among political regimes in the ways that banal nationalism is cultivated, the actors and capacities involved in the process, and the implications for regime survival.

The following section elaborates this framework for understanding the relationship between regime type and modes of production of banal nationalism. The article next examines post-Soviet Russia as a case study illustrative of 'banalization' across hybrid and autocratic regimes.¹ It concludes by noting the additional hypotheses and opportunities for comparative analysis yielded by this approach.

How nationalism goes from blatant to banal

How does the nation become so omnipresent that it is pervasively unnoticed? The literature on nationalism has focused on different historical and political problematics related to the emergence of nationalism as a powerful force. If early constructivists like Benedict Anderson (2006), Ernest

Gellner (1965), and Eric Hobsbawm (1992) focused on the ways that nations were forged by convergent historical processes of industrial capitalist development and the spread of popular sovereignty, their focus on the *longue durée* meant that nation-creation was rendered as gradual, sedimentary, and evolutionary processes among old, established (usually meaning Western) nations.

In a second wave of constructivist scholarship, Michael Billig's (1995) pathbreaking work examined the pervasiveness of nationalism in Western societies in the form of 'banal nationalism,' symbolized by the unwaved flags that hang unnoticed in front of public offices. Billig observed that the nation has already become a banal reality in democratic Western states, pointedly contrasted with the 'hot,' 'noisy,' or blatant nationalism that characterizes mobilizational cycles. The nation is continually reproduced and 'flagged' in daily speech, particularly in the kinds of deixis that identify *we* and *ours* with the nation. Crucially, the constant presence of banal nationalism makes it possible for 'hot' nationalism to be triggered and mobilized even in seemingly stable and pacific democracies.

A third wave of nationalism scholars sought to push past the questions of national origins and debates among competing paradigms (Chandra 2001). These scholars initially concentrated on nationalism as a form of contentious politics, particularly drawing on the social movements literature and social identity theory (Beissinger 2002; Chandra 2012). Others noticed that nationalism often fails to mobilize publics in ways sought by the state even as the nation is deployed and co-constructed in daily social interactions (Brubaker et al. 2006; Skey 2011). In focusing on 'everyday nationalism,' these latter works drew attention to the ways that repertoires linking nation and state are forged, challenged, manipulated, and appropriated on the micro-level and often across ethnic boundaries.²

If a crucial contribution of Billig's work (and the many it has inspired) was to demonstrate how nationalist mobilization might arise from banal nationalism, it stops short of considering how the nation becomes banal in the first place.³ A similar argument might be made with reference to the literature on nation-building. Nation-building refers to the construction of national majorities as

the source of legitimate authority in modern states (Mylonas 2012). As Connor (1972) noted in relation to earlier efforts to assess nation-building, a tendency persists to this day of construing the absence of ethnic conflict as evidence of successful nation-building. Nation-building concerns state actions intended to cultivate national unity (or at least the unity of a core national group with the state), usually as a complement to the institutional, legal, administrative, and coercive processes involved in modernization and state-building (Kolstø 2004). While nation-building policies can powerfully shape the lives of ethnic majorities and minorities, they do not necessarily explain the means by which national identities promoted by the state come to be taken for granted in daily life. Crucially, the traditional focus on nation-building as an elite-led, top-down process neglects that elites rarely craft new national identities from scratch—indeed, state-sponsored national projects are likely to fail if they do not resonate with the broader public's daily experiences (Whitmeyer 2002). As Polese (2011, 40) observes, nation-building “may be renegotiated informally at the national but also at the local level. ...Such an approach would acknowledge the role of the people in the production of the political and see the role of human agency as crucial in the definition of the nation-building project.” In this sense, examining the production of banal nationalism as a process effectively bridges between the literatures on nation-building and everyday nationalism.

