The rise and fall of "Novorossiya": examining support for a separatist geopolitical imaginary in southeast Ukraine

John O'Loughlin[a]*, Gerard Toal[b], and Vladimir Kolosov[c]

[a]*Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO, USA*
johno@colorado.edu

[b]*School of Public & International Affairs, Virginia Tech, National Capital Region, Alexandria, VA, USA*

[c]*Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia*

In the spring of 2014, some anti-Maidan protestors in southeast Ukraine, in alliance with activists from Russia, agitated for the creation of a large separatist entity on Ukrainian territory. These efforts sought to revive a historic region called Novorossiya ("New Russia") on the northern shores of the Black Sea that was created by Russian imperial colonizers. In public remarks, Vladimir Putin cited Novorossiya as a historic and contemporary home of a two-part interest group, ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking Ukrainians, supposedly under threat in Ukraine. Anti-Maidan agitation in Ukraine gave way to outright secession in April 2014, as armed rebel groups established the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhans'k People's Republic on parts of the eponymous Ukrainian oblasts. Rebel leaders aspired to create a renewed Novorossiya that incorporated all of eastern and southern Ukraine from Kharkiv to Odesa oblasts. To examine the level of support for this secessionist imaginary in the targeted oblasts, our large scientific poll in December 2014 revealed the Novorossiya project had minority support, between 20 and 25% of the population. About half of the sample believed that the concept of Novorossiya was a "historical myth" and that its resuscitation and promotion was the result of "Russian political technologies." Analysis of the responses by socio-demographic categories indicated that for ethnic Russians, residents of the oblasts of Kharkiv and Odesa, for older and poorer residents, and especially for those who retain a nostalgic positive opinion about the Soviet Union, the motivations and aims of the Novorossiya project had significant support.

Keywords: public opinion survey; Russian-speakers; Russians; "New Russia"; geopolitical imaginary

Irrespective of whether one accepts that separatism in southeastern Ukraine is homegrown, manufactured by Russia, or some combination of both, the all-embracing geopolitical imaginary deployed to justify that separatism, Novorossiya, deserves careful examination (Kudelia 2014; Matsiyevsky 2014; Umland 2014; Wilson 2014; Menon and Rumer 2015; Sakwa 2015; Tsygankov 2015). Novorossiya has both a long and a contentious contemporary history. Its recent revival emerged in late Soviet Ukraine and within a coalition of "national-patriot" Russians who viewed the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union as a tragic fragmentation of the Russian nation. Novorossiya was one of a number of Russian nationalist fantasies about Ukraine in the 1990s (Lieven 1999, 106). Its re-emergence as an alternative territorial vision of Ukraine amidst the tumult of early 2014 took many by surprise.

A geopolitical imaginary is a geographic signifier that helps organize and anchor geopolitical discourse. Most are meta-geographical abstractions, like "the West" and "the East," which are put to use in multiple ways by political entrepreneurs, party organizations, and state elites. Some are mobilizational images, symbols and slogans for political movements. A few are the rallying cries of secessionist projects expressing alternative political geographies amidst crises of the existing territorial order, like "Republika Srpska" after Bosnia-Herzegovina's parliament moved towards independence in 1991–92, "Alania" for South Ossetians in Georgia, or "Tamil Eelam" during the civil war in Sri Lanka.

Novorossiya did not begin life as a secessionist imaginary but as an aspirational regional identity in reaction to the parliament of Soviet Ukraine proclaiming itself sovereign in the summer of 1990. After Ukraine became an independent state, only a few marginal groups within Ukraine and Russia clung to the idea of Novorossiya as a primordial imperial region. The idea persisted on the political margins within both states until the spring of 2014. The governance crisis precipitated by the Euromaidan protests created a moment of opportunity for a cross-border network of pro-Russia activists to seize power in the Donbas and beyond in southeast Ukraine. Though the activists were disorganized and disjointed, they were united by the idea of Novorossiya as an alternative political geography for southeast Ukraine, one that should be conjoined to and follow the path of Crimea towards "self-determination" and "rejoining" Russia. Rebel militia leaders posted maps of Novorossiya as comprising eight oblasts of southeast Ukraine—Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovs'k, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhans'k—decorated with the Donetsk People's Republic armed forces flag on their walls (see Figure 2 below for locations). The two secessionist entities unilaterally proclaimed by rebels in eastern Ukraine in the spring of 2014, the People's Republic of Donetsk (DPR, proclaimed 7 April) and the People's Republic of Luhans'k (LPR, proclaimed 27 April), held referenda, declared themselves sovereign, and jointly announced the creation of Novorossiya as a confederal Union of People's Republics in June 2014. Yet a year later, leading proponents of Novorossiya were proclaiming the project suspended and a failure (Whitmore 2015). Novorossiya was thus resurrected but only to live for two months as a live secessionist geopolitical project.

What precisely is Novorossiya and how popular was it as both an imaginary and as a separatist project in southeast Ukraine? This paper is divided into two major parts and a series of subsections. Part one examines Novorossiya in history and its subsequent reemergence as a separatist geopolitical imaginary. Part two examines the degree to which this geographical and political imaginary attracts support among the population of

southeastern Ukraine. We present the results of a public opinion survey that we conducted in December 2014 via contract to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in six of the eight oblasts that are claimed to represent Novorossiya, the exceptions being the Donetk and Luhans'k oblasts caught up in the war.

Novorossiya as geopolitical imaginary

The term "Novorossiya" appeared first in legal documents and then on geographical maps about 250 years ago. It was the name of a new Russian province (*guberniya*) created on the lightly populated steppe territories north of the Black Sea, controlled partly by the Zaporog Cossacks and partly by the Crimean khanate that was backed by the Ottoman Empire. It was "securitized" by annexation to the Russian Empire as a result of a number of wars with the Ottomans and approved by Empress Catherine II in 1764. The *guberniya* was subdivided into three provinces and consisted of Cossack regiments, the military, and administrative structures formed around military units raised from the local population and based on the principle that each territory would have its own militia. Militia members were simultaneously farmers and soldiers. Later the regiments were transformed into regular territorial units—*uyezds*. The territory of Novorossiyskaya Guberniya was constantly growing, expanding to include Russia's newly acquired lands around the Azov Sea. In 1803, Novorossiya was split into three smaller guberniyas but, until 1874, they were integrated within Novorossiya's general governorship. For most of its history, its political center was Odesa (see Figure 1 for the territorial extent of Novorossiya around 1800).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

To consider Novorossiya as part of either Russia or Ukraine before the twentieth century is presentist (i.e., an anachronistic use of present-day concepts to interpret the past) because distinct polities with these names did not exist. Ukrainian and Russian territories were identified only by the convention of naming lands after the dominant ethnic group in each administrative unit (Shubin 2015). Strict ethno-territorialism was not an administrative criterion: the boundaries between guberniyas never fully matched ethnic boundaries but were drawn depending on the orientation of different rural areas to important cities. In many territories such as the historical lands of Slobozhanshchina now divided between Russia and Ukraine in the Kharkiv-Belgorod area, the population was ethnically mixed, with Ukrainian-speakers being generally dominant in rural areas.

In the early twentieth century, geographers and historians delimited historical Novorossiya in different ways, with some not even including the Crimean Peninsula or the Kuban' and Stavropol' territories on the east side of the Black Sea. According to a well-regarded Russian source—a 19-volume geographical description of Russia (Semenov-Tian-Shansky and Lamansky Vol 14, 1910)—historical Novorossiya comprised of six guberniyas: Bessarabskaya, Khersonskaya, Tavricheskaya, Yekaterinoslavskaya, the Region of the Don Army, and Stavropol'skaya. Their respective capitals were Kishinev (Chişinău), Kherson, Simferopol, Yekaterinoslav (now Dnipropetrovs'k), Novocherkassk (now in Rostov Oblast), and Stavropol'. In Soviet times, the word "Novorossiya" was associated with the imperial past and used only in specialized books or in historical novels. Its connotations were with imperial adventure, glorious victories of Russian troops over the Ottoman Empire, and the

deeds of famous generals, such as the iconic Russian heroes Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov. Kharkiv, the main center of Slobozhanshchina only a few kilometers from the Russian border, was never part of Novorossiya (see also Clem 2014b). None of the political and administrative boundaries drawn during Communist rule corresponded to historical Novorossiya.

