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Selling War at Home and Abroad: The Dual Objective of State Media Propaganda in the Russo-Ukrainian War

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how authoritarian regimes set conflicting domestic and foreign propaganda agenda during wartime to ensure domestic unity and engage international audiences. We posit that authoritarian regimes relying on public support for legitimacy attempt to keep domestic opinion onside by emphasizing the high stakes and low costs of war, thereby ensuring that dissent against the conflict does not threaten the regime. Foreign audiences, on the other hand, are encouraged to consider their responsibility and the risks of catastrophic escalation associated with intervention. We test our argument by analyzing domestic and international Russian propaganda around the reinvasion of Ukraine from January 2022 to August 2023. By comparing war coverage tailored for domestic audiences in RIA Novosti and foreign-facing coverage that appeared on RT, we find greater emphasis on the threat from the opponent, the high stakes of the war, and less emphasis on risks in domestic media. Foreign media focuses more on international actors' responsibility, the local stakes, and the risks of nuclear escalation. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and the tradeoffs autocracies must contend with in the management of the media during wartime.

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Introduction

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the news broadcaster RT (formerly Russia Today), a network financed by the Russian government but intended for the international market, summarized the beginning of a “special military operation” with “no plans to occupy Ukrainian territory.” Putin’s statements emphasized peacekeeping to prevent Ukrainian aggression.¹ Similar articles featuring official statements also appeared in the Russian national press, particularly in RIA Novosti (“RIA News”), the most cited information source in Russia (Medialogiya, 2023a). RIA Novosti, however, included longer quotes from Putin and highlighted allegations of genocide and nuclear weapons pursuit by Ukraine.² RIA Novosti also carried quotes from Putin that war with Ukrainian nationalists over Crimea was inevitable, which were absent in RT despite occurring in the same speech.

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The discrepancy between how two official Russian media, which share an Editor-in-Chief, covered the start of the war in Ukraine suggests that authoritarian states use distinct narratives to sell war at home and abroad. The puzzling contradictions between messaging intended for domestic and international audiences foreground the balancing act in guiding public opinion, a critical pursuit for autocracies that rely on persuasive propaganda and depend on popular support for legitimacy (Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik 2016; Potter and Wang 2022; Rosenfeld and Wallace 2024). As such, we hypothesize that while domestic media exploit the conflict to bolster legitimacy and manage domestic perceptions of the leadership, autocracies attempt to convince foreign audiences and elites to remain neutral or support their agenda.

This hypothesis is informed by how autocracies obfuscate the full scale of the conflict at home to avoid endangering mass support for the war and the regime. Because autocracies such as Russia rely in part on public opinion for legitimacy, public attitudes matter, and autocrats put significant effort into “public opinion management” (Karpchuk 2021). But to engage international opinion, especially in non-aligned countries, authoritarian regimes must also highlight the urgency and seriousness of the war and the risks of escalation, while simultaneously pinning responsibility on foreign actors. As a result, we posit that authoritarian leaders undertake distinct efforts to sell war at home, where they attempt to build unity, and abroad, where they seek to galvanize support and neutralize opposition.

This entails minimizing foreign and domestic pressure on the war, leading to different and occasionally contradictory messages to domestic and international audiences. We explore the specific ways that authoritarian states navigate this challenge by contrasting domestic and international coverage that is plausibly rooted in the regime’s agenda, but also in professional practices and differences suggesting willful interference or suppression (Koltsova 2001). We expect this approach to identify the mechanisms that explain why Russian media might choose to cover events for its foreign audience while ignoring the same events in the domestic coverage.

In the following we test this hypothesis by analyzing Russian media coverage of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine in the international branch of RT (the newscaster also manages a Russian version of RT) and the national news outlet RIA Novosti. Both RT and RIA Novosti are part of the same parent company, but RT broadcasts to international markets while RIA Novosti serves a domestic, Russian-speaking audience. The editorial slant of these publications appears in the tags they apply to different news articles, which summarize content and reference key events, locations, and actors during the war. To analyze these editorial differences, we rely on a novel database of news items that appeared in RT and RIA Novosti from January 2022 to August 2023, with the ensuing analysis offering the first systematic test of the differences between domestic and foreign-facing propaganda during wartime. The results reported in this study expand on existing scholarship on RT’s strategy and its role in Russian international information operations.

Previous Work

Research on authoritarian propaganda and political communication tends to focus on either domestic or international efforts. Scholarship has considered how autocrats try to shape the domestic media environment by removing the editorial independence of

news outlets to limit criticism and forestall collective opposition (Guriev and Treisman 2019; Lorentzen 2014; Roberts 2018). Soviet disinformation is a prominent example (Bittman 1985), but the use of propaganda to mold mass attitudes remains critical for autocracies espousing some of the trappings of democracy, which must then rely on persuasion instead of domination (Carter and Carter 2023).

The tension between consensual and persuasive communication is extensively discussed in propaganda scholarship, where the use of news outlets to construct narratives that are comparable with verifiable claims is referred to as propaganda simulacrum (Boyd-Barrett 2023). Others have examined the prevalence and impact of authoritarian propaganda within foreign countries (Tomz and Weeks 2020; Van Herpen 2015). This scholarship was particularly salient following reported Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential elections and the UK EU Membership referendum (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018; Kim et al. 2018). Work on foreign reactions complements but differs from research on domestic propaganda (Karpchuk 2021) and the more diffuse notion of propaganda that is often synonymous with persuasive communication (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). Other contributions have focused on the strategic narrative advanced by the Russian state to promote its preferred self-identity, advancing nation branding practices while foregrounding the threat of Western and American political and media discourse (Oates and Ramsay 2024; Szostek 2017). RT itself exemplifies this trajectory, having evolved from a soft power instrument designed to project a favorable image of Russia to international audiences into a vehicle for the weaponization of information, advancing strategic narratives intended to undermine Western cohesion and legitimize Russian foreign policy (Carter and Carter 2021; Van Herpen 2015).

Modern Russian propaganda has also been described as rewired propaganda to account for its move away from centralized, top-down messaging toward a networked model that engages multiple channels simultaneously. This form of propaganda deemphasizes single official narratives in favor of disrupting the information space by fostering confusion, emotional reactions, and distrust toward institutions, journalism, and expertise. Central to these operations are state-controlled media, nominally independent outlets, and social media platforms that are weaponized through online influencers, bots, and memes to obscure the role of the Russian state as the original source. Another marker of rewired propaganda is the tailoring of messages to different audiences, which can lead to contradictory messaging and weakened consensus reality (Oates 2016, 2021).

Similarly, participatory propaganda refers to the reliance on ordinary users as active contributors to the creation, circulation, and legitimation of propaganda narratives instead of centralized information clearinghouse for propaganda operations. In participatory propaganda, emotional engagement, identity signaling, and social belonging are more salient contact points than factual accuracy. In this context, Russian state media crafts narrative cues or frames—such as patriotism, anti-Western sentiment, or moral conservatism—that are then amplified online (Wanless and Berk 2020). The messaging can often appear contradictory, as domestically the Kremlin combines control of traditional media with selective repression and online narrative flooding, which are conducive to political cynicism and apathy while positioning the state as the only reliable actor.

Indeed, eliciting support or apathy from domestic and foreign audiences becomes more important when autocracies go to war (Chubb and Wang 2023). Success or failure in domestic efforts is critical to the endurance of autocratic regimes that depend

on mass attitudes (Carter and Carter 2023), especially when autocrats claim legitimacy from public approval (Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik 2016; Potter and Wang 2022). As a result, autocrats engage in domestic propaganda efforts “as if the need to maintain public support constrains their foreign policy choices” (Weiss and Dafoe 2019, 963). At the same time, they also promote a favorable narrative around their operations in the international arena (Weeks 2008; Weiss 2014; Weiss and Dafoe 2019).