Conceptualizing ‘banalization’ as a regime process

The production of banality—or, to risk a neologism, *banalization*—is understood here as the process of forging banal ties between a state and core nation, for instance after revolution, regime change, or a critical juncture in state-society relations. Assuming that all new regimes engage in an initial flurry of legitimacy-seeking and flag-waving, banalization might be conceived as a consolidation period during which the state actively and conspicuously promotes the nation in daily life, particularly as long as the prior regime (colonial, communist, or authoritarian) remains an active object of politics and popular reference point for assessing the performance of successor regimes. During this interval, the state and its challengers impose or incentivize contending visions

of nationality, bringing the nation into markets, ballot boxes, and classrooms. Official repertoires are established and become integrated into citizens' daily routines. Thus, in contrast to the nationalizing states famously discussed by Brubaker (1996; 2011) as seeking to change the status quo in the name of the nation, we might instead talk about *banalizing* states that invoke the nation to legitimate the status quo.⁴ This distinction is neither trivial nor semantic, given that the vast majority of people's lived experience occurs during 'settled' or 'quiet' times outside of mobilizational cycles (Bonikowski 2016; Goode 2012).

The virtue of thinking about banalization in this manner is that it helps one to identify how the process varies and interacts with different kinds of regimes in the course of routine politics. While there is much debate in political science over regime categories, this study adopts a minimalistic conceptualization in focusing on the range of actors, the nature of competition among them, and the role of society in each regime. *Democracies* feature open and competitive politics involving multiple, autonomous actors in politics, civil society and the economy. Civil societies provide the means for the realization of objectives jointly held with the state, for social mobilization autonomous of the government, and for accessing alternative sources of information that prevent political domination. *Hybrid regimes* are characterized by formally democratic institutions and electoral competition, but these are continually subverted by informal practices and competition among rival patronage networks. Consequently, no single actor can dominate politics and state administrations tend to be fragmented. Civil societies often are apathetic but mobilizable and potentially even decisive during episodes when power is contested (for instance, during the post-Soviet "colour revolutions" of 2003-2005). *Autocracies* possess hierarchically organized patronage and centralized administrative networks. Competition among elites is tightly controlled by the state and usually concerns access to power or demonstrations of loyalty to the regime rather than the representation of autonomous, organized interests in society. Civil society tends to be apolitical, though regimes may seek to mobilize it periodically to demonstrate its support.

In democratic political regimes, banalizing dynamics might be likened to supply-side market policies in which success depends upon market convergence and standardization of a finite range of national images and nationalist claims, which in turn come to be popularly accepted as normal and desirable. Crucially, banalization in democracies benefits from the availability of electoral legitimacy, such that it can develop within, alongside, or even in spite of political competition. Instead, the content and boundaries of national identities are elaborated through daily social interactions.

Banalizing dynamics in autocracies relate to *regime* legitimacy rather than state legitimacy (Connor 2002; Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). Compared to democratic regimes, legitimizing autocratic politics requires more than convergence around a shared range of national images. Rather, banalizing autocracies advance justifications for the restriction or elimination of political competition, the minimization or elimination of citizens' political subjectivities, and active support of a ruler or ruling elite as essential for the preservation of the homeland (Schatz 2009).

The different means of legitimation in democracies and non-democracies likewise entail different social and political mechanisms (Table 1). In democratic regimes, banalization entails *incentivization* to stimulate competition and convergence. New states may adopt an incentivization strategy for a variety of reasons, including democratic commitments to competitive politics—though pragmatic realities (like the inability of new leaders to monopolize politics) likely also lead hybrid regimes to pursue incentivization. The state initially plays a pivotal role in proposing national self-images and repertoires. However, the dissemination and acceptance of national images and narratives depends upon a range of public and private actors in political, economic, and civil society, in cooperation with the state. Incentivization is less likely to succeed in hybrid regimes, where the predominance of informal politics places a higher premium on demonstrations of loyalty to the regime in exchange for access to patronage streams.

