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**HOW TO GET AWAY WITH
MURDER IN RUSSIA: POLITICAL
SUPPORT IN THE TIMES OF
CRISIS. EVIDENCE FROM THE
SURVEY EXPERIMENT**

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How to Get Away with Murder in Russia: Political Support in the Times of Crisis. Evidence from the survey experiment [†]

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Abstract

Economic crises are expected to erode domestic political support for the existing regime. However, in comparison with democracies, autocracies enjoy more of a leeway responding to economic downturns due to their ability to strengthen their clientelistic ties and increase the level of repression ('the tragic brilliance'). Since 2013, the Russian economy has been undergoing a deep and protracted recession, which was further aggravated by the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent imposition of international sanctions. The latter slashed the purchasing capacity and disposable income of the Russian citizens by half. At the same time, the annexation of Crimea provided the regime with a significant boost in popularity. The latter consolidated the citizens and reinvigorated the feeling of national pride. Taking into consideration these two contradictory tendencies – economic downturn and patriotic consolidation – is there evidence of Russian citizens willing to punish the incumbent authorities for the economic crisis?

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Does the 'the rally around the flag' help the incumbent in the times of economic crisis? We carried out a survey experiment on the eve of the State Duma elections in August 2016 to scrutinize the causal effects of perception of crisis and patriotic uprising on political blame attribution. First, we find the priming effect of question about Crimea: those who were exposed to this question evaluate the president more favorably, but this tendency does not extend to their assessment of the State Duma and the government. Those exposed to the question about the economic crisis, reveal a more critical assessment of the State Duma and the government, while the president's approval remains unchanged. The State Duma does not benefit from 'the rally 'round the flag', while the president is not punished for the crisis. Second, when we compare the mediation effect of the rally 'round the flag under economic crisis with the economic crisis alone, we find that the presidential support increases while those of the State Duma and the government decreases. In the opposite case, when economic crisis intervenes with patriotic fervor - the president's support is not affected, while the Duma and the government do not seem to benefit.

JEL Classification: D72, F5, P48.

Key words: blame attribution, economic crisis, rally around the flag, public opinion in autocracies, survey experiment.

Introduction

Since 2013 Russia found itself in a situation of economic recession that stemmed from domestic economic imbalances and drop in the oil export prices. Citizens' purchasing capacity shrunk dramatically by Fall 2014 after economic sanctions and Russian embargo had been implemented¹. At the same time, the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 boosted the political ratings of Vladimir Putin up to 80+% (Volkov, 2014, Frye et al., 2017). The phenomenon of a sudden increase in political support due to temporary consolidation around the national

¹<http://www.forbes.ru/news/334955-lichnoe-blagopoluchie-okazalos-dlya-treti-rossiyan%-vazhnee-velichiya-strany>

leader was coined a “rally ‘round the flag” (Mueller, 1970). Despite of the currency crisis in Fall 2014 and subsequent recession, the political support remained abnormally high until recently. The study by Frye et al.(Frye et al., 2017) provides some evidence that the true preferences of Russian citizens are not dramatically far away from the numbers reported by the Russian pollsters.

Since 1990 there are not so many cases when economic downturns coincided with the massive ‘rally around the flag’ effects (?): The Gulf War in USA 1990, 1991, Israel 2002, military operation *Boleas* in South Africa 1998, Turkey against Iraq in 2007, Columbia against Ecuador and Venezuela 2008 (see Table 1). Russia encountered such economic and geopolitical circumstances several times: in 1999 after the South-Asian ‘twin crisis’ and the beginning of the second Chechen war; in 2008 when the global financial crisis overlapped with the conflict with Georgia over South Ossetia; and, finally, the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

[Table 1 about here]

Usually the patriotic consolidation proves to be fairly short-lived, but the Russian ratings have demonstrated the sustainability of this tendency despite the worsened economic conditions. The study of public opinion in Russia provide an opportunity to analyze the interaction between the perceptions of economic dynamics in the times of patriotic ascent, as well as the mechanisms of blame attribution.

In this study we question whether “rally ‘round the flag” or patriotic ascent help political elites in the hard times? Do all political institutions benefit equally from the ”rally ‘round the flag” effect? Do economic perceptions diminish respondents’ political support during the patriotic ascent?

To circumvent potential endogeneity problems, we employ the experimental design where we randomized the question items regarding perceptions of economy and attitudes towards the Crimea rejoining the Russian Federation. We expected the Crimea question to be potentially sensitive and to frame subsequent answers in a more optimistic way. While the

questions about economy were expected to re-frame following answers in a more critical way. The overall sample was divided into four groups where the control group did not receive any treatment, second group received the Crimea treatment, third group - the economy treatment, and, finally, fourth group - both treatments (the question about economy followed the question about Crimea). This design allows us to observe ‘the rally ‘round the flag’ produced by Crimea relative to respondents’ assessments of the current economic situation. Apart from the treatment effects, we can also track how substantive responses to the treatment questions alter the assessment of how effective political institutions are.

The paper contributes to the literature on public opinion under non-democratic conditions, mechanisms of blame attribution, and the political consequences of economic recession in non-democratic regimes. The paper consists of the theoretical section, methods and analysis section followed by the discussion and preliminary conclusions.

Theoretical framework

Economy and political support

Economic crises are said to have an impact on the domestic political regime or governmental changes (Linz and Stepan, 1978, Haggard and Kaufman, 1995, Gasiorowski and Power, 1998, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000, 2008). Previous large-N cross-sectional analysis suggests that in general economic downturns tend to harm the stability of political regimes and lead to governmental alternations in democracies or even sliding back to authoritarianism. On the other hand, the political harm due to economic crisis depends on adjustment policies and coalitional politics (Pepinsky, 2009, 2012). Some political regimes succeed to absorb the shock energy of the crisis through re-arranging the relations with interest groups and even ruling coalitions. According to the conventional wisdom, economic crises erode domestic political support for the existing regime. However, in comparison with democracies, autocracies enjoy more leeway in their responses to such crises and economic downturns, due to their