Conversely, previous studies found that news coverage during war events differ in issue salience, but not in issue selection—i.e., they emphasize separate issues but cover the same events. Domestic and international news coverage should therefore be broadly aligned in the reporting of important events (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2017; Kampf and Liebes 2013) at the risk of alienating audiences and losing credibility due to overt bias, inaccuracy, and lack of transparency perceived from event selection misalignment. Russian media are of course sufficiently unfree and reports directly contravening the prevailing agenda may be ignored or discounted by questioning the credibility of sources (Baden and Stalpouskaya 2020). There remains, however, a fundamental limit to what journalistic media can ignore without losing credibility even in authoritarian settings (Roudakova 2017).

News coverage directed to foreign and domestic audiences must therefore balance different pressures and objectives with respect to advancing the agenda of the regime without crossing the line between apparent news reporting and overt political propaganda (Kampf and Liebes 2013). State media of autocratic regimes, in particular, are often dedicated to keeping public opinion onside to head off challenges to the regime and sustain the war effort. At the same time, they should also craft a compelling international narrative that is simultaneously in line with the international coverage and that advances the regime’s objectives (Robinson 2005). As a result of this tension, speeches can generate seemingly mixed messages as leaders discuss different issues for different audiences (Roudakova 2017).

There are also important differences between the domestic and international audiences of autocratic regimes with respect to access to alternative sources of information and their relative importance in autocracies. Domestic audiences have less access to alternative information, often must contend with outright censorship of oppositional voices, and are essential to a leader’s political survival. International audiences, on the other hand, have greater access to alternative information, but are less essential to political survival, except for how they shape war fighting (Fengler et al. 2020; Nordenstreng et al. 2023). In practice, both domestic and international news outlets strive to offer professional conflict coverage while remaining embedded in their national context and sharing a perspective that foregrounds the role of political influences and agency (Wolfsfeld, Frosh, and Awabdy 2008).

Autocrats also have more control over the domestic information environment. The public can seek out or stumble across alternative information due to imperfect censorship, but direct control of key media outlets provides greater flexibility. Domestic propaganda has therefore more latitude to ignore or downplay negative events and avoid interacting with information in foreign media. For international audiences, autocrats face a more contested information environment, with many potential news sources and target audiences requiring different information strategies (Dukalskis 2021). Foreign audiences can also turn to their own national news sources, which are likely to

offer another framing of the news, and messages that carry some domestic agenda may be less credible in foreign media environments (Karpchuk 2021).

Wartime propaganda targeting domestic audiences emphasizes the culpability of the immediate adversary, the stakes of the conflict, and the manageability of its costs (Potter and Wang 2022). When effective, these narratives increase public support and willingness to endure the human and material costs of protracted war (Barber and Miller 2019). While mass publics are not members of autocrats' ruling coalition or selectorate (Bueno De Mesquita et al. 2005), widespread opposition can undermine both war efforts and regime legitimacy, even if conflict may also generate rally-around-the-flag effects.

To sustain domestic support, propaganda frames the war as high-stakes—often existential—and assigns primary responsibility to the adversary that is frequently portrayed as the aggressor. Such framing makes defensive conflicts easier to justify and renders the opponent a tangible threat to citizens. References to international actors appear only when strategically useful (Gartner and Segura 2021). At the same time, autocratic propaganda minimizes disruption and battlefield risks, as casualties, setbacks, and escalation increasingly erode public support in prolonged conflicts (Gartner and Segura 2021; Getmansky and Weiss 2022).

Foreign audiences also shape propaganda strategies. Autocratic regimes seek neutrality or favorable positions abroad by portraying the war as a localized conflict with limited relevance for other states, thereby lowering perceived foreign stakes. Reduced stakes diminish support for intervention (Tomz and Weeks 2021) and increase openness to settlements that allow autocrats to consolidate gains. International messaging further assigns responsibility for violence and destruction to other actors and emphasizes the risks of escalation from foreign involvement, raising the perceived costs of intervention and improving the regime's prospects for success (Getmansky and Weiss 2022).

This dual objective of state media propaganda is informed by Putnam's (1988) two-level games, as winning domestic support constrains what autocrats can achieve with foreign propaganda. This framework stems from international negotiations in which nation-states must contend with domestic and international "game boards" simultaneously. In the first level, leaders must ensure that any international agreement or action is ratified by domestic actors—such as legislatures, interest groups, or the general public; in the second level, the leader seeks an agreement with other states that maximizes their nation's interests.

For Putnam (1988), this is embodied in the notion of win-sets: the range of all possible outcomes at the international level that would also be acceptable to the domestic audience. In the context of autocratic propaganda, state media serves as a tool to manipulate these win-sets. Instead of just reacting to public opinion, the state uses propaganda to expand or contract its own win-set or to influence the win-sets of its adversaries. This creates a dual objective of manufacturing consent and ensuring the ratification of the state's actions domestically, while foreign countries are subjected to propaganda that fuels fear and confusion in international fora leading to strategic concessions.

Propaganda targeting domestic and international audiences focuses on mass publics rather than elites, limiting the costs of inconsistent messaging given low public attention to international affairs and, domestically, extensive media control. Although elites may identify inconsistencies, these critiques rarely reach broader audiences. The impact of inconsistent claims also varies cross-nationally: they are weaker where publics are

sympathetic to Russia or distrustful of the West. Even in Western contexts, sowing confusion or promoting alternative narratives may be sufficient, as Russia faces minimal costs and potential gains from shaping foreign public opinion.

Objectives

In view of the above, we expect autocracies to portray the war in fundamentally different light for domestic and international audiences. We test this theoretical proposition on modern Russian propaganda for three reasons. First, the clear split between foreign and domestic media within the same company offers a clear control group. Second, Russian propaganda is one of the most salient instances of a nation-state attempting to persuade domestic and international audiences (Van Herpen 2015) since British and American propaganda efforts surrounding the Iraq War (Altheide and Grimes 2005; O'Shaughnessy 2004). Lastly, Russian coverage of the war in Ukraine, one of the largest interstate conflicts since World War II, clearly demarcates which statements are meant for domestic and international audiences, with RT international having minimal penetration inside Russia³ (Medialogiya, 2023b) and RIA Novosti ostensibly focusing on domestic audiences.

Our theoretical proposition yields three research questions about the content and editorial decisions in autocratic media for domestic and foreign audiences. These include how state-controlled media covers the leader, how different news outlets cover battlefield setbacks, and finally the presentation of costs and risks. In the context of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, we expect domestic media to present Russia's war in Ukraine as a special military operation to address a threat not seen since World War II. We also expect international audiences to face a fundamentally different stream of Russian propaganda that attempts instead to pin the costs and risks of war on foreign actors, while also highlighting the potential for catastrophic escalation if other states become involved.

These research questions are informed by the assessment that autocracies derive legitimacy from public opinion and therefore mass attitudes towards a leader are important (Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik 2016). As a result, we hypothesize (H1) that domestic media will seek to trigger rally-around-the-flag effects by covering the leader's statements and actions prominently, up to the point when battlefield setbacks emerge. We further hypothesize (H2) that domestic and international media will focus on different threats and issues, with international media foregrounding the role and responsibilities of foreign actors in contrast to domestic media, which we expect to focus on direct threats from adversaries.