Novorossiya as a separatist geopolitical imaginary

The last years of the Soviet Union were a time not only of "thickened history" but also of intensely unstable political geography (Beissinger 2002). The declaration of sovereignty by Soviet Ukraine's newly elected parliament in July 1990 spurred the creation of movements opposed to the prospect of Ukrainian independence. In August 1990, a political movement in Odessa sought to revive the imperial territory of Novorossiya. Called the Democratic Union of Novorossiya, its main spokesperson was Oleksii Surylov, a professor at Odesa State University. He argued that the inhabitants of southern Ukraine were a separate ethnos—a melting pot of settlers from 10 neighboring nations—from ethnic Ukrainians with their own distinctive imperial history. Given this, Novorossiya should become an autonomous region within a federated Ukrainian state (Solchanyk 1994, 60). Surylov subsequently became involved in the mobilization of residents of Transnistria against the prospect of Moldova "re-uniting" with Romania. In September 1990 a self-constituting assembly in Tiraspol' proclaimed the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (PMR).

The collapse of the Soviet Union precipitated a crisis of geographic and political belonging for many of its nations. Within Russia, the notion of Novorossiya was not central to the well-known search for a new "Russian idea." Few of the prominent intellectual figures of this time used it. However, within far right and far left political circles, the idea of restoring the Soviet Union or at least creating a larger Russia that incorporated historic imperial lands where ethnic Russians were now supposedly "stranded" had many supporters. A catalyzing event in geopolitical debate at the time was the conflict in Moldova over Transnistria. From March until July 1992, fighting there was in the headlines in Moscow. Some young Russians traveled to Tiraspol' to join the separatist Transnistrian forces, and turned to the romantic idea of Novorossiya to justify and aggrandize their cause. Novorossiya was an appealing notion to some partisans of the PMR because it foregrounded the foundational role of the Russian empire in the region. The idea of the unification of Transnistria with southeast Ukraine, however, gained no traction. The whole enterprise retreated to the fringes after independent Ukraine and Russia signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership in 1997 in which they pledged to respect each other's territorial integrity.

Things changed, however, in the following decade and a half. When it appeared to Vladimir Putin and his inner circle that another "colored revolution" had violently forced Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych from power despite an agreement with the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland, he authorized a military operation to seize Crimea and enable a self-determination referendum that would legitimate its annexation by Russia (Wood et al. 2016). At the same time, the Kremlin appears to have authorized the Russian security services to use their influence to create territorial governance problems for the new pro-Western government in Kyiv. A plethora of networks were involved, and

their messages varied (Laruelle 2016). Some were former Communist Party member networks that agitated around protecting factories and workers in the Donetsk Basin (Donbas). Others were imperial nationalist groups that sought to create Novorossiya as a "red orthodox" project that mixed worker rights with the Orthodox religion and conservative morality. Yet other groups were interested in sparking a "Russian Spring" that would lead to a revolution against the rule of regional oligarchs (Rinat Akhmetov in the Donbas and Ihor Kolomoysky in Dnipropetrovs'k). Some groups, like the biker gang Night Wolves, gave expression to elements of all these aspirations (Tabor 2015). What united these different groups was their opposition to the new government in Kyiv after February 2014.

The initial figurehead of the Novorossiya movement in the Donbas was Pavel Gubarev, a businessman with a background in far right Russian nationalist politics. At a rally in Donetsk on 1 March as Russian military forces began their takeover of Crimea, Gubarev proclaimed himself the "People's Governor of Donetsk." He was arrested soon afterwards and thus lost out to others within the Donetsk People's Republic movement.[1] While Russian citizens were involved from the outset in the flag removals and occupations that characterized March 2014 in the Donbas, the protests articulated grievances that were highly localized (Kudelia 2014; Giuliano 2015). Indeed, the prevailing power structure coherence (or division) on the ground in the different cities and towns of southeast Ukraine played a major role in determining where separatism gained traction and where it did not (Popova and Shevel 2015; Portnov 2016). The conflict entered a new phase on 12 April when groups of armed fighters from Crimea seized buildings in the city of Slovyansk (Mitrokhin 2015). Ukrainian Interior Ministry forces tried to dislodge them the next day and heavy fighting broke out in the city and thereafter spread to the surrounding region. One of those who traveled from Crimea was Aleksandr Borodai, a Russian citizen born in Moscow. As a young man he fought in Transnistria in 1992, later becoming a writer and editor under the guidance of Aleksandr Prokhanov at the "national-patriotic" newspaper *Zavtra*. After rebels in Donetsk and Luhans'k staged self-determination referendums on 11 May, Borodai served as the first Prime Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) until early August 2014. The first defense minister of the DPR was Igor Strelkov (Girkin), a friend of Borodai and another veteran of the 1992 Transnistrian conflict and who later fought in the Army of Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Chechnya. In Crimea, both Borodai and Strelkov played active roles in facilitating its annexation by Russia. Many speculated that they sought to do the same in the Donbas and that they were indeed agents of the Russian state (Weaver 2014b).

After Gubarev was released from custody by the Kyiv government as part of a prisoner exchange, he established *Partiya Novorossiya* in Donetsk under his leadership on 14 May 2014. Activists attended the party's founding congress from the eight oblasts of southeast Ukraine it envisioned uniting into a separatist confederative state. Both Alekaandr Prokanov and Aleksandr Dugin, key intellectuals of Russian revisionist nationalism, addressed the delegates and promised their support. Oleg Tsarev was the only member of the Ukrainian Rada to defect to the rebels. That same month he formed an alternative Novorossiya movement "Popular Front for New Russia." It attracted delegates from all eight oblasts in southeast Ukraine. Tsarev subsequently became speaker of the putative federal parliament of Novorossiya in June 2014. By this time, however, the dream of a united Novorossiya had withered in the face of widespread local Ukrainian resistance, the

greater resonance of localized geopolitical imaginaries, and the fragmentation of authority among the rebels as locally embedded warlords jockeyed for the favor and patronage of Russia's security services.

Putin and Novorossiya

The attitude of the Putin presidency toward Novorossiya is a matter of debate (Toal 2016). Journalists have connected the dots between the Kremlin, the prominent "Orthodox oligarch" Konstantin Malofeev, and his former employees Borodai and Girkin (e.g., Weaver 2014a). How the Putin administration's policy emerged and evolved is a subject for future historians to detail. What we do know is Putin's public attitude in the key month of April 2014. A month after the Crimean annexation, Putin appeared on the television show *Direct Line*, an annual call-in show his administration has used to showcase him as an accessible, competent, and benevolent father of the nation (Ryazanova-Clarke 2013). It was in this context that Putin first spoke publicly about Novorossiya. The stimulus was a rather obsequious question from the former Russian politician Irina Khakamada, who asked if there was a possibility of a compromise solution in Ukraine with the United States, which she indicated was the real money power, more so than the EU, in Kyiv. Putin's response rejected her premise that outside powers can make a deal over Ukraine. "A compromise should be reached by the various political forces in Ukraine, not third parties. This is actually the key issue here. We can only support and accompany this process," he noted. He then continued:

> The essential issue is how to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in the southeast of Ukraine. I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiya (New Russia) back in the tsarist days—Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev, and Odessa—were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. Why? Who knows. They were won by Potemkin and Catherine the Great in a series of well-known wars. The center of that territory was Novorossiysk, so the region is called Novorossiya. Russia lost these territories for various reasons, but the people remained. Today, they live in Ukraine, and they should be full citizens of their country. That's what this is all about. (Putin 2014a)

There are three aspects of the Putin response worth underscoring. First, central to Putin's storyline about the Ukrainian crisis is the assumption that "ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in the southeast of Ukraine" were under threat, and in need of protection. This presumption assumes a coherent identity for a group that finds itself in a condition where they cannot secure their "legitimate rights and interests." This threat was said to have emerged in the wake of the "military coup" that overthrew the democratically elected president of Ukraine and forced him to flee under threat of execution. The effort in the Ukrainian Rada on 23 February to repeal the Yanukovych law allowing the Russian language official status at the regional level is also cited as evidence of this claim (this repeal was vetoed by acting President Turchinov on 3 March 2014).

Second, the Putin connection of this endangered group to a contemporary location ("southeast of Ukraine") that was previously part of Russia is more than a historical teaching moment. In naming Novorossiya, Putin was giving public legitimacy to this geopolitical imaginary. The notion that Ukraine was an "artificial state" is one that a number of radical Russian nationalists had held since the 1990s. Aleksandr Dugin's influential *Osnovy Geopolitiki* (*Foundations of Geopolitics*, first edition 1997) sketches out a vision of a dismembered Ukraine (Dunlop 2001; Wilson 2009). During Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, anti-Orange activists in Donbas and revisionist geopoliticians in Moscow openly used the term to describe a potential secessionist entity in southeast Ukraine that would split from Kyiv should it move decisively toward NATO and the West (Åslund and McFaul 2006; Trenin 2011). The idea of such an entity was one of the "cards" in the Russian playbook should its security interests be threatened. Should Ukraine join NATO, Russian state officials privately threatened to use the Russian minorities in Ukraine to destabilize the country (Lieven 1999, 4).