ability to strengthen their clientelist ties. Predictions regarding authoritarian regimes are ambiguous: there is evidence that resource-based non-democracies are more vulnerable to economic crises (Haggard, 2000, Pei and Adesnik, 2000), on the other hand, in-depth studies of how elections operate in relatively poor autocracies provides proof that these regimes can be even more resistant to economic downturns (Goloso, 2016). If average economic well-being decreases, the cost of an additional vote drops down as well, which opens opportunity for electoral clientelism and vote buying. As voters' vulnerability grows, it becomes easier to exercise control over their actions. Authoritarian context makes these voters particularly vulnerable and unprotected in cases of political non-compliance. The worse economic conditions are, the more support the incumbent gets (the 'tragic brilliance' thesis) (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2003, Magaloni, 2006, Levitsky and Way, 2010). Authoritarian regimes are on average less economically sustainable, however there are prominent instances where authoritarianism is backed up by a relatively high per capita income (e.g. China, Singapore, Malaysia, Russia). This may cast serious doubts that individual well-being would worsen to such a degree that they would become exposed to clientelistic practices, especially in big cities. Relatively well off city-dwellers may also be frightened through controlled voting (Frye et al. 2015) or unwilling to express their true level of support given the preference falsification that is widespread in authoritarian regimes. Finally, even in democratic regimes subjective perceptions of economic dynamics play a more decisive role in explaining political support (Kaufman, 2009, Gélinau, 2013). There are grounds to believe that the same is applicable to authoritarian regimes. However, these perceptions can be blurred with preference falsification or other factors that shape public opinion in the context without free flows of politically relevant information.

The rise of patriotism or the "rally 'round the flag"

"Rally around the flag" *ceteris paribus* boosts political support for the ruling authorities (Mueller, 1970, Chatagnier, 2012). However, these peaks proved to be shortlived. Russia

makes an interesting case where the splendid little wars occur with some regularity since 1999 and bring about significant increase in political support. Mueller emphasizes three criteria that suffice for “a rally around the flag” effect: 1) the event must have an international scale, 2) the event must be immediately associated with the executive; 3) the event must be salient and have some historical value (Mueller 1970: p.21). Some scholars claim that emotional perceptions by citizens play a crucial role in the rally around the flag (Parker, 1995), while others highlight the uniqueness of the executive in the political institutional design of a country (Jordan and Page, 1992). Such consolidating events, usually military conflicts, downplay the opposition criticism of those in power inside the country and temporarily strengthen the incumbent’s positions. ”Rally ‘round the flag’ effect brings about growth in political support not only for the presidents (in presidential systems), but for all related institutions (parties, government etc.) (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003). Thus, the beneficial effects of consolidating patriotic events tend to spill over other political institutions - legislature, police, parties. Both strands of literature have several insights into how economy and contingent geopolitical events translate into political support, however there is a lack of understanding how both factors interact and how ‘the rally around the flag’ effects affect the longevity of modern forms of authoritarian rule.

Political support and economy in Putin’s Russia

Starting from the first competitive elections in 1990s, scholars revealed that Russian voters react to economic changes and tend to change their preferences accordingly. For instance, there is evidence of political business cycles in 1995 and 1996 elections (Gimpelson et al., 2000, Treisman, 1999) and voters rewarding the incumbent for the short-term inducements. There is also evidence of retrospective egocentric voting in the regions before the annulment of direct gubernatorial elections in 2005 (Konitzer-Smirnov, 2003). Since mid-1990s political support co-varies with aggregate economic indicators (Treisman, 2011). Political effects of the Great recession of 2008-09 in Russia were limited (Rose, 2011, Rose et al., 2011), but,

nevertheless, the crisis undermined political support of specific groups of citizens - primarily middle class and small business (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2012). Some scholars argue that voters' perceptions since mid-2000s are largely detached from economic fluctuations and tend to be rather 'sociotropic' (Rose, 2011, McAllister and White, 2008, 2011). On the other hand, cross-regional studies show the importance of gubernatorial political machines in early 2000s (Golosov, 2011, Hale, 2005) that boost the political support for federal powers in the regions. Economically vulnerable regions deliver more votes that serves as a condition for higher federal investments and subventions (Reuter and Remington, 2009, Bader and van Ham, 2015).

Drawing on the literature on Russia and comparative political economy literature, we articulate the following hypotheses:

Treatment effects:

H1: Those who are exposed to the treatment (T1) will evaluate the effectiveness of the Russian institutions at higher rates

H2: Those who are exposed to the treatment (T2) will evaluate the effectiveness of the Russian institutions lower

Interaction effect:

H3: The "rally 'round the flag'" will overlay negative influence of the economic crisis and bring about higher assessment of the Russian political institutions. In other words, there is a significant positive interaction effect of the Crimea and poor economy unfolding simultaneously.

Main effects:

H4: Those who are against Crimea rejoining the Russian Federation will be more critical of the Russian political institutions.

H5: Those who admit the severity of economic crisis will be more critical of the Russian political institutions.

Research Design

To test these hypotheses, we employed a randomized survey experiment on the all-Russia nationwide sample. We draw on the data from the regular Omnibus survey carried out by Levada Center on the 26-29th of August 2016, on the eve of the Russian legislative elections. The survey is based on the representative sample of 1601 respondents aged over 18. Table 1 of the Appendix shows summary statistics of the treatments, outcome variables, and covariates clustered by treatment groups. The experiment aims to estimate whether (1) the patriotic provoking treatment under economic crisis, or economic downturn interrupted by the “rally ‘round the flag’” will have statistically significant effect on respondents’ evaluation of the ruling authorities; (2) the main effects of the Crimean affair approval and recognition of economic crisis on the assessment of the authorities effectiveness, and (3) the moderation effect of Crimea (does ‘the rally ‘round the flag’ tones down the perceived severity of economic crisis?’) and poor economy (do economic downturns spoil the patriotic motivation). We conclude with running OLS regressions measuring how different is the effect of these treatments on the Duma, the president, and the government evaluation depending on whether respondents agreed or not with the statements in the treatment questions. We conducted the experiment two years after annexation of Crimea and one year after the latest economic shock in 2014-2015. Since the patriotic sentiments were highly strong just after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, while the economic crisis was only gaining momentum, the experiment was carried out in 2016, when both Crimea’s rejoining Russia and economic crisis became equally visible on the agenda. Two years after the annexation of Crimea, 87% of respondents approved Crimea’s rejoining the Russian Federation (April 2016²), while 82% agreed that Russia is undergoing economic crisis (April 2016³).