The third and last hypothesis (H3) posits that domestic media is less likely to cover signals and statements indicating that a conflict could escalate or impose substantial costs to the nation. In Russia's invasion of Ukraine, nuclear threats offer a helpful window into these decisions. Russian policymakers have frequently alluded to the risk of the conflict escalating to nuclear use. Instances of this included Putin's reference to "consequences such as you have never seen in your history" in the lead up to the war, and subsequent nuclear alert on February 27, 2022. We expect that these nuclear threats will feature more prominently in content tailored for international audiences than in domestic media.

Finally, we probe these hypotheses by unpacking the framing of the conflict through Nazi symbolism and the recurrent use of identical text blocks presented as “backgrounders”—standard text recalling previous events. Such inserts in news text function as repetition, an important propaganda technique that maximizes the Nazi rhetoric and nuclear threat frames that percolate in domestic and international coverage of Russian state media to contrasting effects.

Data & Methods

Data collected for this study includes national and international news outlets operated by MIA Rossiya Segodnya, which translates to “Russia Today,” a state-owned, leading Russian media group that wholly owns and manages several news outlets and brands, including, among others, RIA Novosti, Sputnik, and Baltnews. The corporation is headed by Dmitry Kiselev, one of the regime’s key propagandists serving as the deputy general director of the Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, and since 2012, the host of Russia’s main analytical television program “Vesti Nedeli.” MIA Rossiya Segodnya distributes news content to Russian and international markets (MIA Rossiya Segodnya, 2023). Central to our study is RIA Novosti, which translates to “RIA News,” the most important source of news in Russia (Medialogiya, 2023a). The database curated for this study also includes RT (formerly Russia Today), a broadcast network financed by the Russian government but tailored to the international market, with subsidiaries operating and distributing content in seven languages (RT, 2023). Both organizations share an Editor-in-Chief, Margarita Simonyan, who is one of the most prominent and influential Russian propagandists.

We scraped all news articles published by RT and RIA Novosti from February 1, 2022 to July 31, 2023, which is the relevant period for this study. The resulting database contains the content, tags, and publication dates, allowing for longitudinal analysis at various levels of data aggregation (daily, weekly, or monthly). We subsequently applied the following filtering rules to the data: 1. RIA Novosti (<https://ria.ru>): all articles were scraped and no filtering applied; 2. RT (<https://www.rt.com>): all articles scraped, except for those posted in “podcast,” “shows,” and “on-air” directories (e.g., <https://www.rt.com/shows/>).

We subsequently filtered the database to remove content not associated with the Russo-Ukrainian War based on the following criteria: for RIA Novosti, we selected articles that include “Специальная военная операция на Украине” (“Special military operation in Ukraine”) tag; for RT, given the relative absence of war-related tags, we selected all articles containing Russia- or Ukraine-related tags (Russia, Ukraine, Moscow, Ukraine turmoil, and Kiev). Lastly, we lemmatized all articles to reduce the words to their base forms using the Python library for Russian texts (pymystem3 2023) and WordNet Lemmatizer for English (Bird, Klein, and Loper 2009). This approach relied on the tags employed by each news organization to identify significant variations in their coverage and to examine the hypotheses driving this study. This yielded a total of 56,772 articles published by RT and 403,339 by RIA Novosti.

Given that tags are employed asymmetrically across news organizations, we conducted robustness checks by comparing the incidence of tags across news outlets with a list of terms (mention-group). We also supplemented the text corpora by adding articles

Table 1. Mention-groups based on case-insensitive search, with “!” at the beginning of a line indicating that the search was carried out only by matching the full word.

Group	RT	RIA Novosti
Putin	‘Putin’	‘Путин’
NATO	‘!nato’, ‘atlantic’	‘!нато’, ‘натовский’, ‘атлантический’
Ukrainian Shelling	‘JCCC’, ‘ukraine shell’, ‘ukrainian force shell’, ‘ukrainian force attack’, ‘ukrainian troop shell’, ‘kiev force shell’, ‘ukrainian military shell’, ‘attack russian’, ‘ukrainian attack civilian’, ‘kiev attack civilian’, ‘ukrainian attack civilian’, ‘terrorist attack’	‘сцкк’, ‘украинский войско активно использовать обстрел’, ‘украинский войско использовать обстрел’, ‘украинский войско выпускать’, ‘обстрел сторона вфу’, ‘обстрел сторона украинский’, ‘обстрел сторона украина’, ‘обстрел сторона всу’, ‘украинский войско обстреливать’, ‘обстрел украинский войско’, ‘обстрел сторона вооруженный формирование украина’, ‘военный преступление украина’, ‘украинский военный обстреливать’, ‘обстрел украинский военный’, ‘калибр миллиметр’, ‘калибр мм’
Crimea Nuclear weapons	‘Crimea’, ‘kerch’, ‘Sevastopol’, ‘Simferopol’ ‘weapon mass destruction’, ‘nuclear weapon’, ‘nuclear strike’, ‘nuclear warhead’, ‘nuclear war’	‘Крым’, ‘керч’, ‘севастополь’, ‘Симферополь’ ‘оружие массовый уничтожение’, ‘оружие массовый поражение’, ‘ядерный оружие’, ‘ядерный удар’

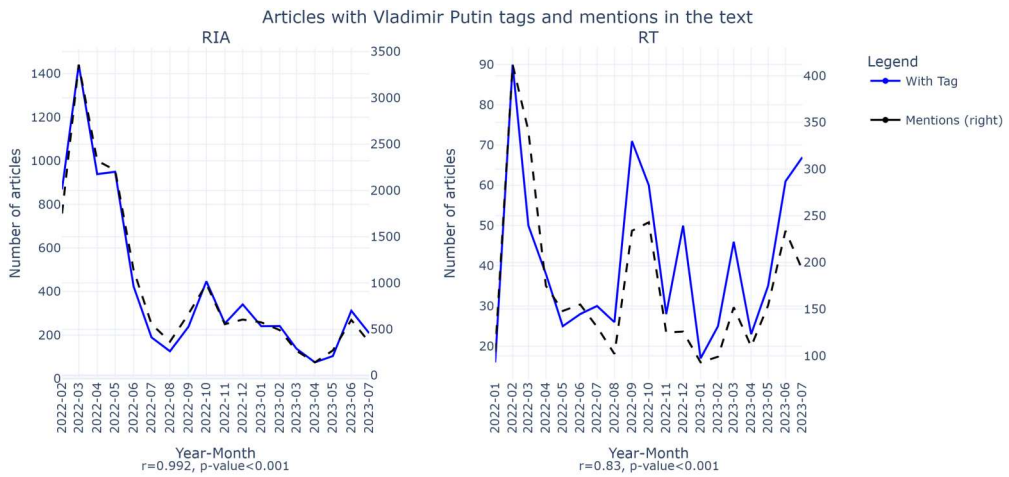
commonly associated with the topic based on the most common lemmatized words and phrases that reflected the content of the articles (Table 1). These consistency checks show that for topics where tags are available, the number of articles with tags of a particular group is positively correlated with articles from the same mention-group (aggregated over day, week, or month). This revealed consistent trends across the news organizations and provided validation to the effectiveness of our approach (see robustness checks in the [repository of the project](#)). Figure 1 shows the robustness checks performed on the database to consolidate the relative differences in the distribution of tags across news articles.

Results

We start by comparing the distribution of tags identified in domestic and foreign-focused Russian media. The first analysis tests the hypothesis that domestic media gave additional prominence to Vladimir Putin earlier in the war to catalyze and take advantage of rally-around-the-flag effects, before sidelining the coverage of Putin following a series of military setbacks. The second analysis covers the relative emphasis on NATO and Ukrainian actions, with additional focus on Crimea to highlight the stakes of the war. The third analysis examines coverage of nuclear issues and threats.