While taking care to publicly articulate Russia's respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Putin also held two not uncommon qualifications about it. The first is the Russian nationalist conceit that Russians and Ukrainians are one people (*narod*). The second is a conception of Ukraine as a "put together territory" made up of many distinctive regions, a conception easily framed negatively as an "artificial state." At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Putin gave President George W. Bush a famous lecture on Ukraine that underscored its contingent and fragile character—though his statistics were, as Wilson (2014, 149) notes, "seriously confused." Putin was thus doing more than providing a history lesson on Ukraine to his *Direct Line* audience on 17 April 2014. He was highlighting what he saw as the historic Russian foundations of southeast Ukraine, and underscoring how the country was a set of distinctive regional pieces that had been assembled somewhat arbitrarily rather than a country that was a natural organic whole. The contingency of Ukraine is underscored here by Putin's exclamation "Why? Who knows?" This disposition echoes that taken toward Crimea's transfer to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954, namely an "historic accident" that should never have occurred. Ukraine itself, by this logic, was an accident of history.

Third, Putin's discussion boosted the public profile of Novorossiya at an important moment. At the same time, he reaffirmed the existing geopolitical order of border and citizenship. The passage is typical of a rhetorical style that legitimates provocations while ostensibly disavowing them. Revisionist geopolitics is articulated as legitimate debate that is then reined in by expression of official state discourse. Putin's approach here was different, as he chose to lie about Russian forces in Crimea in private conversations with world leaders and in his 4 March 2014 press conference (Myers 2015). Taken together, Putin's storyline on Ukraine relies on three presumptions of coherence. There is a homogeneous group: "ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers." There is a distinct joined-up territory, a "southeast Ukraine." And lastly, there is an ostensible post-Crimean annexation "Ukraine," with whom Russia wishes only to have friendly relations.

The Putin administration's relations with the Ukrainian rebels were characterized by public ambivalence after April 2014. On the one hand, it is clear that elements within the Russian state were actively aiding the rebel forces, providing financial assistance to the new authorities, and distributing humanitarian aid. On the other, the Kremlin kept its distance from the rebel leaders in its public statements and actions. With revolt against

Kyiv consolidating itself in the Donbas rather than in other parts of southeast Ukraine, the Kremlin dropped discussion of Novorossiya completely. The Kremlin publicly requested that the rebels postpone referendums seeking independence from Ukraine. When the rebels went ahead on 11 May 2014, the Kremlin indicated it "respected" the results but did not respond to the call by DPR officials that Moscow "absorb" this entity (BBC News 2014). In August, the most public Russian faces in the leadership of the two people's republics— Borodai and Strelkov—were replaced with local faces. All attention was focused on the battlefield, where rebel losses were reversed by a timely intervention by Russian tanks near Horbatenko and Ilovaysk, southeast of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk. The Ukrainian army defeat there was so significant that a few days later Kyiv agreed to a ceasefire with the separatists. On 29 August 2014, the Kremlin released a statement addressed to "the Novorossiya militia" that called on rebel fighters to create a humanitarian corridor for the Ukrainian army to retreat in safety from their battlefield losses (Putin 2014c).

The term Novorossiya would likely have remained unused thereafter if Putin had not been asked directly about it by *Financial Times* journalist Neil Buckley at the Valdai conference meeting in October 2014. Buckley directly challenged Putin on whether he believed Ukraine was a real country or not, and whether he believed Novorossiya was part of that country. Putin replied that he "never disputed that Ukraine is a modern, full-fledged, sovereign, European country" (Putin 2014b). But, he added, "it is another matter that the historical process that saw Ukraine take shape in its present borders was quite a complex one." He then proceeded to give a history lecture about Novorossiya as "a single region with its center at Novorossiisk [that]…included Kharkov, Lugans'k, Donetsk, Nikolayev, Kherson and Odessa Region." As before, Putin placed the theme of historical contingency to the fore, stating that the Bolsheviks transferred this land from Russia to Ukraine for purely political ideological reasons. This was "not considered any great loss to Russia" when these lands "were all part of the same country anyway" (and here, presumably, he means the Soviet Union). Tellingly, he then transitioned to the illegal transfer of Crimea to Ukraine by Khrushchev and the denial of Crimea's rights by Kyiv after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He also cited how parts of western Ukraine were previously part of Poland. His conclusion is that it "is difficult not to recognize that Ukraine is a complex, multi-component state formation." Justifying the Crimean annexation as a case of self-determination by a threatened community, he states: "this does not in any way mean that we do not respect Ukraine's sovereignty. We do respect Ukraine's sovereignty and will continue to do so in the future" (Putin 2014b). Unspoken was a fundamental question: what now was Ukraine?

Novorossiya in a major Russian newspaper

To examine Novorossiya's profile in Russian geopolitical discourse, we analyzed the archives of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* ("The Independent"), a "quality" daily newspaper widely covering international events and foreign policy issues, and devoted mainly to experts and well educated audiences in the capitals (Moscow and St. Petersburg) and a few other large cities. Its editorial policy is mostly liberal, but the newspaper regularly offers its pages to authors of different political orientations, though not the most radical ones. It carried in-depth articles on the developments in Ukraine from the beginning of the Maidan protests

and considered the wider geopolitical and territorial implications (Gamova, 2014; Shestakov 2014).

The archive stretches from the beginning of the post-Soviet period (1994) to the end of 2014. More than 20,000 articles are in the database, and a computer algorithm (*Adagram*) was used to detect the most probable combinations of words. It defines the probability of a word in a given context and indicates the probability of other words in that context. The analysis can thus yield a number of words in order of probability for any key term. We limited the results to the 30 most probable associations. Even though *Nezavisimaya* combines critical materials, it also tries to maintain the image of a "quality newspaper" and to avoid radical language and openly ideological articles without fact-based arguments.

The term "Novorossiya" did not appear on the pages of the paper until 2013–2014. We then examined the combinations or the associations for different words—for instance, "Novorossiya" and "pro-Western." The stories in the paper used the term "Novorossiya" almost exclusively to designate the areas controlled by the Donetsk and Luhans'k militia, and therefore, the associations with this word are mainly neutral, such as "to declare," "militia," "Cossack," and "geographical." This lexicographical neutrality is in sharp contrast with the journalistic associations of "Eurasian integration" with positive terms such as "advantages," "benefits," "union," and "guarantor." In a similar vein, the adjective "pro-Western" is non-neutral, being associated with negative words such as "opponent," "aggressive," "pressure," "blackmail," and "condemn."

We can conclude from this comprehensive examination of one key Russian newspaper that the term "Novorossiya" has little resonance except to describe the ongoing military and political actions in the war-affected oblasts of Donetsk and Luhans'k. While the militias in these oblasts used the language and symbols of Novorossiya that was then reflected in the news stories describing the war developments, the broader political project received little attention in the Russian media. The brief mention by President Putin of the historical legacy of Novorossiya was not followed by any sustained analysis of its implications for the geographic integrity of Ukraine or of Russian-Ukrainian relations. The project was abandoned in Moscow either due to its implausible nature, or because the trial balloon was never floated in any expectation of a determined push.

Novorossiya no more

On the one-year anniversary of the proclamation of Novorossiya, a series of statements by separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine acknowledged what had been apparent for some time: Novorossiya as an active geopolitical project was dead (Whitmore 2015). Pavel Gubarev's Novorossiya Party, for example, had lost out in the power machinations in Donetsk. He personally had survived an assassination attempt, but his party was banned from the November 2014 elections in the Donbas on a technicality. Oleg Tsarev was on the margins of the powerful Donbas clans (Butts 2015). On the first-year anniversary of his movement and the federal parliament, he declared both suspended until further notice. The ostensible reason was that the movement and parliament were incompatible with the peace process led by the Normandy Four that resulted in two separate ceasefire agreements in Minsk (Kolesnikov 2015).

Aleksandr Kofman, a businessman from Donetsk and acting as a "Minister of Foreign Affairs" for the Donetsk People's Republic, was more forthright, conceding that Kyiv had successfully thwarted its efforts in the southern regions of Ukraine. Novorossiya as a project was now "closed due to the fact that its supporters in Kharkov and Odessa were successfully suppressed by official Kiev" (Dergachev and Kirillov 2015). Kofman pointed to the death of pro-Russian protestors in Odesa in May 2014 as a significant event as well as manifest opposition elsewhere in the southeast. The fact that the pro-independence referendum organized by the rebels on 11 May 2014 was not held outside of the areas controlled by separatists indicated that the project had failed beyond areas seized in the Donbas.