Table 1. Variations in Banalization Among Regime Types

	Democracies	Hybrid Regimes	Autocracies
<i>Mode of banalization</i>	Incentivization		Monopolization
<i>Elite actors</i>	Multiple, autonomous actors in politics and the economy	Multiple, competing patronage networks and fragmented state administration	Hierarchically arranged patronage networks and centralized state administration
<i>Means of banalization</i>	Electoral & market competition, converging on shared symbols and repertoires	Competitive and mimetic demonstrations of loyalty, involving regime-sanctioned symbols and repertoires	
<i>Criteria for societal success</i>	Citizens <i>routinely care</i> about the contestation of national symbols and repertoires in public life		Citizens cease to care about <i>routinely imposed</i> symbols and repertoires

Viewed in relation to regime context, then, an indicator of successful incentivization is that the state no longer remains the chief supplier of national images and narratives; the tie between state and core nation is no longer a matter of policy but social and cognitive structure, or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990). *Incentivization thus succeeds as a strategy for banalization to the extent that multiple, autonomous social and economic sectors are drawn into the re-production of banality, and that citizens come to routinely care about national symbols and repertoires in their daily lives.*

By contrast, banalization in autocracies is dominated by the regime and involves the *monopolization* of displays of loyalty to state and nation, followed by mimicry and overt public acceptance. Monopolization involves the imposition of regime-created or regime-sanctioned national tropes with an eye towards establishing the regime’s right to rule and excluding challengers. The dissemination of national images depends less on acceptance across a range of public and private actors than transmission throughout clientelist networks. It bears noting that monopolization is unlikely to succeed for hybrid regimes as they typically must contend with weak institutions and slow economic performance, both of which diminish the material incentives and capacities for regime actors to diffuse national images through rival clientelist networks. Among political and

economic elites, *monopolization succeeds as a strategy for banalization once the repetition of regime-supplied images and narratives becomes understood to be a sign of acceptance into (or affiliation with) the regime, while their re-circulation becomes a routine cost of doing business or a means of communicating authority by paying tribute to power.*

Monopolization is attractive for autocrats seeking security and stability as it delegitimizes opposition, produces scapegoats for the nation's ills, and induces social conformity (Bar-Tal 1997). Meanwhile, the imposition of symbols of the new national order remains blatant for ordinary citizens—particularly for those whose livelihood or welfare depends upon the regime's expectation even in the absence of explicit threats or coercion. From a popular perspective, then, *monopolization may be said to have succeeded as a strategy for banalization to the extent that citizens cease to care about the routine imposition of national symbols and repertoires by the regime in public life.*

Case selection and method

Bringing regime type explicitly into the analysis of banal nationalism is a departure from existing approaches, for which there is no established or consensus method for observing, measuring, or testing for banal nationalism (Fox and Ginderachter 2018). This study examines Russia as a case involving both incentivization and monopolization under hybrid and autocratic regimes. The ability to observe within-case variation makes Russia useful as a “pathway case,” or a type of case study that relates abstract models to the real world and helps to elaborate potential causal mechanisms (Gerring 2017, 105–114). The case study is thus intended to elicit the relationships between regime type and mode of banalization and to suggest hypotheses concerning the directionality and salience of those relationships for future comparison and testing. While this case study bears some elements of process-tracing, banalization is not event-driven (like contentious or ‘blatant’ nationalism). This approach thus comes closer to the notion of “practice tracing” than process tracing, insofar as it

foregrounds social practices as possessing causal power and as “the generative force thanks to which society and politics take shape.” (Pouliot 2015, 241)

The following sections examine Russia’s efforts at banalization since the collapse of Soviet rule, beginning with its attempts at incentivizing the nation as a hybrid regime in the 1990s and then continuing with its shift towards monopolization since the 2000s. The discussion of Yeltsin’s Russia necessarily relies upon secondary sources, while the observations informing the analysis of the Putin era are drawn from the author’s field research conducted in Russia over 2014-2016.⁵ This research involved 67 in-depth interviews (lasting from 30 minutes to two hours) conducted in Perm’ (in the Urals) and Tiumen’ (in western Siberia) with Russian citizens across a range of age groups and occupations (Table 2). Perm’ and Tiumen’ were selected as field sites owing to relatively prosperous regional economies, reputations for political loyalty, and their predominantly ethnic Russian populations. Interviews were arranged using snowball sampling.