Putin

Both domestic and international news coverage portrayed Putin prominently at the start of the conflict. Putin had substantial public approval (Frye et al. 2017) and sought to maintain it during the conflict. Domestic-focused RIA Novosti mentioned Putin in 73% of all articles in our database during the first months of the conflict. RT also featured Putin, but far less frequently. As the conflict progressed and momentum stalled, mentions of Putin in domestic media collapsed. By July and August 2022, RIA and RT mentioned



Smoothened Percentage Distribution of Mentions over Time (averaged by week)

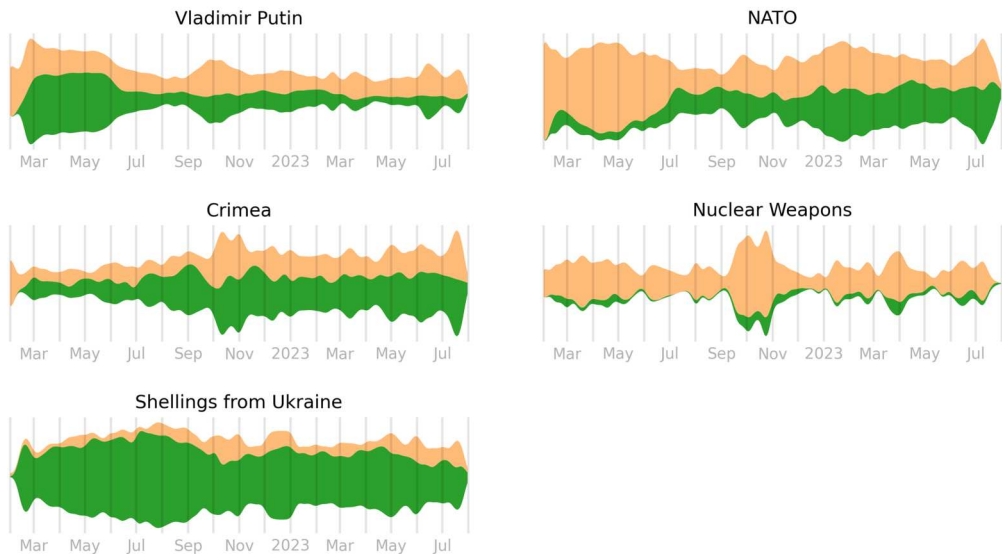


Figure 1. (a) Correlation between tags and mentions of Vladimir Putin over time. (b) Smoothed percentage distribution of mention-groups over time.

Putin at similar rates. Mentions of Putin then rose again in September-October 2022, which coincided with the announcement of mobilization in Russia and the annexation of occupied territories of Ukraine (despite the purported objective of not occupying Ukrainian land). Due to the contentious and costly nature of the mobilization, RT actually mentioned Putin marginally more regularly than RIA. In the remainder of our dataset, RT mentions Putin as often as or more often than RIA does.

Figure 2 shows a clear divide in the domestic (RIA) coverage of Putin before and after June 2022, after which rally-around-the-flag efforts are downplayed by RIA in face of

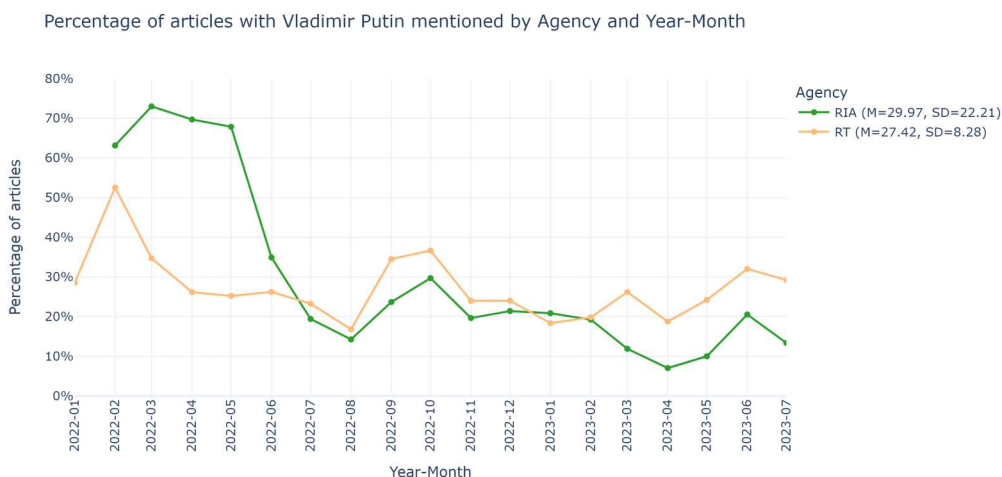


Figure 2. Percentage of articles mentioning Vladimir Putin in RIA Novosti ($N = 17232$) and RT ($N = 3350$) over time.

growing military setbacks. This remarkable inversion in the press coverage suggests that domestic news outlets sought to use the conflict to maintain support for Putin early in the war. But as battlefield progress stalled and the costs of war for Russians rose, domestic coverage of Putin collapsed. These changes are consistent with H1, as efforts to maintain support for an autocrat led to dramatic shifts in the relative emphases of domestic and foreign coverage.

NATO, Ukrainian Shelling, and Crimea

Our second hypothesis suggests that domestic and foreign media will focus on different actors and stakes. To test H2, we examine the mention-groups of “NATO,” “Ukrainian Shelling,” and “Crimea.” These reveal stark differences in which actors, threats, and stakes domestic and foreign state media choose to emphasize. Domestic state media paid far less attention to NATO than foreign-facing state media (Figure 3). RT discussed NATO in more than 30% of its articles during the early months of the war. NATO mentions peaked in April 2022 as Western discussions of how to respond to Ukraine continued and Western aid ramped up. Battlefield setbacks led to a large decline in NATO mentions, before NATO discussion stabilized around 20% of all RT articles.

RT’s early mentions of NATO are connected to publicly stated Russian war objectives. Russian leaders frequently emphasized the provocation and problems of Ukrainian NATO membership. In total, 57% of RT articles ($n = 118$) published between March 10 and April 11 included the following “backgrounder:”

Russia has now demanded that Ukraine officially declare itself a neutral country that will never join the US-led NATO military bloc. Kyiv insists the Russian offensive was completely unprovoked and has denied claims it was planning to retake the two republics by force.

More broadly, most RT’s references to NATO serve to justify the decision to engage in warfare by emphasizing the prospect of NATO’s eastward expansion into Ukraine, even

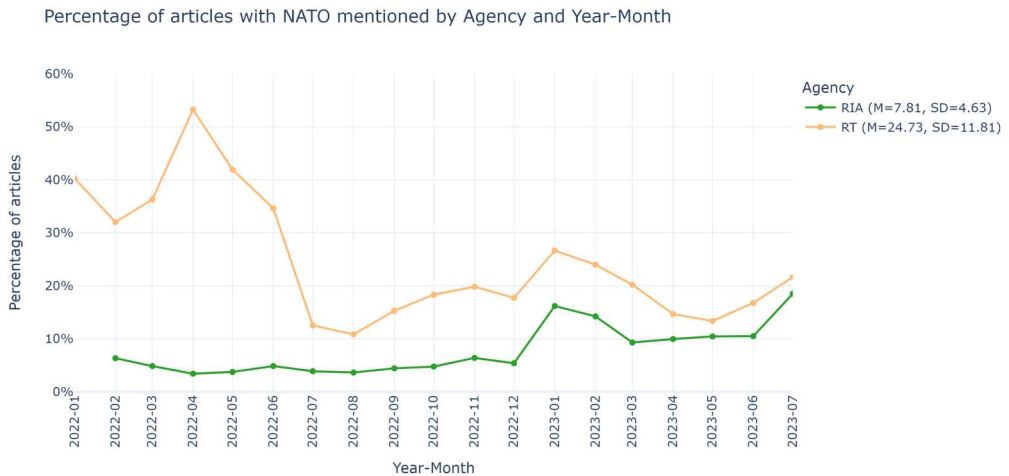


Figure 3. Percentage of articles mentioning NATO in RIA Novosti ($N = 3917$) and RT ($N = 2946$) from January 2022 to July 2023.