Though Novorossiya battle flags and maps continue to circulate, the September 2014 Minsk Accord and the November 2014 elections in rebel-controlled areas were evidence that local de facto statehood (of the DPR and the LPR) had triumphed on the ground over aspirational geopolitical imaginaries. Even envisioning the former as a "lesser Novorossiya" in preparation for the realization of the latter as a "greater Novorossiya" was not the game unfolding any more in eastern Ukraine. Instead, the game was creating separatist de facto states along the lines of Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia and, in a fantasy mode, envisioning a union of separatist states across the world (Parfitt 2014).

Yet, we should be careful not to discount the power of Novorossiya as an alternative geography to a hardcore of Russian nationalists and volunteer activists in Ukraine (Fitzpatrick, 2015). Novorossiya still lives as a virtual presence on the Internet, on websites, and on social media. As a signifier for separatism and for discontent with rule by a Westernizing elite in Ukraine, Novorossiya will still have its attractions. To find out who found it attractive or repulsive, we turn to a survey we completed in southeast Ukraine in December 2014.

Who supports and who opposes Novorossiya?

With support from the US National Science Foundation, we organized a comprehensive and representative survey of the population of six Ukrainian oblasts (Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovs'k, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Zaporizhia) in the southeast of the country. While we could have conducted phone and even face-to face interviews with residents in the Ukraine-government controlled parts of Donetsk and Luhans'k oblasts, inability to carry out stringent checks and the rapidly changing circumstances in the war zone persuaded us not to pursue this option. We developed an instrument of about 140 questions that is divided into three segments. The (1) demographic questions and (2) the broader questions about the geopolitical environment of the Ukraine crisis, Russia's foreign policy, Russian-EU-US relations, post-conflict attitudes, and inter-ethnic relations allow us to develop comparisons between these contested regions and to compare results to similar questions that we asked in other de facto states five years ago (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and O'Tuathail 2011; O'Loughlin, O'Tuathail, and Chamberlain-Creanga 2013; Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013a). The third section of each instrument probed attitudes on specific local topics and recent developments, including electoral and security prospects.

In the six Ukrainian oblasts, the sampling was designed to be both population proportional and to adequately represent both rural and urban areas. The survey was

conducted in 118 primary sampling units (see Figure 2), with sample sizes ranging from 231 in the city of Kharkiv to 9–10 people in many rural settlements. The total sample size is 2,033 with a 2.2% margin of error. The design is a four-step process with random selection at each stage. First, the sample was divided by each of the six oblasts proportionate to the census population over 21 in each one. For each oblast, all settlements were stratified by size and type (village, small town, town/city) and the probability of each settlement being included in the sample is proportional to its size. Next, for each settlement or group of settlements, a random selection of voting precincts was made and for each precinct, the initial address was selected with street, house, and apartment chosen randomly. Starting with the initial address, respondents were selected by the modified route sample method. Lastly, in the selection procedure for respondents, after obtaining the initial address, the interviewer made a list of potential respondents ("chain") who lived in sequential apartments and questioned every third respondent from the list. Follow-up checks by supervisors re-contacted 10% of the interviewees.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Respondents could answer the questions in either Russian or Ukrainian; after answering an initial greeting common in both languages, the interviewer used the language of reply to determine the appropriate language for the survey. The overall response rate was 41%, varying from a high of 55% in Dnipropetrovs'k Oblast to 34% in Kharkiv Oblast. In comparison to the census data, the survey slightly oversamples females by 5.5% and persons over the age of 60 by 3.1%, with a corresponding undersampling of people under the age of 30. In the modeling, the values are corrected by weighting according to these differences. Oblast ratios do not need adjustment, as they correspond to the respective populations.

Attitudes about Novorossiya

Since the Novorossiya concept has both historical and political connotations that can be somewhat orthogonal, we posed three questions on this complicated topic. It is entirely possible that a respondent could accept that Novorossiya was a historical province but reject the proposition that it has any contemporary relevance. Accordingly, we asked first about the historical element and then posed two political questions about Novorossiya's relevance in contemporary Ukraine.

The first question asked interviewees: "Is Novorossiya a myth or a historical fact?" Overall, 52.3% chose the "myth" option, 24.2% the "fact" response, with a high ratio of 22.1% answering "don't know" and 1.3% refusing to answer. The high "don't know" response rate can be the result of many factors—genuine confusion about the competing messages from television and other media sources, a result of self-perceived lack of historical knowledge, inability to choose between two stark options, or an avoidance of a sensitive question. We have witnessed this choosing of "don't know" as a way to dodge sensitive questions in post-conflict zones across the former Soviet Union.[2] A follow-up question asked those (n = 970) who did not choose the "myth" option: "Is it possible that this historical fact can be used as a basis for separation of Novorossiya from Ukraine?" Of those 970 respondents who answered this question, 14.7% answered "yes, it's possible,"

44.1% answered "no, it means nothing now," with 37.0% answering "don't know" and 4.2% refusing an answer. Lastly, we asked a separate question of all 2,033 respondents: "Is the use of the term "Novorossiya" either a) Russian political technology to destroy Ukraine, b) the expression of the struggle of residents of South-Eastern Ukraine for independence, c) don't know and d) refuse." We devised this framing to polarize the question clearly. Overall, 52% chose the Russian political technology option, with 18% seeing Novorossiya as reflecting an independence wish, and again with a high ratio of "don't knows" at 18% and 2% refusal.

  The summary results indicate a split opinion about Novorossiya, both its historical legacy and its contemporary political meaning. While a slight majority of all respondents reject the term in both respects, about 15–20% of respondents recognize its significance and believe that it forms the basis for an identity that is separatist, whether for independence or joining to Russia. The large ratios of "don't know" responses is significant in this instance, as undoubtedly it reflects both uncertainty about the term itself and concern about answering a seemingly innocuous question but one that has important territorial ramifications for the country and the region. It was precisely in the historical guberniya of Novorossiya that we were surveying. Like the answers to the parallel question in the survey about "Russkiy mir" ("is your region part of Russkiy mir—Russian world?"), 23% of the respondents express a sense of attachment to Russia (part of the "Russian world") and also accept the historical heritage of Novorossiya as a "fact." The Novorossiya project was in the television news, both Russian and Ukrainian, at the time of the survey (December 2014), and while the first Minsk agreement of September 2014 had eased the fighting, few believed that the ceasefire would hold. Conflict erupted again in Donetsk and Luhans'k oblasts in January 2015 before the forging of a second Minsk agreement on 11 February 2015.

  Analysis of responses to the Novorossiya questions shows a close correlation with other political and ideological preferences. These correlations reflect a deep divide among the residents of southeast Ukraine about the direction of the country, about responsibility for the war, about the end of the Yanukovich regime and the success of the Maidan protests, and about the orientation of the country to the EU/US/West or to the Eurasian Customs Union led by Russia. To correlate these characteristics with each other is not very useful, since they essentially measure the same latent political/ideological beliefs. Rating Poroschenko highly is strongly correlated with negative attitudes toward Russian actions and to suspected Russian geopolitical ambitions. In statistical terms, putting these political/ideological measures into the analysis is a manifestation of endogeneity. In effect, this position argues that there is an underlying construct that blends ideological, national, cultural, and political preferences. What is more interesting are the demographic and regional traits—exogenous factors—of the various groups of respondents on the Novorossiya questions. We are using these questions not only to understand the responses to a widely known and debated vision for contested Ukraine, but also as an expression of a deeper underlying societal divide.[3]

Regional and national-linguistic factors

The many hundreds of public opinion polls in Ukraine conducted since the end of the Soviet Union have typically highlighted the regional factor in the country's politics. Usually results

are reported for major regions: West, Center, East, South, and Crimea. Similarly, electoral maps of the parliamentary and presidential votes show a dramatic southeast/Crimea block (Craumer and Clem 1999). However, as argued by O'Loughlin (2001), these regional divisions hide significant oblast-to-oblast differences and even more, rural-urban divergences below the oblast scale. As Clem (2014a) argued, the choice of "region" and the respective boundaries dictates how well one can distinguish regional anomalies and evaluate the relative significance of the geographic element in Ukraine compared to socio-demographic factors. Of course, spatial trends will correlate with socio-demographic distributions, but as political geographers have long argued (e.g. Agnew 1987), a contextual element is often identifiable, whereby concentrations of votes or political attitudes will be evident beyond what can be expected from the socio-demographic distribution. Such a regional factor is often the result of local political socialization, access to a limited set of media outlets, conversations with neighbors and fellow workers, or historical legacies.