Table 2. Interview Respondents’ Characteristics

<i>Gender</i>		
	Male	42
	Female	24
<i>Age Groups</i>		
	18-22	6
	23-29	19
	30-39	18
	40-49	9
	50-59	12
	60+	3
<i>Occupations</i>		
	Arts	2
	Business	11
	Education	23
	Media	2
	Non-profit	5
	Politics	10
	State employee	9
	Student	3
	Unemployed	2

The interviews focused on Russians' understandings of, and daily encounters with, patriotism.⁶ They were transcribed and coded in Nvivo using process coding (Saldana 2009) to derive the categories of social practices associated with patriotism.⁷ Following the approach proposed by Goode and Stroup (2015), a series of focus groups were then conducted to verify the consistency and social salience of the patriotic repertoires identified individually in interviews. The focus groups involved participants drawn from the social categories identified by interview respondents as most likely to have distinctive orientations towards patriotism: entrepreneurs, pensioners, state employees, and university students. In each session, a local moderator invited participants to discuss items that ought to be included in a hypothetical museum exhibit dedicated to patriotism. The session transcripts were later coded using the list of practices generated by the interviews.

Yeltsin's Russia: Incentivization vs hybrid regime dynamics

After the USSR collapsed under the weight of nationalist mobilization against the Soviet state, post-Soviet Russia's new leadership aimed to avoid the same fate by incentivizing a civic form of nationality. The new constitution guaranteed the equality of Russians regardless of ethnicity or religion. Russian (*rossiiskii*) citizenship and even the name of the Russian Federation (*Rossiskaya Federatsiya*) were clearly distinct from the Russian ethnonym (*russkii*). The constitution further declared Russia to be a multi-national state and provided ethno-federal accommodation for significant minority ethnicities.

When it came to implementing the civic national concept, Russia's first Nationalities Minister Valerii Tishkov (1997, 63) observed that Yeltsin's approach to nationalities policy was pragmatic. This pragmatism (as well as an instinctive sense of Russian exceptionalism) was soon reflected in the constant turnover in the government's Ministry for Nationalities, as the Kremlin's court politics transformed the ministry into a kind of bureaucratic holding tank for cast-offs from other ministries and departments. Meanwhile, its staff and portfolio were gradually absorbed into the Presidential

Administration (Goode 2019, 146-151).⁸ The ministry and central government also became increasingly Russified as representation of non-Russians dwindled (Tishkov 1997, 259).

As nationalities policy became increasingly presidential, it placed greater emphasis on the needs and concerns of ethnic Russians even as it continued formally to promote civic nationhood. Already by the mid-1990s, Yeltsin began to push back on expressions of non-Russian ethnicity in relation to political rights. He criticized leaders of Russia's ethnic republics for cultivating a separate sense of identity and even citizenship. At the same time, he framed ethnic Russians as a state-bearing people, both secure and dominant but also victims of subnational ethnocracies and conflicts in neighbouring states (Yeltsin 1994). Yeltsin's interest in incentivizing a civic national idea further diminished following his re-election in 1996. A half-hearted attempt at stimulating social participation took the form of an essay competition to define a new Russian national idea, though it ultimately failed to produce either enthusiasm or results (K. E. Smith 2002). At the same time, the new State Nationalities Concept adopted in 1996 gave privileged recognition to ethnic Russians as responsible for unifying the country (*Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 1996). Anti-Westernism also crept into Yeltsin's public statements, especially with the start of NATO's campaign in Serbia.