in articles about the economic implications of the war (e.g., “Major clothing brand explains why it’s staying in Russia”):

Russia argues that its military operation in Ukraine was necessary in order to demilitarize the country, to protect the Donbass republics, and to defend Russia’s own security amid NATO’s eastward expansion.⁴

Conversely, RIA only mentioned NATO roughly 5% of the time for most of the war, but their mentions of NATO doubled in 2023. Yet, RT’s coverage of NATO is considerably higher even after RIA’s increased coverage in 2023. In late 2023, there was a marked alignment and convergence between domestic and foreign state media mentions of NATO. This may reflect efforts to build domestic support by highlighting the threat of foreign support for Ukraine. Much of the upsurge since the end of 2022 is associated with an increase in references to the use of weapons produced by NATO countries in the shelling of territory controlled by Russia, including the following article:

Earlier the DPR representative office at the Joint Center for Control and Coordination of the Ceasefire announced on Thursday that Ukrainian troops fired two 155 mm caliber shells into the central Voroshilovsky district of Donetsk. Artillery with a caliber of 155 millimeters is used by NATO countries.⁵

Such reports were frequently followed by standardized backgrounders reiterating the official Russian government position:

Russia had earlier sent a note to NATO countries regarding arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that any shipments containing weapons for Ukraine would become a legitimate target for Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry said that NATO countries are “playing with fire” by supplying weapons to Ukraine.⁶

The sense of conflict escalation in mentions of NATO is simultaneously undesirable for domestic audiences and encouraged towards international audiences. Indeed, foreign state media continuously mentioned NATO expansion as the central reason for the war

in Ukraine (Oates and Ramsay 2024). Instead of NATO, domestic media emphasized a topic we label “Shelling from Ukraine.” This topic covers mentions of the alleged shelling of Russian-controlled territories by Ukrainian forces and other violence by Ukraine against separatist republics, civilians, and Russian forces. RIA Novosti covered these incidents extensively, while RT barely mentions them, especially before the invasion. These differences are consistent with H2 and reflect the distinct audiences and aims of domestic and foreign-facing autocratic propaganda during the war.

In RIA Novosti, discussions of Ukrainian shelling increase as the conflict starts to turn against Russia. Early mentions were particularly focused on Ukrainian violence to bolster claims that the Russian invasion was humanitarian. Such mentions track the battleground but decline during the Ukrainian offensive in the summer of 2023. Throughout our analysis, at least a fifth of articles in domestic Russian state media mention Ukrainian shelling to boost the sense of an aggressive threat. Discussion of Ukrainian violence in RT grows from a low base as the conflict progresses. By July 2023, roughly 10% of RT articles discuss shelling. Figure 4 unpacks these trends that suggest an effort to pin some responsibility for the conflict in Ukraine.

RIA Novosti’s coverage of Ukrainian shelling, and war-related reporting more broadly, consistently describes units of the Ukrainian Army Forces as nationalist and neo-Nazi formations (“националистические и неонацистские формирования”), Nazi battalions (“нацистские батальоны”), and foreign mercenaries and neo-Nazis (“иностранные наемники и неонацисты”). This persistent use of “Nazi” rhetoric aligns with prior research documenting the Nazi-fascist framing in Russian wartime propaganda (Fortuin 2022). RIA Novosti also refers to the Ukrainian Army Forces as nationalist formations (“националистические формирования”) and armed formations of Ukraine (“вооруженные формирования Украины” or “ВФУ”). References to “armed formations” instead of “armed forces” lead to the frequently used abbreviation “VFU” (translation of “armed formations of Ukraine”) instead of the generally accepted VSU (Army Forces of Ukraine), a framing

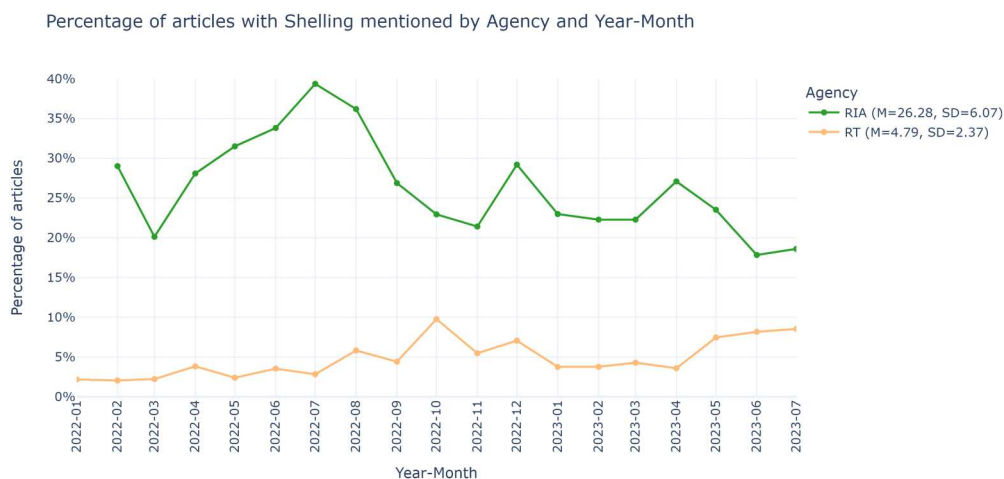


Figure 4. Percentage of articles in RIA Novosti ($N = 13721$) and RT ($N = 568$) mentioning alleged shelling by the Ukrainian Army from January 2022 to July 2023.

device that fosters a sense of illegality surrounding the Ukrainian army. Such language appears across a wide range of war-related topics:

The United States supplies militants with weapons and medical supplies both in Syria and in Ukraine, fighters from one of the Russian Armed Forces reconnaissance units fighting in Donbas told RIA Novosti ... According to one of the scouts, without support for the militants, Nazism in Ukraine would have already been eradicated, and people would be living peacefully.⁷

In contrast to that, RT places considerably less emphasis on Nazi rhetoric when directly describing the Ukrainian military. While the official justification of “demilitarization and denazification” persists in RT’s coverage, references to Nazi or neo-Nazi sympathizers in Ukraine are not found. Instead, RT employs Nazi references to draw historical parallels between contemporary Ukraine, its allies, and Nazi Germany:

“We will get these systems around June 22,” Melnyk said, referring to the howitzers as he again criticized Berlin for being too slow with the arms shipments. The date named by the ambassador was the very day that Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union back in 1941. The USSR included both Ukraine and Russia at that time, and Ukraine was among the first Soviet territories attacked by the Nazis.⁸

Similarly, RT invokes alleged historical continuity between Ukrainian nationalism and wartime collaboration when reporting on diaspora organizations, such as the Ukrainian World Congress based in Canada:

The [Ukrainian World] Congress, which is based in Toronto, originated as a Cold War-era organization representing the Ukrainian diaspora living outside of the Soviet Union. Many Ukrainian nationalists, including those who joined forces with Nazi Germany when it invaded the USSR in 1941, later fled the advancing Red Army and found shelter in countries such as Canada. Declassified CIA documents have shown an extensive record of recruiting such people for a guerilla campaign against Soviet Ukraine after the war. Modern Ukraine portrays war-time nationalist leaders as heroes and downplays or denies the crimes that those individuals and their forces committed.⁹

Nazi symbolism is also employed to frame the press coverage of Western military:

German arms giant Rheinmetall unveiled its new main battle tank at the major weapons exhibition in Paris on Monday. The vehicle comes under the “Panther” nickname in an apparent nod to Nazi Germany’s iconic PzKpfw V medium tank.¹⁰

These excerpts underscore a key difference in propaganda strategy: while RIA Novosti uses “Nazi” rhetoric primarily to delegitimize the Ukrainian military for domestic audiences, RT applies Nazi references more selectively, linking Ukraine and Western supporters to Nazism through history, symbolism, and analogy rather than direct accusation.