Two crucial and much-debated explanations for the distributions of responses to the Novorossiya questions—a geographic one in the form of oblast comparisons and a social one in the form of nationality-language group comparisons—deserve closer scrutiny before we turn to an understanding of the responses according to key socio-demographic factors. President Putin has repeatedly asserted that he wishes to protect the rights of ethnic Russians and of Russian-speakers in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries. As noted already, implicit in this proclamation is the assumption that these are coherent groups whose beliefs and interests are at odds with the majorities in the respective states. The language rights question in Ukraine is obliquely related to the national question since a large ratio of ethnic Ukrainians speaks Russian as their first language. In our sample, we probed this question by asking what language respondents spoke at home. The respective overall ratios of Ukrainians who speak Russian at home is 40.14%, Ukrainians speaking Ukrainian 22.23%, and Ukrainians speaking both languages 17.12%. The number of ethnic Russians, almost all of who speak Russian, in the sample is 11.41%. (Others are 9%, including people who gave a mixed ethnic Russian-Ukrainian national identity, as well as small minorities). Asking about home language distinguishes common and everyday language use from "mother tongue" or from the census definition of language.

While the ratios of Russians and Russian-speakers in southeast Ukraine are both much higher than in central and western Ukraine, there are sizeable differences between the six oblasts in our study area. Table 1 shows the distributions. Kharkiv, Odesa, and Zaporizhia have proportionately more Russians, while these three oblasts plus Dnipropetrovs'k are more Russified (more Russian language speakers) than the more rural oblasts of Kherson and Mykolaiv. The interesting question is whether there are significant and proportional differences in the beliefs about Novorossiya between the oblasts and the language-national groups. Sizeable differences between ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians are evident in the three sets of graphs in Figure 3. Differences between the different language groups of Ukrainians are never significant; in other words, the language that Ukrainians speak at home does not significantly influence their responses to the Novorossiya questions. In this respect, Putin's argument for protecting the rights of Russian-speakers has a false premise, because this group is not distinctively different from other Ukrainians. What is different, however, is the responses of self-identified ethnic Russians from ethnic Ukrainians. Here Putin's claim about ethnic Russians as a distinctive group within Ukraine has more credibility. There is about a 30-point difference in the three

responses on Novorossiya between Russians and Ukrainians. This difference is clearest for the question about whether Novorossiya is a myth or a historical fact, but importantly, the very low ratio (27%) of Russians who attribute the concept to the machinations of Russian political technologists for geopolitical ends clearly suggests that the majority of Russians believe that the concept of Novorossiya is grounded in historical and geopolitical realities.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The majority of respondents of all ethnic/linguistic groups reject the view that the history of Novorossiya could justify a separation from Ukraine, although Russians thought so much less frequently than Ukrainians. These results suggest that the events of 2013–2014 in Ukraine could harm the peaceful ethnic relations that have existed for centuries between Ukrainians and Russians on Ukrainian territory. Analysis of Ukrainian official political discourse, school history and geography textbooks, and the content of the most popular evening TV news programs in Ukraine showed that the grounds for the split between Ukraine and Russia, and between Ukrainians and Russians, were gaining momentum during the two decades after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Vendina et al. 2014).

Because the ethnic/linguistic groups are heterogeneously distributed across the oblasts, differences between the regions generally match the divides noted above. Residents in Odesa and Kharkiv were less skeptical of Russian motivations and intentions in Ukraine compared to the other four oblasts. For two of the questions (Novorossiya as a myth or fact and Novorossiya as a Russian political technological creation or an expression of a desire for independence), Odesa and Kharkiv are the only oblasts where a minority adopted the position of the Ukrainian government. Novorossiya as a myth got 46% support in Odesa and only 32% in Kharkiv; on the Russian political technology prompt, 45% of Odesa residents agreed with this position with only 24% in Kharkiv. Noticeable also is the high ratio of "don't know" answers in Kharkiv, reaching 50% for the political technology versus desire for independence question. At the time of the survey, Kharkiv was the scene of many clashes between Maidan supporters and pro-separatist sympathizers; the Lenin statue (now destroyed) in the center of the city was the focus of fighting in the fall of 2014. Unexplained bombings and killings, as well as an attempted assassination on the governor, added to the tension. Unlike more rural oblasts farther south, the economy of Kharkiv Oblast has dense cross-border trade linkages with Russia, in this case with the Russian oblast, Belgorod, across the border (see the essays in Kolossov and Vendina, 2011). A rupture in trade relations and even a hardening of the border through visa controls and tight inspections would significantly affect the livelihoods of Kharkiv residents. While the May events in Odesa left a legacy of mistrust, a contested sense of victimhood, and a lack of clarity concerning the causes of the deaths, the overall beliefs about Novorossiya in this oblast are closer to the other four sample oblasts than to Kharkiv. On the question about whether the concept of Novorossiya could be used as a basis for a separation from Ukraine, the Kharkiv respondents replied yes (10%) or "don't know" (32%), but the comparable figures for Odesa were 8% and 12%, in line with the other oblast ratios on this sensitive question.

The usual discussions about geographic differences in Ukraine's geopolitical orientation revolve around the east-center-west-Crimea comparisons. Our survey results corroborate maps of the various presidential and parliamentary votes that show sizeable differences within southeast Ukraine. A more nuanced discussion of geographic scale in the key disputes facing Ukraine is merited, but typically data are not available at the sub-regional level. Survey data do not allow consideration of local county (*rayon*) and city distinctions because the sample size in any one place is too small for reliable comparisons. But, as shown here, even oblast differences are substantial and merit consideration in their own right.

Modeling the responses about Novorossiya

Many statistical predictors are available to examine the responses of the residents of southeast Ukraine to the meanings and the political ramifications of the concept of Novorossiya. As explained earlier, it makes little sense to use ideological and political attributes of respondents to explain the outcomes from other political questions because both the predictors and the dependent variable share the same generic constructs that run through contemporary Ukraine. What is more interesting are the socio-demographic attributes of the adults who hold distinctive positions. Our questions about Novorossiya could be seen as direct and provocative, but we chose this approach for clarity rather than trying to speculate about answers to more abstract or academic questions. In the modeling, we use logistic regression for all three questions—either Novorossiya is a myth or not (all other options including "historical fact," "don't know," answers, and refusals) and whether Novorossiya is the product of Russian political technology or not. For the third question—whether the concept of Novorossiya could be used as the basis for separation from Ukraine—we distinguish between those who say that it could (149 respondents of the total sample) and all others. This latter category includes those who said it could not be, the "don't know" or "refuse" answers, and those individuals who picked the "myth" option in the previous question. We thus combined the "not applicable"—those who said that Novorossiya was a "myth" in the earlier question—with the "no" answers, since both sets of respondents clearly reject the possibility of Novorossiya as a modern territorial referent. The respective coefficients thus indicate the relative importance of the various socio-demographic factors affecting these binary options.

All models were fitted using Stata 13.0 with the "svy" prefix for the regression models that indicate the survey nature of the Ukraine data. This prefix takes into account both the sample weights (explained above) as well as the nature of the clustering and stratification of the 118 PSUs (primary sampling units). If the modeling ignored the clustering in the survey design and data collection, the standard errors would likely be smaller than they should be, and the significance of the coefficients would be suspect.

Is Novorossiya a "myth" or "historical fact"?

The coefficients for the 14 socio-demographic predictors are presented in the first two columns of Table 2. Only four predictors are significant at the .05 level. The Soviet legacy provides two of the significant findings. Those who believed that the end of the Soviet

Union was a good move strongly support the idea that Novorossiya is a myth and conversely, those who claim a Soviet identity (as opposed to Russian or Ukrainian ones) do not accept this view, adopting the position that Novorossiya was a historical fact. In previous work, we identified questions about the end of the Soviet Union and its effects on family material fortunes as well as nostalgia for Soviet times (often expressed in a Soviet identity) as most helpful in understanding the attitudes of residents in the unrecognized "de facto" states of Transdnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal, 2014). Like the ethnic Russian factor, the Soviet legacy is significant in understanding the responses across the three questions. The lure of Soviet nostalgia is well documented in Russia and other post-Soviet states through polls and high ratings for Soviet leaders such as Stalin (De Waal et al., 2013). In an era of economic and geopolitical uncertainty, the stability and predictability of Soviet times remains attractive to those who struggle financially and living in conflict or post-conflict regions with severe ethnic tensions. Typically, older people, pensioners, poorer respondents, and the unemployed dominate this "Soviet demographic," and in post-Soviet regions where they are a minority Russians feature prominently as well among these groups.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

What is also evident in Table 2 is the connection between national identity and pride and beliefs about Novorossiya. Most respondents (over 80%) are proud or very proud of their nation (undefined) but when we separate out the "very proud," members of this group are more likely to think of Novorossiya as mythic (significance level of .07). Similar to the North Caucasus of Russia and in Nagorno-Karabakh where local ethnicities similarly have high levels of ethnic pride (O'Loughlin and Ó Tuathail 2009; Toal and O'Loughlin 2013b), those in southeast Ukraine who classify themselves as "most proud" are also more likely to adopt nationalistic positions.