²<http://www.levada.ru/2016/04/07/krym-dva-goda-spustya-vnimanie-otsenki-sanktsii/>

³<http://www.levada.ru/2016/07/13/ekonomicheskij-krizis-i-potreblenie-2/>

Randomization

Randomization procedure was straightforward. We randomized sample twice. The first time we randomized respondents into groups A and B (see Figure 1). Respondents from the group A received either both or no treatment, while respondents in the group B received either ‘T1 Crimea’ or ‘T2 Economy’ treatment. The second randomization took place within groups A and B. Randomization within the A group sorted respondents into two subgroups: the Control group, which received no treatment, and the ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’ group, which received both treatments⁴. The B group was randomized into two subgroups, one of which received ‘T1 Crimea’ treatment while the other received ‘T2 Economy’ treatment. Eventually, we formed four groups, three of which were experimental while one was the control.

[Figure 1 about here]

Treatment variables

The control group received the battery of all evaluation questions (outcome variables) with no treatments, while in the three experimental groups evaluation questions strictly followed the treatment questions. The ‘T1 Crimea’ experimental group received the treatment question asking to evaluate one’s attitude to the rejoining of Crimea with Russia. The wording “Do you support Crimea’s rejoining the Russian Federation?” meant to provoke patriotic attitude towards the ongoing policies and, thereby, make subsequent assessments of the governing bodies more positive. The ‘T2 Economy’ experimental group received the question whether a respondent agrees or not with the statement that the Russian economy is going through an economic crisis. The wording of the treatment (“Many experts claim that Russia is undergoing economic crisis now. Do you agree with this?”) meant to stimulate a more critical assessment of the the Duma, president, and the government than in the control group.

⁴ First we asked whether respondents support annexation of Crimea and then followed the question asking whether Russia is currently undergoing economic crisis (See next chapter for details)

Lastly, the ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’ experimental group received both treatments. The treatment question about the state of economy was asked after the treatment question about the annexation of Crimea and then followed the questions asking to assess the effectiveness of the political institutions. We formulated treatment questions based on our knowledge of the general public attitude towards the annexation of Crimea and economic crisis in Russia. Preliminary expectations about the answers on treatment questions were obtained from the media and all-Russia surveys, which reported that almost 83% of the Russian support the annexation of Crimea while about 70% (by August 2016) agree that Russia is undergoing the economic crisis. We worded the treatment questions in the groups ‘T1 Crimea’ and ‘T2 Economy’ in a manner to provoke respondents to agree with the statements in them (the treatments suggested two options for answers: ‘Yes, I agree’, ‘No, I don’t agree’). While our major interest was how agreement with both statements in the group ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’ will affect evaluation of the ruling officials who are considered to be responsible for the Russia’s current policies. Those who endorsed the annexation of Crimea and at the same time agreed with poor state of economy in Russia both praise the authorities for geopolitical success and blame the same authorities for poor internal politics – this contains a contradiction, while the question at hand is what will be the resulting vector of the authorities evaluation in this contradiction.

Outcome variables

The outcome variables are the assessment of the State Duma, President Putin, and the government effectiveness. We ask respondents to rate the effectiveness of the incumbent authorities and put it on the scale from “1” for “extremely ineffective” to 4 for “extremely effective” (see Appendix for the exact wording). In this study we applied a formal approach to determining ‘the incumbent authority’ by the branches of power following the approach of the leading Russian polling centers (e.g. VCIOM or Levada Center), which conduct regular surveys on the level of approval of the governing authorities.

Analysis

In this section we present the results of our experiment and discuss a number of robustness checks.

Priming Effects of the Crimea Question and Economic Crisis

We compare the groups, which received both treatments (‘T1+T2 Crimea + Economy’) with each of the groups either received ‘T1 Crimea’ or ‘T2 Economy’ treatments (See Figure 2). This comparison sheds light on how economic crisis affects evaluation of the governing bodies under the rise of patriotic support of the regime (comparing ‘T1+T2 Crimea + Economy’ and ‘T1 Crimea’), while the opposite combination (comparing ‘T1+T2 Crimea + Economy’ and ‘T2 Economy’) examines evaluation of the governing bodies under the rise of patriotism with and without poor economy on the background. The groups are blocked on Age, Gender, Education, Economic Category, and Residential Area (see Covariates balances check in the Appendix).

[Figure 2 about here]

Main results of the ATE estimation are shown in Table 2 in Appendix. Columns 1 and 2 compare assessment of the Duma, the president, and the government in the group with both treatments (‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’) with the groups with either of the treatments (‘T1 Crimea’ or ‘T2 Economy’ respectively). We implement sample bootstrapping (1000 times) and standard errors bootstrapping (1000 times) procedures as an additional test to verify the reliability of the randomization. Comparing the effect of Crimea holding assessments of economy constant and, vice versa, the effect of perceptions of economy under patriotic ascent provoked by the annexation of Crimea, we find that the president benefits no matter whether the patriotic sentiment is primed by poor economy or whether the rise of patriotism unfolds under economic downturn, while the Duma and the government lose

in both cases. Interestingly, that the Duma and the Government are assessed in the same logic, while the President Putin evaluation stands out.

Randomized statistical inference (postestimation)

To check the robustness of the results obtained, we perform a number of statistical inferences tests. To test the null that the treatment effect is constant across all units, we start from a conventional t-test on the equality of means of the outcome variables between the two combinations of groups comparison (Tables 4-5 in Appendix). The results of the t-test indicate that the means of the Duma evaluation in the ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’ compared to the means in ‘T1 Crimea’ and ‘T2 Economy’ respectively are significantly different.