Given the government's ambivalence on civic nationhood, it is unsurprising that rival political actors, parties, and networks found little incentive to adopt or contest the civic national concept. The two main opposition parties throughout the 1990s were the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, both of which competed for the support of nationalist and anti-Yeltsin constituencies. Oligarchs and big business similarly had little interest in promoting a civic national concept. Even in the advertising sector, there was weak commitment to elaborating brand attachment to Russian national identity, aside from some attempts to link to the pre-Soviet Tsarist era (Fabrykant 2018). This situation persisted until the 1998 economic crisis, and then only because large multinational brands exited the market and allowed Russian companies to respond (Morris 2005). In other words, *Yeltsin's regime failed to draw in multiple, autonomous actors in political and economic society for the production of banal ties between state and nation.*

Civil society actors also made little headway in cultivating banal ties between state and nation. In the de-institutionalized political environment of the 1990s, the formation of national identity in post-Soviet Russia might better be described as society-led rather than state-led, and even as a response to the state's obvious failings. World Values Survey data finds that pride in civic nationality remained low throughout the 1990s, with those claiming to be "very proud" never surpassing 30% (Inglehart et al. 2014). Instead, Serguei Oushakine (2009) describes the collective practices of grief and discourses of bereavement on a quotidian level as a 'patriotism of despair.'

Civic nationality thus failed to become a routinely meaningful social identity among ordinary Russians. On the contrary, many citizens rejected the government's civic national project in favour of ethno-nationalism: according to Levada Centre (2018) surveys, the view of ethnic Russians "as a great nation, bearing particular significance in world history" rose markedly from 1992 through 1999 (from 13% to 57%), while the civic perception that Russians "are a nation like any other" declined precipitously (from 80% to 36%). In my own interviews, respondents remembered the 1990s as the "least patriotic time" to be Russian and some even referred to the 1990s simply as the time "before Putin"—memories that conform to Putin's own representations of the decade (Malinova 2018). Ultimately, the failure to incentivize civic nationhood left Yeltsin's successor unfettered by either regime elites or society in appropriating Soviet-era symbols and opposition nationalist demands while advancing patriotic justifications for autocracy.

Putin's Russia: Autocratization and incomplete monopolization

Rather than seek a clean break with the Soviet past, Vladimir Putin instead sought a clean break with the 1990s. Real movement on officially adopting state symbols only came after Putin's Unity faction shared leadership of the Duma with the Communist Party following the 1999 elections. With the Communists' support, Yeltsin's wordless and unfamiliar national anthem was replaced with the Soviet-era anthem with new lyrics penned by one of its original authors (Kolstø 2006).

By the end of Putin's first term, the emergence of United Russia as a dominant party and the muting of ideological challenges moved the Kremlin firmly in the direction of a patronal regime (Hale 2014). Rising authoritarianism in Russian politics was soon matched by a monopolistic approach to banalization in which state-sponsored symbols and narratives were imposed in top-down fashion and widely disseminated through state institutions and media. The state's promotion of patriotism centred on Soviet-style patriotic education (Sanina 2017) and "the rehabilitation of fatherland symbols and institutionalized historical memory, the instrumentalization of Orthodoxy for symbolic capital, and the development of militarized patriotism based on Soviet nostalgia" (Laruelle 2009, 154). The government solicited and funded the creation of new military-patriotic films and broadcast media (Norris 2012). Soviet history was rehabilitated in Russian education, with an emphasis on the Second World War and the Soviet state's achievements as a world power. New patriotic symbols were produced under the regime's direction and their uses monitored under what Oushakine refers to as 'affective management.' For example, the new St. George's Ribbon began to be mass produced in 2005 for distribution to Muscovites to wear and display, but organizers condemned attempts to commercialize (or otherwise make unsanctioned use of) the ribbons (Oushakine 2013, 284-298). The government also promoted the creation of patriotic social organizations at the local and regional levels, though sometimes these groups appropriated patriotism as a brand to legitimate their own activities (Le Huérou 2015).

A step-change in the promotion of state patriotism occurred first with the 2011-2012 election cycle, and then in 2014 with the Sochi Olympics and the annexation of Crimea. First, the election protests in 2011-2012 deeply shook the regime, as nationalist and liberal opposition joined forces in mass demonstrations for fair elections (Kolstø 2016; Popescu 2012). Against the background of rising protest sentiment and declining economic performance, Putin advanced a deeply conservative social and political agenda that mixed cultural conservatism and anti-Westernism with state patriotism. In practical terms for state-society relations, this meant the state's withdraw from its informal "nonintrusion pact" with society—the unspoken understanding

that the state would not interfere with citizens' private lives in exchange for their acceptance of the regime (Petrov, Lipman, and Hale 2014, 5-6).