On the Novorossiya myth-fact question, the residents of Odesa and Kharkiv oblasts (higher Russophile regions) are less likely to think of Novorossiya as a myth compared to residents of the other four oblasts in the study. The coefficients for the Ukrainian-language groups are not significant, but that for ethnic Russians is highly significant (disagreeing that Novorossiya is a myth). Finally, people under the age of 35 are slightly more likely (p = .06) to consider Novorossiya a myth, when other factors are controlled.

Consistent with other questions, the Novorossiya as myth or fact query elicited answers that point to a divide within the population of southeast Ukraine. Though clearly not aligned along language lines within the Ukrainian population, the experiences of the post-Soviet years, the Russian ethnicity of the respondent, and location in Russophone oblasts are helpful in predicting the nature of the response. Acceptance of the concept of Novorossiya as legitimate challenges the conception of the unity and the territorial coherence of the post-1991 Ukrainian state. Somewhat surprisingly, television-watching habits are not important in this regard, although they appear significant for other Novorossiya questions.

Is Novorossiya the result of "Russian political technology" or a "desire for independence"?

One of the dramatic developments that has emerged over the past couple of years since the Ukrainian crisis started has been the efforts of participants to control news reporting, to promote certain storylines, and their versions of facts, causality, and truth. In this regard, modern mass media, especially television, have been critical. Social media (Twitter, VKontakte, etc.) especially have joined Internet outlets such as blogs, newspapers, and other journalistic outlets. The power of television, however, remains very high, especially as newspapers decline in circulation, with over 90% of Ukrainians and Russians saying that TV constitutes their main new source. The competing storylines and divergent explanations of the crash of Malaysian flight 17 in the war zone of Donetsk in July 2014 illustrate well the news chasm. Ukrainian and Russian TV viewers "live in different worlds" (Toal and O'Loughlin 2015). The term "political technology" has been used for about 20 years in the Russian context to describe the role of techniques of mass media control in promoting desired political attitudes and feelings. The Putin administration now controls the main Russian TV networks and has been accused of refining "political technology" to such an extent that television has become "the central mechanism of a new type of authoritarianism" (Pomerantsev 2014, 5). Asking whether the term "Novorossiya" is a creation of Russian political technology or an expression of a wish for independence allows us to determine the extent to which respondents believe that the information about this concept is manipulated and stage-managed, or whether there is substance to its connotation.

Seven predictors are significant in the logit model of the answers about Russian political technology. That four significant variables from the previous model appear again as significant is not surprising, since we would expect those who gave the answer that "Novorossiya is a myth" to believe also that "Novorossiya" is a creation or at least a manipulation of "Russian political technology." For these respondents, it is an artificial construction, a position also held by those who are "most proud" of their nation. For the reasons elaborated earlier, the Soviet tradition and its detractors remain important, as does residency in Odesa or Kharkiv, where the probability of believing the argument that Russian political technology manipulates the concept of Novorossiya is significantly lower.

What is distinctive from the earlier model is the significance of television viewing habits. Those who said that TV is their main source of news are significantly more likely to believe that Russian political technology is behind the resurgence of Novorossiya as a much-discussed and/or much-dismissed topic. Since most respondents in the sample watch Ukrainian television stations, they are exposed to a narrative counter to that of the Russian channels. The "media war" has reached an unprecedented level with no common ground. Consistently viewing the same newscasts and the same channels reinforces existing beliefs. Given the low level of access to alternative voices, especially on the Internet (only 17% in our sample report that they use the Internet for news), increased divergence of opinions about the ongoing conflict is a natural outcome and compromising positions less likely.

Can Novorossiya be used as a base for separation?

The volatile debate about Novorossiya in contemporary Ukraine is not really about the accuracy of its historical borders nor whether it was ever a broadly accepted political territory. Ukrainians who support the Kyiv government are concerned that a historical argument is being made to claim a large section of the country along the northern rim of the Black Sea as a separatist pro-Russian state. The frequent use of the "Novorossiya" term by the rebel groups in Donetsk and Luhans'k and their expressed desire in 2014 to extend their territorial control from about half of these two oblasts to the large semi-circular swath of land from Kharkiv to Odesa lends credence to these fears. We asked those who did not dismiss Novorossiya as a myth a follow-up question; could Novorossiya be used as a basis for separation? While only a small ratio (7% or 149 respondents) of the overall sample agrees with this proposition, the large number of "don't knows" suggests either uncertainty about the political possibility or caution about answering a sensitive and provocative question.

  For distinguishing the small number of "yes" respondents from all others, seven predictors are significant. Again the "Soviet generation" is visible, with h significant positive coefficient (espousing a Soviet identity). Similar to the results of the first model, older, poorer, and more nationalistic respondents are less likely to give a positive response to the question. Those who claimed Russian ethnicity and those aged under 35 are more likely to agree that Novorossiya could be used for separation but those with a university education are less likely to give a "yes" answer. The importance of the media factor is evident, with those who watch Russian television more likely to agree that Novorossiya's legacy could be used as the basis for separation, while those (mostly Ukrainian) respondents who say that television is their main news source are more likely to disagree. Consistent with other answers, those with the highest level of national pride do not believe that it could be used for separation.

  The consistency of key socio-demographic factors in southeast Ukraine in determining answers to questions about Novorossiya suggests a divided society. More nationalistic people (more ethnic Ukrainians—79%—than ethnic Russians—68%—said that they were "very proud" or "proud" of their nationality), those who think that the end of the Soviet Union was a positive development, those whose main news source is television, and older people were more likely to dismiss Novorossiya as an artifact of Russian manipulation and thus mythical in nature. By contrast, those who considered themselves as Soviet, who live in Odesa and Kharkiv, ethnic Russians, and those who watch Russian television find merit in the arguments about historical Novorossiya and see some basis for it to be recreated as a separatist state from Ukraine. They further believe that the term signifies a credible desire for independence on the part of those dissatisfied with the current political and geopolitical trajectory of Ukraine. This latter group is small—no more than 20% of the population of the southeast—but it remains distinctive especially in the two oblasts of Odesa and Kharkiv.

  A complementary approach to check on the consistency of answers to the Novorossiya questions by respondent characteristics is to cluster their answers and examine the profiles of those with similar responses. With the 14 socio-demographic variables from the logit analysis (all categorical), we used k-nearest neighbor analysis with distance calculated using the Mahanalobis metric. K, referring to the number of nearest neighbors, is set at 3.

Overall, the discriminant analysis is highly accurate, with over 90% of the predicted answers put into the right class for all three analyses (Table 3). (This comparison omits the observations not classified.) A reading of the diagonal values provides the clearest indicator of the ability of the characteristics to make the correct groupings. For example, of the 1,055 persons who said that Novorossiya was a myth, the k-nearest neighbor analysis predicted correctly for 82% of them (863 people),8% incorrectly (82) and 10% (110) went unclassified.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Respondents who said that Novorossiya is a myth are also likely to have said that Novorossiya is the result of Russian political technological intrigues. (And the converse is also expected.) As a result, the tables for the myth and political technology analyses are very similar (Table 3). A comparison of the average values of the respondent characteristics for each predictive classification showed that the biggest differences between the means were evident again for four key predictors, namely, the Soviet legacy, TV main news source, national pride, and residence in Odesa or Kharkiv.

Conclusions

The governance crisis of February 2014 in Ukraine sparked a broad crisis of European security structures, when the Russian government responded by annexing Crimea and supporting secessionist sentiment in southeast Ukraine. A vanguard of cross-border activists seized on the historic geopolitical signifier, Novorossiya, and made it a rallying cry for their aspiration to create a secessionist territory across southeast Ukraine that would follow Crimea into the Russian Federation. Novorossiya flags flew alongside those of localized secessionist projects in the Donbas region. At the highest levels of the Russian state and in the Russian media in March and April 2014, the term served as an expression of Russia's historical presence and longstanding interests in the northern shores of the Black Sea. The historical legacy was bolstered by assertions of the divergent interests of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers living in this area from the new Kyiv authorities after the ouster of the Yanukovich regime in March 2014.

The separatist aspirations of Novorossiya activists failed to gain traction across southeast Ukraine with the exception of the Donbas. The death of many pro-Russia activists in Odesa in horrific circumstances on 2 May was also a symbolic death of the Novorossiya project. Rhetoric on Novorossiya in the Russian media waned as the Ukraine crisis became the "war in the Donbas."