[Figure 3 about here]

We proceed with the two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney) test to compare the averages of the three evaluation outcomes in five different combinations. According to Kaiser (2007) estimations, Wilcoxon rank-sum test displays lower power efficiencies than the permutation test. So we check the validity of the Wilcoxon rank-sum test with the following Fisher–Pitman permutation test for independent samples (Fisher, 1937) and (Pitman, 1937), also referred to as a randomization test. We use permutation with 10,000 replications and see how the Monte Carlo permutation test agrees with the result of the Wilcoxon rank-sum test based on the normal approximation. Both tests confirm significant difference between ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’ compared to ‘T2 Economy’ for the Duma evaluation. The president’s efficiency evaluation is statistically different when compared ‘T2 Economy’ and ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’, while the government’s evaluation differs in ‘T1 Crimea’ and ‘T1 + T2 Crimea + Economy’ groups.

Regression estimates

We proceed with regression estimation and present the results in Table 3. We find that the Duma and the government's evaluations do not depend on the exposure to the Crimea question, while only the president's rating benefits in a significant way from the Crimea's rejoining Russia. We find quite the opposite for the exposure to the economic crisis question: the president's performance is the only one, which remains intact even for those who were exposed to the economy treatment. The Duma and the government are blamed for poor economy with lower assessment results. When both questions asked in sequence, we find that both the Duma and the government's assessment scores increase with supporting the annexation of Crimea and decreases with recognition of the economic crisis. However, the president's assessment is not exposed to the recognition of the crisis and only benefits from the support from annexation of Crimea. The interaction of the two questions, when respondents both support the annexation and recognize the economic crisis, shows a faint negative influence on the assessment of the Duma and the government and no effect of the presidential level of support. Thus we conclude that when the boost in patriotic sentiments is interrupted by the economic crisis, the governing bodies might lose except for the president, as his support remains unviolated.

[Figure 4 about here]

Discussion

Rally 'round the flag enhances the public support for the governing authorities. However, will the rally 'round the flag effect be the same lifesaving under the fall into dire straits of the economic crisis? And in the opposite - will the growing nation's unity under the rally 'round the flag be broken by the economic crisis? The results of this study show that overall the rally 'round the flag effect does help the regime in hard times. However, the only political actor who benefits is the president. No matter whether his assessment undergoes a

more critical judgment provoked by poor economy or the credit granted with the annexation of Crimea - he wins over while the Duma and the government lose.

We find that the president proves to be the only beneficiary from the rally ‘round the flag, which means that only the presidential effectiveness is positively associated with recognition of benefits from Crimea annexation. While at the same time his performance evaluation is the only (of the three institutions), which is not affected by poor assessment of economy and the president weathered the economic storm virtually unscathed. The interaction of the two treatments the Duma and the government receive lower scores, so the resulting vector of assessment will be negative when both poor economy and patriotic boost break in simultaneously - yet the presidential rating remains intact.

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Table 1: “Rally ‘round the flag” in the times of economic downturn 1990-2015

Event	Date	Country	Regime type	Economic growth	Δ political support
The Gulf War	02.08.1990	USA	Democratic	Negative	14%
Operation Desert Storm	17.01.1991	USA	Democratic	Negative	18%
War in Transnistria	23.03.1992	Russia	Democratic	Negative	13%
1st Chechen War	April 1995	Russia	Democratic	Negative	4%
The Alto Cenepa War	26.01.1995	Ecuador/Peru	Democratic	Positive	38%/7%
Operation Desert Fox	17.12.1998	USA	Democratic	Stagnation	9%
Operation Boeas	11.09.1998	South Africa	Democratic	Negative	15%
Conflict in Cargill	03.05.1999	India	Democratic	Stagnation	9%
2nd Chechen War	30.09.1999	Russia	Democratic	Stagnation	12%
War in Iraq	20.03.1999	USA/UK	Democratic	Stagnation	13% / 12%
Operation Protective Wall	29.03.2003	Israel	Democratic	Negative	40%
2nd Lebanon War	12.07.2006	Israel	Democratic	Positive	7%
Turkish incursion into northern Iraq	16.12.2007	Turkey	Authoritarian?	Negative	11%
Incursion of the Colombian military into Ecuador	01.03.2008	Colombia/Ecuador	Authoritarian	Negative/Stagnation	10%/8%
South Ossetian War	07.08.2008	Russia/Georgia	Authoritarian/Democratic	Negative	10%/9%
Senkaku boat collision incident	07.09.2010	Japan	Democratic	Positive	24%
Bombardment of Yeonpyeong	23.11.2010	South Korea	Democratic	Positive	3%
Military intervention in Libya	19.03.2011	France	Democratic	Stagnation	5%
Sino-Japanese territorial dispute	19.08.2012	Japan	Democratic	Positive	3%
Crimean crisis	02.03.2014	Russia/Ukraine	Authoritarian/Democratic	Negative/Stagnation	16%/5%
Southeast Ukraine War	Fall 2014	Ukraine	Democratic	Stagnation	8%
Operation ‘Protective Edge’	08.07.2014	Israel	Democratic	Positive	37%
Operation in Syria	30.09.2015	Russia	Authoritarian	Negative	4%