The gap in discussions of NATO and Ukrainian shelling between RT and RIA Novosti shows different threat emphases in Russia’s domestic and international state media. Foreign-focused news focuses on the involvement and responsibility of foreign actors. This is in sharp contrast to the emphasis placed by domestic actors on the immediate opponent, save for when international actors like NATO can be unambiguously tied to the conflict through material support. Foreign and domestic news also highlights distinct stakes. While NATO is part of the international stakes and threats, domestic media pays more attention to issues like Crimea. [Figure 5](#) shows news articles connected with

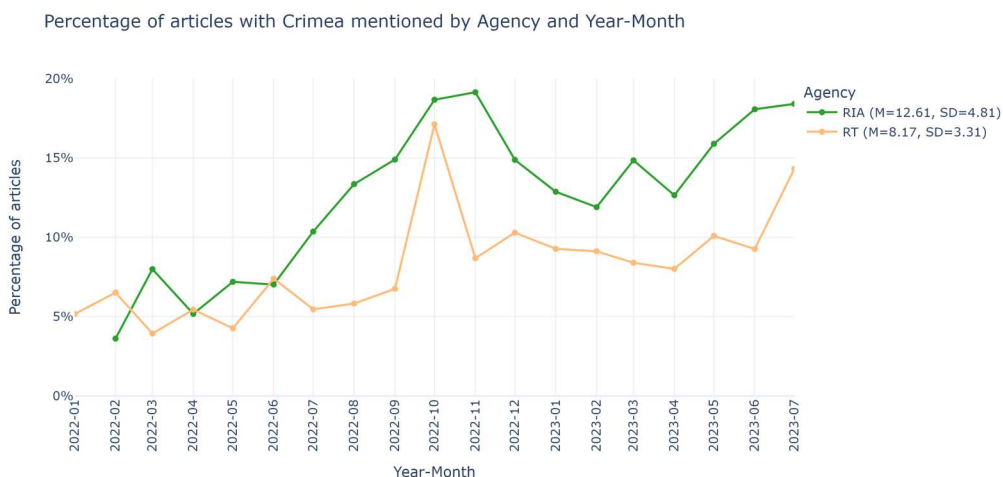


Figure 5. Percentage of articles in RIA Novosti ($N = 6453$) and RT ($N = 958$) mentioning Crimea from January 2022 to July 2023.

Crimea locations and the Crimean Bridge. For this set of articles, the most significant surges in activity are associated with attacks on the Crimean Bridge in October 2022 and July 2023.

Specifically, RIA Novosti emphasizes Crimea more often as the Russian war effort stag-nates and struggles to maintain public support. Putin's 2014 seizure of Crimea was reportedly very popular domestically (Levada-Centr, 2021), foregrounding that the stakes in Crimea can boost support for the war effort. RT, on the other hand, is far less concerned with Crimea. The exception is the Ukrainian attack on the Kerch Strait Bridge, which RT covered much more extensively. This was conceivably driven by the perception that Crimea is less important to international audiences, save for as a potential red line for nuclear escalation.

In addition to different emphasis, the content of domestic and international coverage also differs. Before the first attacks on the Crimean Bridge, RIA mentions of Crimea were associated mainly with its economic connections to newly occupied territories. After the attacks, RIA highlights the alleged terrorism of the Kerch Bridge bombing and uses that attack to justify Russian strikes on civilian Ukrainian infrastructure. Before the Kerch Bridge attack, 68 RIA Novosti articles (0.2% of the all articles) published between April 28 and August 23 featured the following backgrounder:

During a special operation to demilitarize Ukraine, the Russian military took control of the entire Kherson region in the south of the country and the Azov part of the Zaporozhye region. Military-civil administrations have been formed in these regions, Russian TV channels and radio have begun broadcasting, and trade ties with Crimea are being restored.¹¹

After the Kerch bridge attack, the emphasis shifted:

Since the beginning of the week, Russian armed forces have been striking targets in Ukraine's military command and control, communications, and energy systems. Massive attacks using long-range precision weapons occurred on October 10 and 11. President Vladimir Putin, at a meeting with permanent members of the Security Council, called this a response to the

terrorist attack on the Crimean Bridge carried out by Kiev and other attacks on civilian targets in Russia.¹²

The recurring use of identical text blocks presented as backgrounders suggests the presence of state-approved messaging on sensitive topics such as the status of Crimea. This practice is a notable characteristic of authoritarian state media and an indicator of state control over information. Such text blocks, however, were not restricted to RIA. RT's coverage of Crimea also features state-approved messaging during this period. Before the attack, RT's mentions of Crimea were more likely to be associated with the political context of joining Russia but shifted to justify the strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure after the Kerch bridge explosion. RT content before the Kerch Bridge featured the following backgrounder:

Crimea voted to leave Ukraine and join Russia shortly after the 2014 Maidan coup in Kiev. The Donbass republics of Donetsk and Lugansk broke away from Ukraine the same year, with tacit Russian support. The Kremlin previously stated that Crimea's return to Ukraine is impossible. According to amendments adopted in 2020, the Russian Constitution bans the surrender of Russian territory, with the exception of minor border adjustments.¹³

But after the attack it presented this backgrounder:

The Russian military launched dozens of missiles on targets in Ukraine, which included its key infrastructure sites. Moscow called the military action retaliation for a number of sabotage plots targeting crucial Russian facilities, including the Kursk nuclear power plant, the Turk-Stream gas pipeline, and the Crimean Bridge. Kiev's "terrorist tactics" can no longer remain unanswered after last week's truck bombing of the bridge, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.¹⁴

The coverage of NATO, Ukrainian shelling, and Crimea show how domestic and international state media address distinct threats and stakes. While domestic state media places an emphasis on salient issues and threats from the opponent, the international news coverage distributed by RT emphasizes the role of international actors in the conflict. Events can blend these emphases, as shown in the above case studies, but even in such instances domestic and international news outlets employ fundamentally distinct frames to cover the events.