Following the Sochi Olympics, the annexation of Crimea, and the launching of an undeclared war in eastern Ukraine in 2014, state patriotism became a daily fact of life. In domestic politics, the consequences included record levels of popular support for Putin as well as a chilling of dissent (Suslov 2014; Teper 2016). The regime's campaign in Ukraine fragmented nationalist opposition in domestic politics (Verkhovsky 2016). In 2016, Putin declared that "we can have no other unifying national idea but patriotism," and that "it needs to be in everyone's minds, but it's not sufficient that you or I mention it 100 times. That's not enough...it has to be part of our consciousness, understand? That means we have to talk about it constantly, everywhere, at all levels." (Putin 2016)

Despite Russia's growing economic constraints (the imposition of international sanctions, the sagging value of energy exports, and the crash of the rouble), funding for patriotic education soared—rising to 1.67 billion roubles in 2016 (Pravitel'stvo RF 2015) compared to its original, largely symbolic budget of 130 million roubles in 2001 (Blum 2006). In addition, presidential grants awarded millions of roubles to patriotic proposals from non-governmental organizations (Kozlov 2016). Even pro-business environmentalists signalled their loyalty with 'ecological patriotism' in urging the Kremlin to create loyal, domestic alternatives to allegedly subversive international groups like the World Wildlife Foundation and Greenpeace (Chernykh 2016). In sum, *the Kremlin's strategy of monopolization appears successful among elites insofar as the repetition of regime-supplied patriotic symbols and repertoires are now understood as a routine cost of gaining access to the state's power and resources.*

The limits of monopolization: Unpacking public and private patriotism

Turning to the societal level, to what extent has monopolization been successful in cultivating citizens' ambivalence about regime-imposed symbols and repertoires in public life? Over the course of in-depth interviews conducted with Russian citizens in two regional capitals (Tiumen in 2014 and

Perm in 2015-2016) on the ways that patriotism is encountered or practiced in daily life, a distinction emerged between private (everyday) and public (official) patriotism.

Far from becoming banal, official patriotism was associated with blatant public displays, celebrations, and commemorations organized by the state (most often 9th May). The state's patriotic repertoires were well understood in relation to the current regime. While focus groups struggled to agree on patriotic repertoires related to 1990s, they had virtually no hesitation when it came to the present day. They also represented state patriotism as something expected of normal states and even as necessary task of government. Among pensioners, the perception that the state stopped promoting patriotism after the Soviet Union's collapse was a significant complaint (though an equally significant complaint was that the state often gets it wrong). At the same time, the state's promotion of patriotism was *not* seen as obligating citizens to support the state in an active way. Defending the motherland was identified as patriotic in principle, but not military service—in fact, military service could even have a negative effect on one's self-identification as a patriot. Citizenship was viewed as a purely legal category with no patriotic associations. Voting was never mentioned in the same breath as patriotism. Even opposing the regime's enemies (internal or external) was rarely mentioned as patriotic.

Significantly in relation to the regime context, state patriotism was seen as something that happens to *other people*. Many were convinced that the majority of their fellow citizens were "genuine" patriots in the sense of being loyal to Putin's regime while distancing their own views from that of the presumed patriotic majority. This kind of response bears a relationship to "third person effects" in communications studies, or the notion that people act in accordance with expectations of how everyone else will behave (Davison 1983). Such effects are reinforced by a relatively closed information environment and increasingly monitored social media that can facilitate a "spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann 1974) concerning political alternatives to the regime. The practical effect of the state's monopolization of patriotism is that citizens' roles have more to do with performing loyalty than with civic participation.