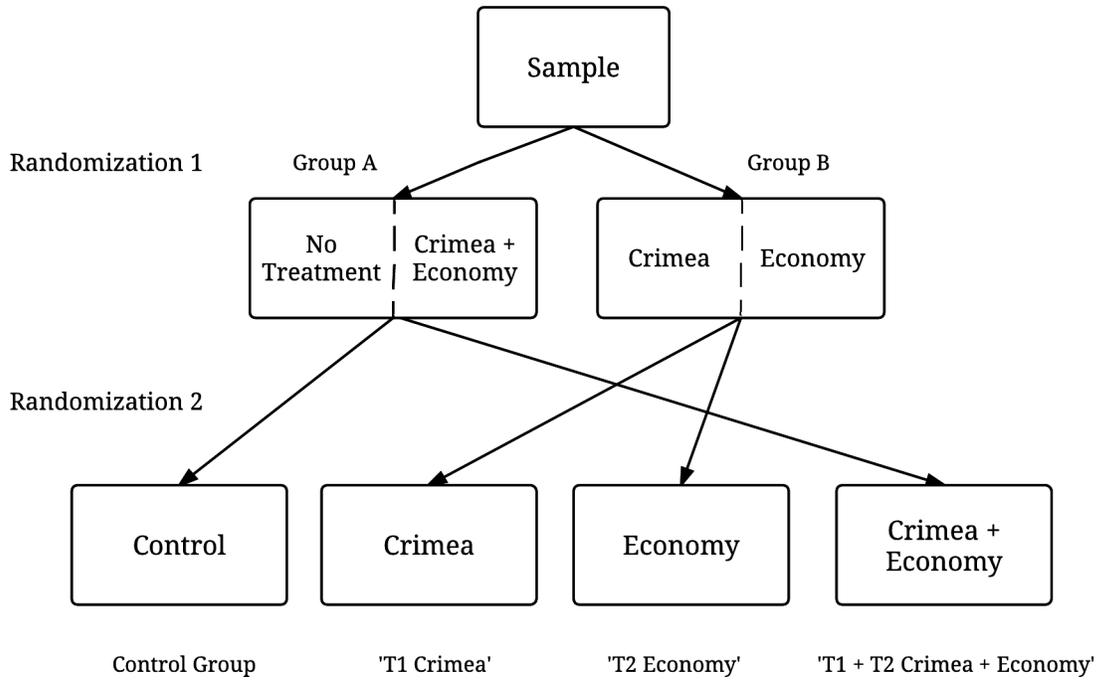


Figure 1: Randomization Procedure

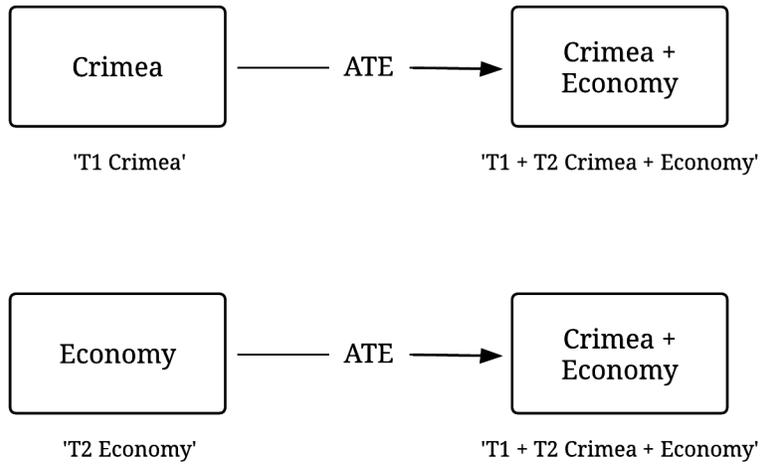


Figure 2: Estimation of the Effect of Crimea under Poor Economy and vice versa

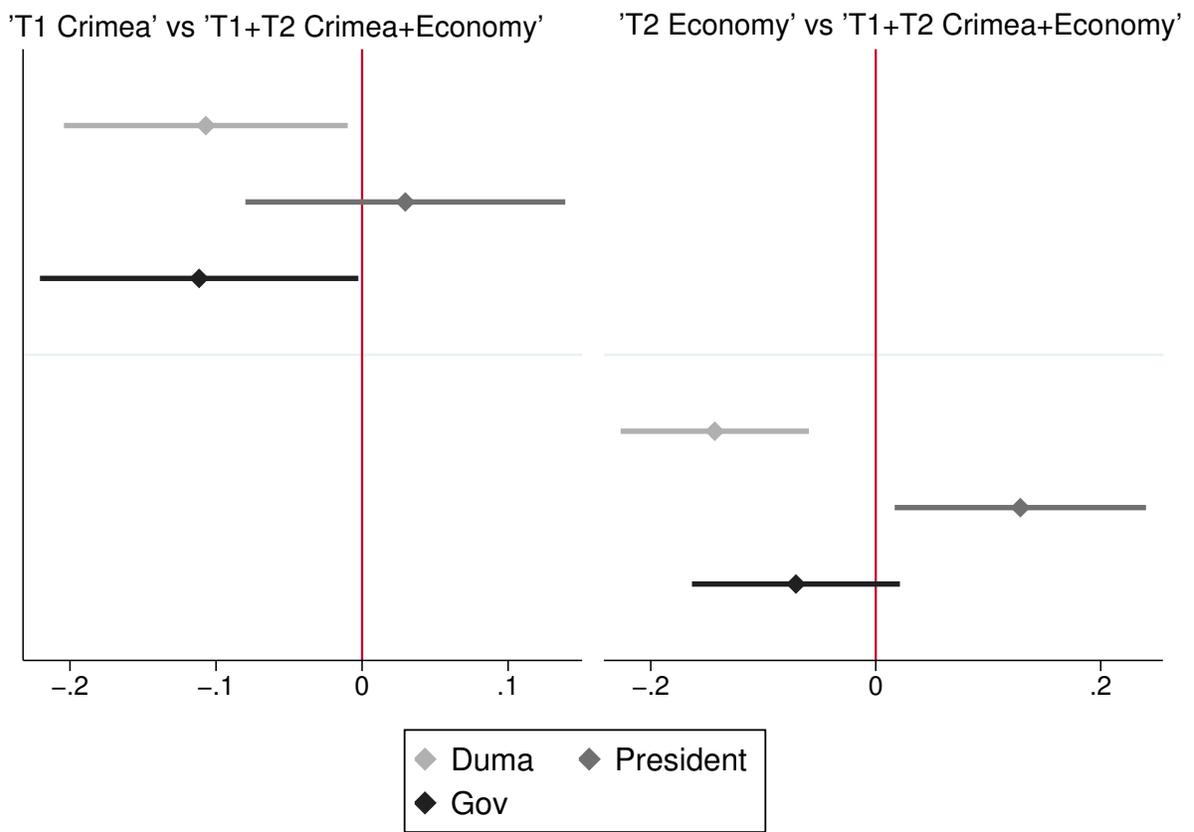


Figure 3: Moderating Effect of Crimea under Economic Crisis and vice versa

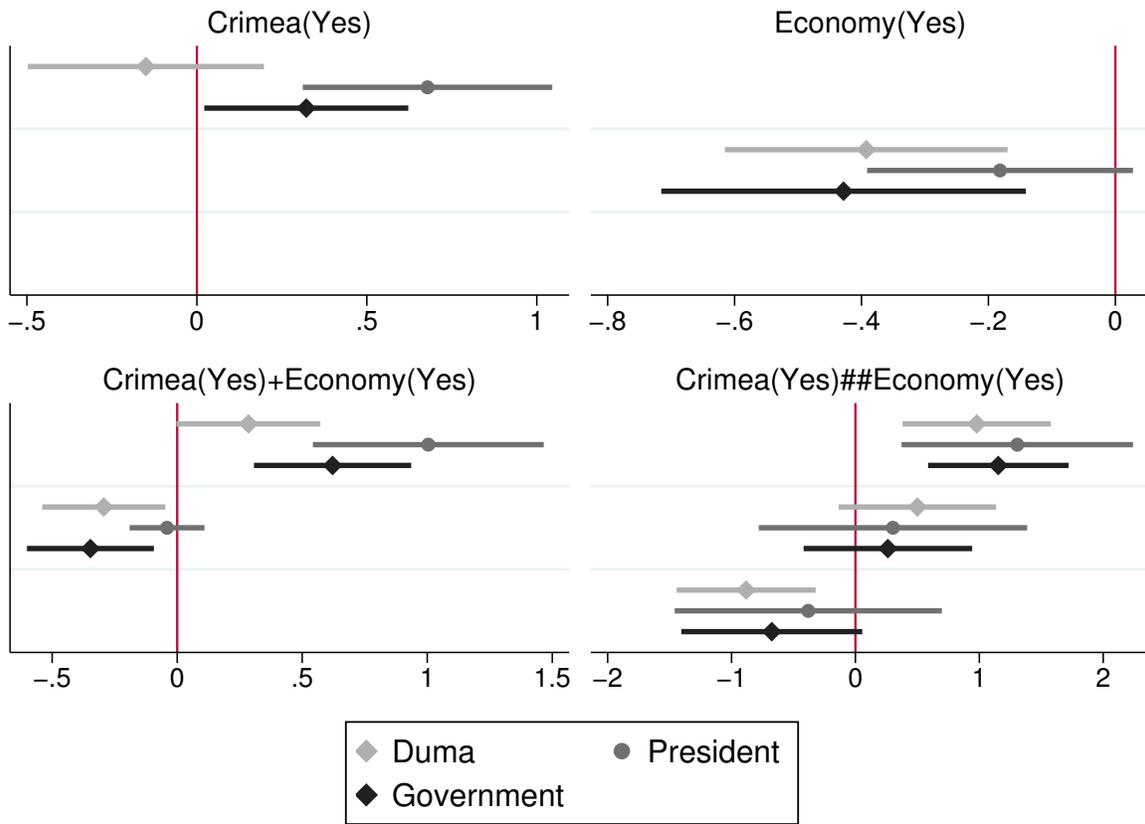


Figure 4: Regression Estimates and Interaction Effects

Each figure represents the results of regressing “yes” answers in the treatment questions on the estimation of effectiveness of the three incumbent authorities. The upper figures show the results for the ‘T1 Crimea’ and ‘T2 Economy’ groups (where respondents replied “yes” for supporting annexation of Crimea and in agreement that Russia goes through the economic downturn), while the two lower figures show the regression results in the ‘T1+T2 Crimea+Economy’ group, when the treatment questions were asked successively.

Table 2: Main results: Average treatment effect

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Crimea	Duma -0.08* (0.039)	Duma -0.10~ (0.060)	Duma -0.14*** (0.032)	President -0.08 (0.063)	President 0.04 (0.039)	President 0.13* (0.055)	Government 0.03 (0.053)	Government -0.10* (0.048)	Government -0.07 (0.060)
Economy	-0.11* (0.048)			0.02 (0.073)			0.07 (0.070)		
Crimea+Economy	-0.22** (0.066)			0.05 (0.052)			-0.04 (0.046)		
Crimea and Crimea+Economy									
Economy and Crimea+Economy									
Controls	yes 1.78*** (0.165)	yes 1.52*** (0.194)	yes 1.91*** (0.161)	yes 2.74*** (0.155)	yes 2.83*** (0.214)	yes 2.63*** (0.244)	yes 2.02*** (0.121)	yes 1.84*** (0.152)	yes 1.82*** (0.225)