Escalation Risks

Our last hypothesis posits that international news places greater emphasis on escalation risks while domestic media downplays such issues (H3). This encourages foreign actors to restrain their involvement and minimize the perceived costs for domestic audiences. To probe this hypothesis, we explore the press coverage of nuclear threats and weapons. Russia's nuclear arsenal and military doctrine have provided a constant nuclear undertone to the fighting, with multiple Russian officials mentioning nuclear weapons. These nuclear threats often accompanied battlefield problems, an agenda that is encapsulated in the following examples:

Putin warned Western leaders who openly call for a military defeat of Russia that Moscow is prepared to use any means at its disposal to defend itself and to ensure its territorial integrity. US President Joe Biden has hit back at Putin, accusing him of "making irresponsible nuclear threats to use nuclear weapons."¹⁵

According to Antonov, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine was caused by the continuation of the same policies, to which Moscow had to respond militarily. If Russia believes that its existence is threatened by the US and its allies, it will use nuclear weapons, as is stated in its military doctrine, he added.¹⁶

NATO would not intervene if Moscow used nuclear weapons against Ukraine, Dmitry Medvedev has said, claiming that Kiev's Western backers would be unwilling "to die in a nuclear apocalypse" for the country.¹⁷

While Russian leaders made several nuclear threats, prominently featured in the international press, domestic news coverage of nuclear threats was markedly different. Figure 6 shows that RIA Novosti largely ignored nuclear weapons in articles related to the war. Even as the war moved against Russia between May–July 2022, no articles published by RIA mentioned nuclear issues. RT emphasized nuclear weapons far more often, with a range of articles directly conveying Russian threats. Indeed, nearly 10% of all articles published by RT in October 2022 mentioned nuclear weapons, a period when the Ukrainian counteroffensive and the Kerch strait bridge attack damaged Russia's military position. In more typical months, 4–5% of RT articles mention nuclear issues.

The downplaying of the nuclear threat by domestic Russian media is consistent with H3, as nuclear conflicts entail a dangerous escalation with existential consequences to the nation. This strategy was likely effective, as most Russians (86% of the surveyed respondents) reportedly doubted nuclear weapons would ever be used in the conflict (Levada-Centr, 2023), notwithstanding credible intercepts revealing that the Russian military considered detonating a weapon on the battlefield (Sanger 2023). Indeed, RT played up these escalation risks for international audiences to induce greater caution, with Figure 6 unpacking these differences. It should be noted that the Russian effort to convey nuclear resolve via propaganda is not unique. North Korea routinely uses propaganda for nuclear signaling (Rich 2014), often ramping up propaganda threats prior to provocative actions such as missile tests (Sukin 2022).

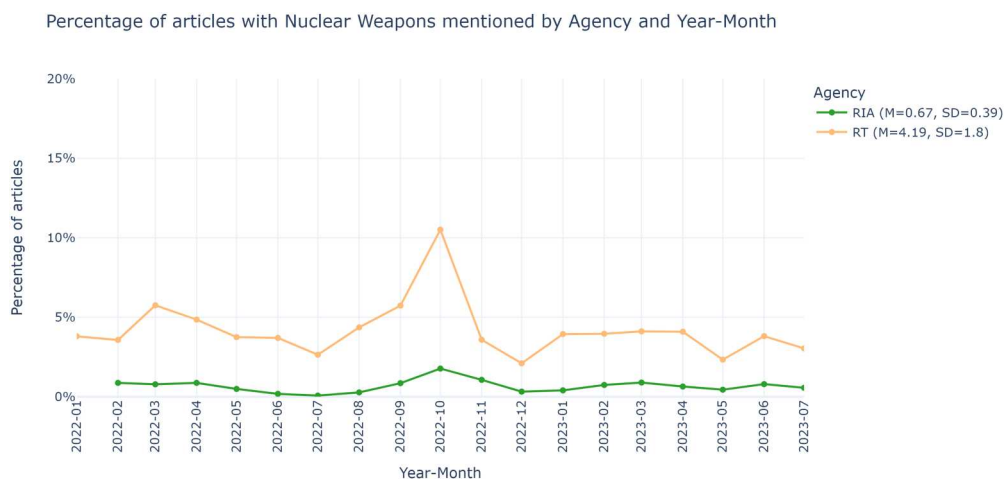


Figure 6. Percentage of articles in RIA Novosti ($N = 355$) and RT ($N = 508$) mentioning nuclear weapons from January 2022 to July 2023.

Discussion

This study provides evidence on Russia's propaganda tactics during the war by unpacking the conflicting news coverage of domestic and foreign state media. Russia's war narratives appear ostensibly inconsistent due to the splintering between messaging and audiences, with propaganda intended for foreign audiences offering a clear signal of deterrence. The domestic audiences of RIA Novosti, on the other hand, are exposed to Putin's statements and actions to the extent that the Russian battlefield progresses. Domestic audiences are also kept abreast of threats from Ukraine and attacks in Crimea far more extensively than international audiences, who are more likely to be exposed to information about the role and actions of NATO in the war. Domestic and foreign state media in Russia also portrayed the potential risks of the war differently, as RT gave much more attention to nuclear weapons and Russian nuclear threats compared with RIA Novosti.

Our findings speak to three debates. First, they extend existing scholarship on RT by providing a nuanced understanding of autocratic propaganda and communication strategies. Prior work examined RT's role within Russian information operations and its evolution as an international broadcasting instrument (Carter and Carter 2021; Oates and Ramsay 2024), examining inward or externally focused propaganda in isolation. By explicitly comparing them, we offer an integrated approach of how autocratic propaganda varies by target audience, contrasting RT's foreign-facing output to Russia's domestic messaging. Second, our results have implications for how authoritarian regimes manage international conflict and crisis bargaining. Building on existing work highlighting diverse constituencies and the role of the public in autocratic foreign policy (Weeks 2008; Weiss 2014; Weiss and Dafoe 2019), we show how authoritarian states attempt to balance competing imperatives by managing domestic and international opinion during war.

Our results also help to explain apparent contradictions in Russian messaging throughout the war in Ukraine around two tropes. For domestic audiences, the messaging is designed to justify the conflict and downplay its risks. It presents the war as a crucial and unavoidable struggle against a dangerous foe while reassuring the public that the conflict is under control. For international audiences, the messaging is focused on deflecting responsibility and minimizing foreign intervention by framing the conflict as a localized problem that should be contained. This ostensibly contradictory messaging lends support to scholarship on rewired and participatory propaganda (Oates 2016, 2021; Wanless and Berk 2020).

Lastly, this dual message aims to foster a sense of national purpose and support while minimizing public fear and opposition to the war. This helps to explain the perplexing experience of Western audiences towards Russian claims of Nazi-fascists running Ukraine that are perceived as implausible and detrimental to the credibility of the invasion. However confusing, these statements are intended primarily for domestic audiences, and the strategic targeting of Russian propaganda bears this out. Positioned outside Western media coverage of international and domestic affairs, this coverage targets individuals who engage with foreign-focused Russian media and are less likely to see such information, while also more likely to be exposed to the Russian emphasis on NATO and the risks of escalation.

Conclusion

This study shows how autocrats face competing imperatives when using war propaganda to shape foreign and domestic opinion. Minimizing foreign and domestic pressure on the war effort leads to different and occasionally conflicting messages. Domestic state media emphasized the high stakes of the conflict and threats posed by opponents while downplaying the risks of escalation. Domestic state media also connected the leader with success in the conflict but mentioned leaders less often as battlefield progress stalled. In contrast, foreign propaganda places more emphasis on the role and responsibility of international actors in provoking a local conflict that they have low stakes in, while also emphasizing escalation risks, especially if foreign actors join the conflict. These conflicting strategies reveal that the preservation of domestic stability and regime legitimacy takes precedence over maintaining international credibility, even at the cost of messaging inconsistencies that may undermine the regime's foreign-facing narrative.

Our analysis of the press coverage featured in RT and RIA Novosti during Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine support the dual objective proposition, as we found that news content intended for foreign and domestic audiences have distinct aims and emphases. Our results therefore help explain apparent contradictions in Russian messaging by highlighting which messages are intended for which audience. One such example is the Russian state media emphasis on NATO enlargement and NATO's responsibility for the conflict (Oates and Ramsay 2024; Sadler 2025), which featured prominently in foreign but not domestic media, thereby indicating that the issue speaks to an international wedge strategy rather than a salient domestic grievance. Domestic and international press coverage of Russian state media thus differs not only in issue salience, but also in issue selection (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2017; Kampf and Liebes 2013).