In contrast with official patriotism, respondents associated everyday patriotic sentiment with an authentic emotional tie. First and foremost, it is bound to motherland rather than state or regime. One does not choose one's motherland, just as one cannot choose to fall in love. In fact, patriotism was often expressed as a kind of unrequited love: as one respondent put it, "patriotism is love for the motherland, but it would be nice if it were mutual!"⁹ For most Russians, the motherland that matters in daily life is the "little motherland" (usually referring to one's place of birth or hometown), and everyday patriotism relates to one's family, friendship networks, and traditions.

In contrast to the recency of official patriotism, everyday patriotism is enduring. Importantly, this also means that everyday patriotism spans the boundaries of state and regime, incorporating the Soviet era and even the 1990s. In other words, everyday patriotism diminishes the meaning and significance of official patriotism, which appears inauthentic by comparison since politics is viewed as spoiling patriotism by its association with power, greed, or hypocrisy.

A further limitation of the state's monopolization strategy is found in citizens' attempts to reconcile the difference between public and everyday patriotism by ethnicizing patriotism. Ethnicizing is not imposed 'from above', as official patriotism rarely emphasizes overtly ethnic themes and generally promotes inter-ethnic tolerance. Nevertheless, interview respondents often made sense of complex international conditions and especially the conflict with Ukraine in terms of ethnicity as a powerful, unifying force—whether in terms of Russian ethnic peculiarities, Slavic ethnic unity (rarely), or in terms of defining essential differences between Russia and the (seemingly non-ethnic) West. Ethnicity thus becomes bound up with political loyalty: as one respondent put it, "if you call yourself *russkii* [ethnically Russian], then that is already to be a patriot. I think that these words aren't even differentiated."¹⁰ Among all categories of respondents, ethnicizing was predominantly observed among youth (23-29 years) – that is, the generation first targeted by the new patriotic education, and which ought to be most resistant to ethnicizing.

In sum, Putin's attempts at banalization by way of monopolization have had mixed success as well as unintended consequences. The state supplies and regulates the use of patriotic symbols,

narratives, and tropes – for instance, by offering presidential grants for patriotic projects or contracting for patriotic celebrations. Federal and regional governments provide the resources, rubrics, occasions, and space within which state patriotism may be practiced, but the regime carefully patrols the boundaries of patriotic expression and makes it risky for citizens to innovate. On a societal level, there is significant unevenness in the advance of banalization. This was most apparent in focus groups, where pensioners and state employees largely embraced the state’s brand of patriotism. This does not mean that they are uncritical of the Kremlin—indeed, they frequently complain about social policy and corruption—but they tended to accept state patriotism as both common sense and personal. By contrast, entrepreneurs perceived state patriotism as blatant and they were not ambivalent about it (though not necessarily opposed to the regime). Perhaps most emblematic of the limited success of the Kremlin’s monopolization strategy is found in the university students, who were utterly ambivalent and lumped together public and private patriotism in equal measures. *If a criterion for successful monopolization on a societal level is that citizens cease to care about the routine imposition of the state’s imagery and repertoires, the ambivalence of Russian students is perhaps a sign that the Kremlin is gradually succeeding in turning blatant nationalism into banal nationalism.*

Conclusion

This article proposes an original theoretical framework to conceptualize how banal nationalism is sought and produced in different kinds of regimes, using post-Soviet Russia as a ‘pathway case’ to flesh out these understudied processes in hybrid and autocratic regimes. By specifically targeting the production of banal nationalism as a process, this approach unpacks the mechanisms by which it is produced rather than relying on an implicit notion of banal nationalism as the product of nation-building policies and time. Its theoretical advantage over existing approaches is three-fold: first, it reflects the pragmatic political reality that national identities matter (and do not matter) in different ways for democracies and non-democracies. Similarly, it acknowledges that state capacities, elite

competition, and state-society relations vary in distinctive ways among democracies and non-democracies. Neither the literatures on banal nationalism nor nation-building have attempted to address these differences systematically, while the political science literature on authoritarianism generally eschews discussions of identities.