Constant									
Observations	1,468	768	827	1,532	813	871	1,489	783	851
R-squared	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Adj. R-squared	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Omnibus Wald test	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00

Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ~ p<0.10

Table 3: OLS estimates: Support of Annexation of Crimea and Recognition of the Economic Crisis

VARIABLES	(1) Duma	(2) President	(3) Gover.	(4) Duma	(5) President	(6) Gover.	(7) Duma	(8) President	(9) Gover.	(10) Duma	(11) President	(12) Gover.
(YES)Crimea	-0.15 (0.182)	0.67*** (0.169)	0.32 (0.194)				0.29 [~] (0.162)	1.01*** (0.123)	0.62*** (0.165)	0.98*** (0.243)	1.29*** (0.322)	1.18** (0.423)
(YES)Economy				-0.35* (0.144)	-0.18* (0.087)	-0.43*** (0.146)	-0.30* (0.133)	-0.06 (0.084)	-0.37*** (0.123)	0.49* (0.209)	0.26 (0.298)	0.27 (0.411)
(YES)Crimea & (YES)Economy										-0.88*** (0.236)	-0.35 (0.378)	-0.71 (0.459)
Covariates	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Constant	2.11*** (0.372)	1.80*** (0.444)	1.51*** (0.226)	1.44*** (0.380)	2.99*** (0.339)	2.43*** (0.384)	1.79*** (0.391)	1.98*** (0.242)	1.78*** (0.263)	1.18** (0.418)	1.74*** (0.428)	1.30*** (0.411)
Observations	395	410	403	334	349	333	404	431	418	404	431	418
R-squared	0.01	0.07	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.06	0.07	0.11	0.07
Adj. R-squared	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.04	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.09	0.05
Omnibus Wald test	0.39	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ~ p<0.10

Table 4: Balances Check of Covariates (1)