The results of our opinion survey conducted in the targeted six oblasts of southeast Ukraine in December 2014 confirms the project had only minority support. About half of the population believed that the concept of Novorossiya was a "historical myth" and that its resuscitation and promotion was the result of "Russian political technologies" rather than a belief that had wide or deep support. Only a small minority believed that the concept offered a basis for a separation from the rest of Ukraine. While acceptance of the weak support across the oblasts constituting Novorossiya seemed to be an element in the abandonment of the project in May 2015, our analysis nevertheless indicated backing, or at

least no clear rejection, of the concept and project by a substantial minority of the residents of southeast Ukraine. Among ethnic Russians, in the oblasts of Kharkiv, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovs'k, amongst older and poorer residents, and especially for those who retain a nostalgic opinion about the Soviet Union, the motivations and aims of the Novorossiya project had significant support. Further, it is quite likely that the support for the project might indeed be higher than a first glance at the data might suggest. With "don't know" ratios in the 20–25% range on sensitive political questions, the possibility that respondents are avoiding an answer—possibly not wishing to voice verbal support for Novorossiya— must be raised. In our comparable work on support for separatist regimes in the Caucasus region, we have documented similar reluctance to answer sensitive questions. What remains clear, however, is that there are no significant differences between the three groups of ethnic Ukrainians defined by language spoken at home. Russian-speakers do not hold different opinions from those who speak Ukrainian or both languages in their homes.

  The rapid rise over a few months to political prominence and public consciousness of a revisionist geopolitical imaginary that challenged existing international orders and borders allowed us to examine its support "on the ground" through a scientific poll as the debate was sustained. Critical approaches now include close attention to the array of opinions about grand geopolitical conceptions, as well as to the assumptions, perceptions, and ambitions of the framers of the imaginaries.

  The world political map is dynamic and we are likely to see further contentious spatial politics over separatist geopolitical imaginaries in the next few years. In some instances—Scotland, Catalonia, Alania, and now Republika Srpska—these imaginaries have clearly demarcated contemporary borders, some much older than others. In other instances, the separatist geopolitical imaginaries are neither well demarcated nor old. Some, like Novorossiya, may be the pet projects of aspirant intellectuals and aspirant politicians, until circumstances create an opportunity for them to be instrumentalized by external forces to serve particular ends. The future of Ukraine's contested territories, where there may be local legitimacy but none internationally, remains an open question.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest are declared by the authors.

Notes

1. For insight into the chaotic first two months, see the video documentary *The Donetsk People's Republic (or the Curious Tale of the Handmade Country*) (Butts 2015).
2. A close examination of the "don't know" respondents showed that no socio-demographic group had a rate 10 percentage points higher than the overall averages. This suggests that the high "don't know" rate is not a result of fear of giving an honest answer.
3. Examination of the cross-correlations between the socio-demographic variables as well as key political questions such as rating of leaders, preferences for Ukraine's geopolitical position, views about Maidan, and perceptions of Russian government actions show high values, typically about 0.4.

REFERENCES

Agnew, J.A. 1987. *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*. Boston and London: Allen and Unwin.

Åslund, Anders, and Michael McFaul. 2006. *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

BBC News. 2014. "East Ukraine Separatists Seek Union with Russia." *BBC News*, May 12. www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27369980

Beissinger, Mark. 2002. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Butts, Anthony. 2015. *The Donetsk People's Republic (or the Curious Tale of the Handmade Country)*. Video. http://docudays.org.ua/eng/2015/movies/film-vidkrittya/dnr-abo-khimerna-istoriya-kraini-samorobki/

Clem, Ralph S. 2014a. "Location, Location, Location: Measuring Public Opinion in Ukraine's Regions." *Washington Post, Monkey Cage blog*, May 22. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/22/location-location-location-measuring-public-opinion-in-ukraines-regions/

Clem, Ralph S. 2014b. "What Exactly Is Putin's New 'New Russia'?" *Washington Post, Monkey Cage blog,* September 4. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/04/what-exactly-is-putins-new-new-russia/

Craumer, Peter R., and James I. Clem. 1999. "Ukraine's Emerging Electoral Geography: A Regional Analysis of the 1999 Parliamentary Elections." *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 39 (1): 1–26.

De Waal, Thomas, Maria Lipman, Lev Gudkov, and Lasha Bakradze. 2013. *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/03/01/stalin-puzzle-deciphering-post-soviet-public-opinion

Dergachev, Vladimir, and Dmitrii Kirilov. 2015. " Proekt Novorossiya zakryit [Project Novorossiya Is Closed]." *Gazeta.ru*, May 20. http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/05/19_a_6694441.shtml

Dunlop, John B. 2001. "Aleksandr Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasian' Textbook and Dmitrii Trenin's Ambivalent Response." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies,* XXV (1/2) 91–127.

Fitzpatrick, Catherine. 2015. "Is Novorossiya Really Dead?" *The Interpreter,* May 22. http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-this-week-is-novorossiya-really-dead/

Gamova, Svetlana. 2014. "Tretii ukrainskii front: Respublika raspadaetsya na Vostok i Zapad [The Third Ukrainian Front: The Republic is Splitting into East and West]." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 20. http://www.ng.ru/cis/2014-02-20/1_ukraina.html

Giuliano, Elise. 2015. "The Origins of Separatism: Popular Grievances in Donetsk and Luhans'k." Washington, DC: PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo Number 396. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/origins-separatism-popular-grievances-donetsk-and-luhansk

Kolesnikov, Andrei. 2015. "Why the Kremlin Is Shutting Down the Novorossiya Project." Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, May 29. http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=60249

Kolosov, Vladimir A., and Olga I. Vendina, eds. 2011. *Rossiisko-Ukrainskoe pogranich'e: Dvadtsat' let razdelennogo edinstva* [*The Russian-Ukrainian Borderland: Twenty Years of Separated Unity*]. Moscow: New Chronograph.

Kudelia, Serhiy. 2014. "Domestic Sources of the Donbas Insurgency." Washington, DC: PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, no. 351. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm351_Kudelia_Sept2014.pdf.

Laruelle, Marlene. 2016. "The Three Colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32 (1): 55–74.

Lieven, Anatol. 1999. *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Matsiyevsky, Yuriy. 2014. "The Limits of Kudelia's Argument: On the Sources of the Donbas 'Insurgency.'" PONARS Eurasia, October 31. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/limits-kudelias-argument-sources-donbas-insurgency.

Menon, Rajan, and Eugene B. Rumer. 2015. *Conflict in Ukraine:The Unwinding of the Cold War Order.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mitrokhin, Nikolay. 2015. "Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion: Russia's War in the Donbass." *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1 (1): 219–250.

Myers, Steven Lee. 2015. *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

O' Loughlin, John. 2001. "The Regional Factor in Ukrainian Politics: Scale, Place, Space or Bogus Effect." *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 42(1): 1–33.

O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gearóid Ó Tuathail. 2011. "Inside Abkhazia: A Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State." Post-Soviet Affairs 27 (1): 1–23.

O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal. 2014. "Inside the Post-Soviet De Facto States: A Comparison of Attitudes in Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria." Eurasian Geography and Economics 55 (5): 423–456.

O'Loughlin, John, and Gearóid Ó Tuathail. 2009. "Accounting for Separatist Sentiment in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus of Russia: A Comparative Analysis of Survey Responses." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32 (4): 591–615.

O'Loughlin, John, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, and Rebecca Chamberlain-Creaga. 2013. "Divided Space, Divided Attitudes? Comparing the Republics of Moldova and Pridnestrovie (Transnistria) Using Simultaneous Surveys." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 54 (2): 227–258.

Parfitt, Tom. 2014. "Rebel 'Foreign Minister' of Donetsk Looks to Texas for Union of Separatists." *Daily Telegraph,* February 1.

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11381821/Rebel-foreign-minister-of-Donetsk-looks-to-Texas-for-union-of-separatists.html

Pomerantsev, Peter. 2014. *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*. New York: Public Affairs.

Popova, Maria, and Oxana Shevel. 2015. "Why Donbas? Explaining Violent Rebellion in Ukraine." Paper presented at the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies annual meeting, Philadelphia, PA. November 19.

Portnov, Andrii. 2016. "How 'Eastern' Ukraine Was Lost." *Open Democracy*, January 14. https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrii-portnov/how-eastern-ukraine-was-lost

Putin, Vladimir. 2014a. "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin." *Kremlin.ru,* April 17. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796

Putin, Vladimir. 2014b. "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club." *Kremlin.ru,* October 24. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860

Putin, Vladimir. 2014c. "President of Russia Vladimir Putin Addressed Novorossiya Militia." *Kremlin.ru,* August 29. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46506

Ryazanova-Clarke, Lara. 2013. "The Discourse of a Spectacle at the End of the Presidential Term." In *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon,* edited by Helena Goscilo, 104–132. London: Routledge.