Second, the framework paves the way for considering not just the success or failure of banalization but also their consequences for regime trajectories. Just as sequencing matters for the course of regime transition, so it appears to matter for banalization. The case study illustrates how the failure of incentivization strategies in 1990s Russia paved the way for the Kremlin to shift to a monopolization strategy under Putin—not just in terms of the absence of elite constraints on the regime, but also in the lack of resistance in state-society relations. If a lesson of the Russian case is that failed incentivization enabled later monopolization, it is worth considering the reverse scenario: whether successful incentivization can constrain or even deter future attempts at autocratization? In counterfactual terms, this suggests that it would have been harder for Putin to steer Russia in an autocratic direction had Yeltsin been successful in incentivizing civic nationhood. Likewise, the success of prior monopolization may threaten a regime's attempt to re-define or incentivize the relationship between state and nation in response to changing conditions. The framework thus suggests additional hypotheses for future comparative investigation concerning the effects of prior attempts at banalization and regime survival.

Third, this framework helps to relate the mode of banalization to the scope of citizens' agency in autocracies. While the activation of national sentiment in the course of contention and mobilization are associated with perceptions of 'eventful' time (Sewell Jr. 1996; Beissinger 2002), banalization entails a lengthening of time horizons for citizens such that autocracy or democracy comes to be viewed as 'given' or inevitable. To the extent that incentivization involves a variety of social and economic sectors in the innovation and elaboration of national identities, citizens have numerous opportunities to engage in discursive and mobilizational action in the name of the nation without the state's explicit approval. Where it proves successful, national identity becomes a source

of legitimate authority that is autonomous of the state and accessible by a wide range of social actors.

By contrast, monopolization excludes participation in discursive and mobilizational activity except where explicitly sanctioned or credentialed by the state. The unintended consequence is the potential politicization of citizens' everyday practices that subvert the state's monopolization of national imagery. Hence, monopolization failures can be lethal for non-democracies, leading them either to crack down or to co-opt those practices into official repertoires. In this fashion, both incentivization and monopolization put the spotlight on citizens' everyday practices as not just constitutive of national identities, but also as constitutive of institutions and regimes. Focusing on everyday practices is thus a helpful corrective to approaches examining authoritarianism and nationalism in terms of elites, policies, and formal institutions, by restoring the everyday agency of ordinary citizens.

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¹ A full comparison across democratic, hybrid, and autocratic regimes would go well beyond the confines of available space. Since most existing work on banal nationalism focuses on established democracies, this analysis concentrates on the more novel examination of banalization in non-democracies.

² It is perhaps worth noting that the terms 'everyday ethnicity,' 'everyday nationhood,' and 'everyday nationalism' are not often distinguished in the literature, though they share the same core focus on social practices, repertoires, and performances that are constitutive of national identities.

³ Billig mentions in passing the notion of *enhabitation* as a means by which this process might occur but, to be fair, his chosen task was to challenge the assumption that Western democracies are somehow immune to nationalism. However, one might draw clues from the first wave of constructivist works that identify long-term

historical processes of modernization and linguistic assimilation or vernacularization (A. D. Smith 2011)—either imposed in top-down fashion or market-driven—as crucial to spreading the notion of the nation as an imaginable and sovereign entity.

⁴ Both nationalizing and banalizing states share the notion that the state contains a core nation or nationality and that state action is needed to strengthen the nation. To these, nationalizing processes further claim ownership of the state by the core nation, complain that the core nation is weak or unhealthy, and argue for state action to address current or past injustices against the core nation.

⁵ The author is grateful to Ekaterina Semushkina and Valeriia Umanets for research assistance and to Prof. Oleg Lysenko and his team at Perm State Pedagogical University for conducting and transcribing the focus groups.

⁶ Patriotism was chosen as a focus rather than nationalism since the latter is understood by most Russians as referring to extremism or ethnic separatism.

⁷ For a fuller discussion of the interview data and patriotic categories of practice, see Goode 2016.

⁸ From 1991 to 1999, the nationalities ministry changed its name and leadership eight times.

⁹ Author's interview, Perm', 27 November 2015.

¹⁰ Author's interview, Tiumen', 6 August 2014.