Gender				
group	mean	t-test	Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney)	Fisher-Pitman permutation
No Treatment	1.53			
T1 Crimea	1.57	0.40	0.40	0.41
T2 Economy	1.54	0.69	0.69	0.68
T1+T2 Crimea+Economy	1.53	0.68	0.63	0.63
T1 Crimea and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.95	0.95	0.95
T2 Economy and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.15	0.15	0.15

Age				
group	mean	t-test	Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney)	Fisher-Pitman permutation
No Treatment	2.73			
T1 Crimea	2.83	0.19	0.17	0.17
T2 Economy	2.81	0.14	0.17	0.16
T1+T2 Crimea+Economy	2.68	0.82	0.88	0.88
T1 Crimea and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.16	0.88	0.16
T2 Economy and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.21	0.16	0.16

Education				
group	mean	t-test	Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney)	Fisher-Pitman permutation
No Treatment	5.70			
T1 Crimea	5.60	0.20	0.18	0.19
T2 Economy	5.71	0.56	0.59	0.59
T1+T2 Crimea+Economy	5.98	0.32	0.41	0.42
T1 Crimea and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.10	0.16	0.16
T2 Economy and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.01	0.02	0.02

Table 5: Balances Check of Covariates (2)

Economic Category				
group	mean	t-test	Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney)	Fisher-Pitman permutation
No Treatment	2.12			
T1 Crimea	2.09	0.70	0.71	0.70
T2 Economy	2.13	0.66	0.63	0.63
T1+T2 Crimea+Economy	2.13	0.95	0.93	0.93
T1 Crimea and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.68	0.67	0.68
T2 Economy and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.62	0.62	0.61

Residential Area				
group	mean	t-test	Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney)	Fisher-Pitman permutation
No Treatment	3.37			
T1 Crimea	3.36	0.95	0.98	0.98
T2 Economy	3.30	0.36	0.33	0.34
T1+T2 Crimea+Economy	3.24	0.37	0.34	0.34
T1 Crimea and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.93	0.93	0.93
T2 Economy and T1+T2 Crimea+Economy		0.30	0.28	0.28