Sakwa, Richard. 2015. *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands.* London: I.B. Tauris.

Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, Petr P., and Vladimir I. Lamanskiy, eds. 1910. *Rossiya: Polnoe geograficheskoe opisanie nashego otechestva* [Russia: A Full Geographical Description of Our Fatherland], Vol. 14. *Novorossiya i Krym* [Novorossiya and Crimea]. St. Petersburg: A.F. Devrient publishers.

Shestakov, Viktor. 2014. "Ukraina pod stvolom avtomata: Prekrashchenie boev na maidane ne oznachaet prekrashcheniya nasiliya v strane (Ukraine under a Machine Gun Barrel: Stopping Fights on the Maidan Does Not Mean Stopping Violence in the Country]." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 24. http://www.ng.ru/cis/2014-02-24/3_kartblansh.html

Solchanyk, Roman. 1994. "The Politics of State Building: Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-Soviet Ukraine." *Europe-Asia Studies* 46 (1): 47–68.

Shubin, Alexander V. 2015. *Istoriya Novorossii* [History of Novorossiya]. Moscow: Olma
    Media Group.

Tabor, Damon. 2015. "Putin's Angels: Inside Russia's Most Infamous Motorcycle Club."
    Rolling Stone, October 8. http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/putins-
    angels-inside-russias-most-infamous-motorcycle-club-20151008

Toal, Gerard. 2016. *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest for Ukraine and the
    Caucasus.* New York: Oxford University Pressinside

Toal, Gerard, and John O'Loughlin. 2013a. "Inside South Ossetia: A Survey of Attitudes in a
    De Facto State." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29 (2): 136–172.

Toal, Gerard, and John O'Loughlin. 2013b. "Land for Peace in Nagorny Karabakh? Political
    Geographies and Public Attitudes inside a Contested De Facto State." *Territory,
    Politics, Governance* 1(2): 158–182.

Toal, Gerard, and John O'Loughlin. 2015. "Russian and Ukrainian TV Viewers Live on
    Different Planets." *Washington Post, Monkey Cage blog,* February 26.
    https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/26/russian-
    and-ukrainian-tv-viewers-live-on-different-planets/

Trenin, Dmitri. 2011. *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*. Washington, DC: Carnegie
    Endowment for International Peace.

Tsygankov, Andrei P. 2015. "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine
    Policy." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31(4): 279–303.

Umland, Andreas. 2014. "In Defense of Conspirology: A Rejoinder to Serhiy Kudelia's Anti-
    Political Analysis of the Hybrid War in Eastern Ukraine." Washington, DC: *PONARS
    Eurasia,* September 30. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/defense-
    conspirology-rejoinder-serhiy-kudelias-anti-political-analysis-hybrid-war-eastern

Vendina, Olga I., Vladimir A. Kolosov, Fedor A. Popov, and Alexander B. Sebentsov. 2014.
    "Ukraina v politicheskom krizise: obraz Rossii kak katalizator protivorechii [Ukraine
    in Political Crisis. The Image of Russia as a Catalyst of Contradictions]." *Polis* 24 (5):
    50–67.

Weaver, Courtney. 2014a. "Malofeev: The Russian Billionaire Linking Moscow to the
    Rebels." *Financial Times,* July 24. http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/84481538-1103-
    11e4-94f3-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3vpZe66ZJ

Weaver, Courney. 2014b. "Ukraine's Rebel Republics." *Financial Times,* December 6–7.

      http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/9f27da90-7b3f-11e4-87d4-00144feabdc0.html

Whitmore, Brian. 2015. "After Novorossiya." *RFE/RL*, May 21.

      http://www.rferl.org/content/after-novorossia/27029392.html

Wilson, Andrew. 2009. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation.* 3rd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale

      University Press.

Wilson, Andrew. 2014. *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West.* New Haven, CT: Yale

      University Press.

Wood, Elizabeth A., William E. Pomeranz, E. Wayne Merry, and Maxim Trudolyubov.

      2016. *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Figure captions

Figure 1. Approximate boundaries of Novorossiya Guberniya in 1796. Current oblast capitals and borders as well as major rivers are indicated for reference.

Figure 2. Geographic distribution of the survey sample points in the six oblasts of southeast Ukraine. The six oblasts surveyed plus the two oblasts (Donetsk and Luhans'k) constitute the territorial delimitation of Novorossiya, according to the claims of the political leaders of the Donbas rebels in spring 2014.

Figure 3. Distribution of the responses to the three Novorossiya questions by oblast and by language-nationality groups. A. Responses to the question of whether Novorossiya is a myth or a historical fact. B. For those whose said that Novorossiya is a historical fact or were unsure ("don't know"), responses to the question of whether this could be used as the basis for separatism. C. Responses to the question of whether support for "Novorossiya" represents the effects of Russian political technology or a desire for independence.

Table 1. Distribution (% of total of each oblast) of the sample by language-nationality and oblast

Oblast	Ukrainians speaking Ukrainian	Ukrainians speaking Russian	Ukrainians speaking both languages	Russians
Kharkiv	17.84	37.00	19.16	15.20
Dnipropetrovs'k	20.90	54.48	9.14	7.84
Mykolaiv	39.15	32.28	22.75	2.65
Kherson	31.03	22.99	30.46	10.34
Odesa	16.06	39.90	13.99	13.99
Zaporizhia	23.47	34.35	21.09	14.97
Total	22.23	40.14	17.12	11.41

Note: The percentages do not add to 100 due to the presence of smaller groups.

Table 2. Logit models for the Novorossiya questions

Characteristic	Novorossiya is a myth		Novorossiya is Russian political technology		Novorossiya – yes, it can be the basis of separation	
	Coefficient	*p*	Coefficient	*p*	Coefficient	*p*
Ukr–Ukrainian Speaking	−0.211	.24	−0.054	.76	0.097	.79
Ukr–Russian Speaking	0.081	.57	−0.066	.66	0.562	.12
Russians	**−0.643**	**.00**	**−0.993**	**.00**	**1.254**	**.00**
University Educated	0.244	.14	0.130	.34	**−0.492**	**.03**
Under35	0.131	.06	**0.026**	**.05**	**0.704**	**.01**
Poor Mood	−0.119	.46	−0.175	.23	−0.041	.83
Low Income	0.219	.14	0.146	.90	−0.511	.09
Very Proud of Nation	0.352	.07	**0.492**	**.00**	**−0.578**	**.00**
End of Soviet Union right	**1.176**	**.00**	**1.275**	**.00**	−0.371	.18
Soviet Identity	**−0.269**	**.04**	**−0.397**	**.01**	**1.103**	**.00**
TV is Main News Source	0.037	.77	**0.315**	**.02**	**−0.479**	**.02**
Watch Russian TV	−0.024	.86	−0.212	.32	**0.604**	**.00**
Urban	−0.189	.32	0.195	.35	−0.038	.91
Live in Odesa or Kharkiv	**−0.681**	**.00**	**−0.969**	**.00**	0.073	.81

Note: Significant coefficients at the .05 level are indicated in bold type.

Table 3. Discriminant analysis of the responses to the three Novorossiya questions

A. "Novorossiya is a myth"

True values	Classified yes	Classified no	Unclassified	Total
Yes	863	82	110	1055
	81.80	7.77	10.43	100.0
No	80	788	110	978
	8.18	80.57	11.25	100.0
Total	943	870	220	2033
	46.38	42.79	10.82	100.0

Error rate = .089 (220 observations not classified)

B. "Novorossiya is the result of Russian political technology"

True values	Classified yes	Classified no	Unclassified	Total
Yes	874	67	114	1055
	82.84	6.35	10.81	100.0
No	84	780	114	978
	8.59	79.75	11.66	100.0
Total	958	847	228	2033
	47.12	41.66	11.21	100

Error rate = .084 (228 observations not classified)

C. "If Novorossiya is a historical fact, can it be used for separation?"

True values	Classified yes	Classified no	Unclassified	Total
Yes	83	43	23	149
	55.70	28.86	15.44	100.0
No	4	1857	23	1884
	0.21	98.57	1.22	100.0
Total	100	285	136	2033
	4.92	14.02	6.69	100.0

Error rate =.028 (46 observations not classified)

Notes: "No" includes those who refused or gave a "don't know" answer. For the question on separation, the "no" category also includes those who were not asked this specific question because they believe Novorossiya is a myth in the first question.