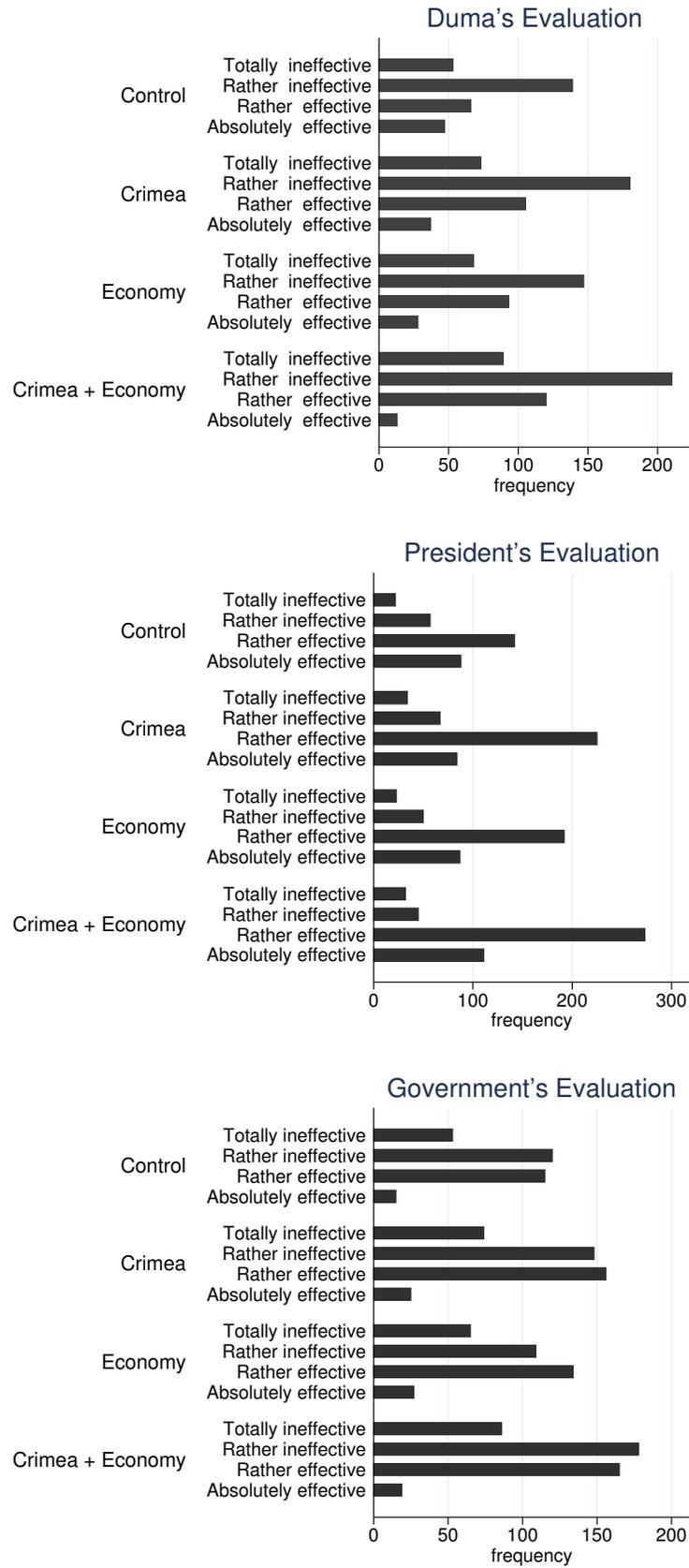


Figure 5: Approval of the federal authorities by group

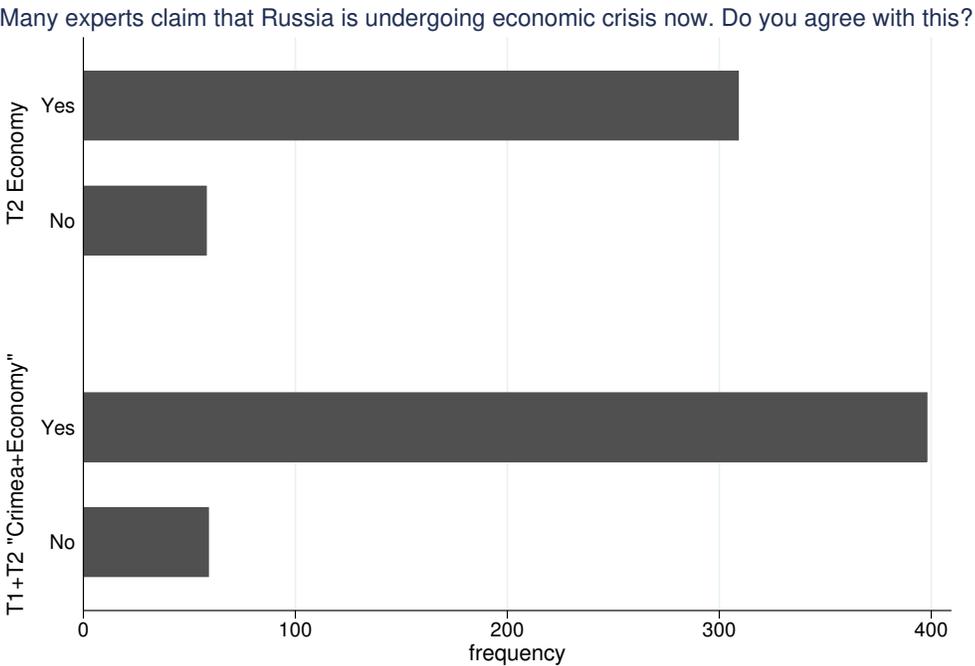
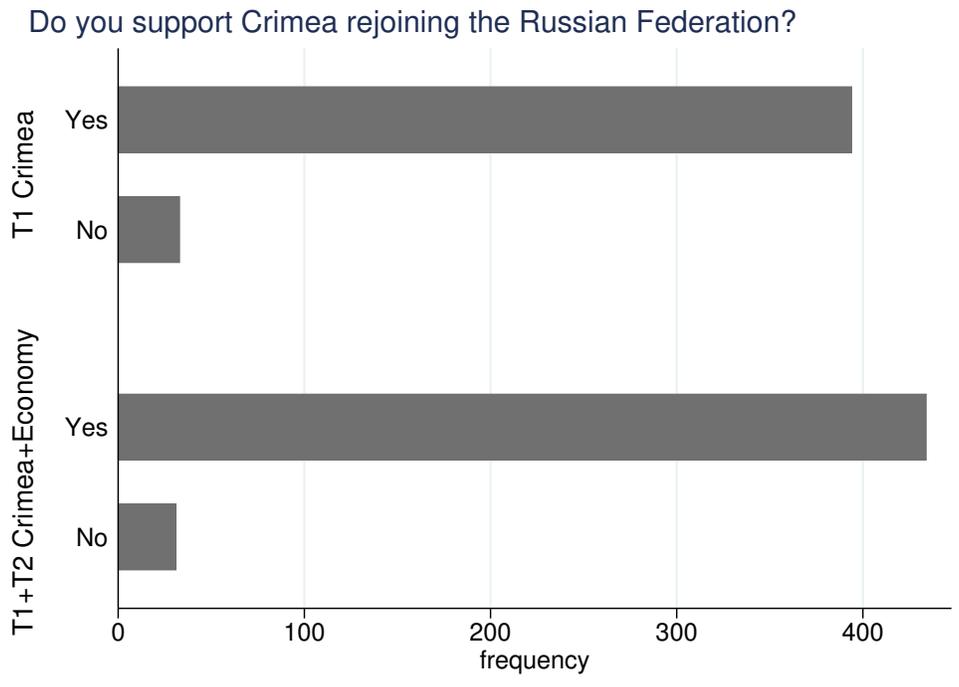


Figure 6: Distribution of Responses to the Treatment Questions

Table 6: Summary statistics: Control group

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Evaluation of State Duma	305	2,35	0,94	1	4
Evaluation of President	309	2,96	0,87	1	4
Evaluation of government	303	2,30	0,81	1	4
Gender	325	1,55	0,50	1	2
Age	325	2,70	1,06	1	4
Education	325	5,81	1,82	1	9
Economic Category	325	2,11	0,66	1	3
Size of Settlement	325	3,38	1,32	1	5
Political Bias	267	0,46	0,50	0	1
Objectivity of news	316	3,20	0,94	1	4
Frequency of news watching	296	2,72	0,74	1	4

Table 7: Summary statistics: “T1 “Crimea” group

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Evaluation of State Duma	395	2,27	0,87	1	4
Evaluation of President	410	2,88	0,83	1	4
Evaluation of government	403	2,33	0,84	1	4
Gender	427	1,58	0,49	1	2
Age	427	2,80	1,08	1	4
Education	427	5,63	1,80	1	8
Economic Category	427	2,09	0,66	1	3
Size of Settlement	427	3,38	1,30	1	5
Political Bias	349	0,48	0,50	0	1
Objectivity of news	423	3,15	0,95	1	4
Frequency of news watching	393	2,77	0,77	1	4

Table 8: Summary statistics: “T2 “Economy” group

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Evaluation of State Duma	336	2,24	0,87	1	4
Evaluation of President	352	2,97	0,81	1	4
Evaluation of government	335	2,37	0,89	1	4
Gender	370	1,53	0,50	1	2
Age	370	2,81	1,02	1	4
Education	370	5,72	1,90	1	9
Economic Category	370	2,13	0,67	1	3
Size of Settlement	370	3,29	1,30	1	5
Political Bias	314	0,46	0,50	0	1
Objectivity of news	365	3,19	0,96	1	4
Frequency of watching news	328	2,72	0,82	1	4

Table 9: Summary statistics: “T1+T2 “Crimea + Economy”

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Evaluation of State Duma	432	2,13	0,77	1	4
Evaluation of President	461	3,00	0,79	1	4
Evaluation of government	448	2,26	0,81	1	4
Gender	479	1,53	0,50	1	2
Age	479	2,71	1,01	1	4
Education	479	5,93	1,77	1	9
Economic Category	479	2,11	0,67	1	3
Size of Settlement	479	3,29	1,30	1	5
Political Bias	405	0,47	0,50	0	1
Objectivity of news	474	3,30	0,86	1	4
Frequency of news watching	434	2,74	0,73	1	4