Our findings suggest one explanation for widespread expert claims that Russian justifications for the war in Ukraine are incoherent. The greater visibility of domestic messages to international audiences creates mixed messages that are more coherent when filtered through corresponding media outlets. Playing up stakes for domestic audiences may not convince international audiences that other nations are responsible for local disputes. Moreover, it might distract from claims that international actors are responsible or reduce the perceived credibility of autocratic messages. This tension is less acute in domestic media, as there are fewer alternative news sources and domestic audiences are unlikely to seek out foreign language media. It is possible, however, that attempts to emphasize conflict costs and risks for international audiences may indicate to domestic audiences that the war is more costly and difficult than domestic media may suggest.

This split narrative of Russian propaganda conceivably maximizes support for a prolonged and costly war by framing the conflict in existential and moral terms ("de-Nazification" and threats to the deep-seated national identity, NATO expansionism, and warmongering) while also suppressing news of casualties and economic sanctions that could prevent the domestic win-set from shrinking due to war fatigue. Internationally, Russian state media inflame escalation fears with a narrative that shifts from moral crusading to strategic intimidation. This is designed to influence the domestic win-sets of Western governments with frequent mentions of Russia's nuclear triad and the "red lines" intended to stoke public fear in the West about a looming World War III, with the tangible win-set of restricting advanced weaponry available to Ukraine.

The two-level propaganda game invariably exceeds any single, unified messaging, favoring instead a bifurcated strategy that seeks to solidify the domestic win-set by making the war culturally mandatory, while simultaneously attacking the international win-set by making the cost of supporting Ukraine appear unacceptably high due to the risk of global escalation. This foregrounds a salient pattern in Russia's manipulation of nuclear threats, a pattern that would reemerge in late 2024 and again in early 2026 when Russia fired an intermediate-range, nuclear-capable missile to strike western Ukraine amidst peace talks between European leaders on postwar security guarantees. In contrast to the muted domestic coverage, the international press highlighted that Russia used the Oreshnik missile, which can carry conventional, dummy, or nuclear warheads to hit drone-making and energy facilities in Ukraine. The firing of these missiles entails a veiled nuclear threat as they are an integral part of Russia's strategic nuclear force, particularly in 2024, when the weapon caused minimal damage as it carried dummy warheads (Hopkins 2026; Kramer and Vinograd 2006).

Our results nonetheless have some limitations. Firstly, although Russian propaganda during the invasion of Ukraine is a useful test of our theoretical proposition, the specific contours of autocratic propaganda may vary across conflicts. Other autocratic regimes may be unwilling or unable to make nuclear threats, or to center the conflict on escalation risks. Similarly, we look at the aggregate distribution of news articles across outlets but spend less time on specific events and the day-to-day content of the news outlets. Future research should consider autocratic efforts to bind partners during wartime, in contrast to the wedge strategies and efforts to keep foreign powers out of a conflict (Crawford 2021). The consequences of the mixed messaging underpinning the dual objective of state media propaganda are also an important subject for future research.

Future research should also consider how propaganda in democratic countries navigates the tensions between selling conflicting narratives in contexts of open and free press. Recent research that contrasted the coverage of *The New York Times* with that of the *Wall Street Journal* identified a consistent pattern pointing to a divide between domestic and international coverage (Leung and Strumpf 2024). With such developments emerging even in contexts where the constitution protects freedom of the press, and where the coverage of domestic and foreign affairs is comparatively much safer from internal censure, future research should investigate whether these differences stem from extant pressures at the intersection of media and politics or the relative but increasing insularity of newsrooms.

Finally, selling war at home and abroad is a critical challenge for autocratic leaders who depend on public opinion for legitimacy. Maintaining domestic support while attempting to preempt or wedge apart international opposition requires a carefully tailored mix of messages, some of which may be inevitably contradictory. Our results show that when these imperatives conflict, autocracies systematically prioritize domestic stability over international credibility. The willingness to deploy contradictory narratives—downplaying nuclear risks at home while amplifying them abroad, foregrounding leaders during military successes but sidelining them during setbacks—demonstrates that regime survival through domestic opinion management consistently takes precedence over maintaining a coherent international message. Ultimately, it is hard to convey high stakes and low escalation risks to one audience and low stakes and high risks to another.

Notes

1. RT: <https://www.rt.com/russia/550408-special-operation-putin-donbass/>.
2. RIA Novosti: <https://ria.ru/20220224/operatsiya-1774620380.html>.
3. We note that while RT is tailored for international audiences, it was banned (along with Sputnik) in the European Union and Canada after the Ukrainian invasion. During this period Russia also restricted foreign media domestically with legislation that criminalizes public opposition or independent news reporting about the war.
4. Source: <https://www.rt.com/russia/551406-russia-clothing-brand-stays/>.
5. From the original: "Ранее представительство ДНР в Совместном центре по контролю и координации режима прекращения огня в четверг заявило, что украинские войска выпустили по центральному Ворошиловскому району Донецка два снаряда калибром 155 миллиметров. Артиллерия калибром 155 миллиметров применяется странами НАТО" Source: <https://ria.ru/20220616/donetsk-1795847459.html>. It should be noted that the JCCC, originally devised as a mechanism for monitoring the ceasefire between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists in the Donbas region of Ukraine, has been a pro-Kremlin organization since 2017 when it began distributing government-sanctioned versions of shelling from Ukraine.
6. From the original: "Россия ранее направила странам НАТО ноту из-за поставок вооружений Украине. Глава МИД РФ Сергей Лавров отмечал, что любые грузы, которые содержат вооружение для Украины, станут законной целью для России. Во внешнеполитическом ведомстве РФ заявляли, что страны НАТО "играют с огнем", поставляя оружие на Украину." Source: <https://ria.ru/20221002/slova-1821007611.html>.
7. From the original: "США снабжают боевиков оружием и медикаментами как в Сирии, так и на Украине, рассказали РИА Новости бойцы одного из разведывательных подразделений ВС РФ, воюющих в Донбассе ... По словам одного из разведчиков, при отсутствии поддержки боевиков нацизм на Украине бы уже искоренили и люди жили бы мирно." Source: <https://ria.ru/20220921/razvedchik-1818448252.html>.
8. Source: <https://www.rt.com/russia/556996-ukraine-get-german-arms-date/>.
9. Source: <https://www.rt.com/news/558909-ukrainian-diaspora-turbine-canada/>.
10. Source: <https://www.rt.com/news/557095-germany-panther-tank-unveiled/>.
11. From the original: "Российские военные в ходе спецоперации по демилитаризации Украины взяли под контроль всю Херсонскую область на юге страны и приазовскую часть Запорожской области. В регионах сформированы военно-гражданские администрации, началось вещание российских телеканалов и радио, идет восстановление торговых связей с Крымом." Source: <https://ria.ru/20220508/ukraina-1787467444.html>.
12. From the original: "Российские вооруженные силы с начала недели наносят удары по объектам систем военного управления, связи и энергетики Украины. Самые массированные атаки с применением высокоточного оружия большой дальности произошли 10 и 11 октября. Президент Владимир Путин на совещании с постоянными членами Совбеза назвал это ответом на устроенный Киевом теракт на Крымском мосту и другие атаки на гражданские объекты в России." Source: <https://ria.ru/20221015/udary-1824223669.html>.
13. <https://www.rt.com/russia/553112-lavrov-ukraine-crimea-donbass/>.
14. <https://www.rt.com/russia/564525-ukraine-damage-infrastructure-cnn/>.
15. <https://www.rt.com/russia/563546-russia-belarus-west-respect/>.
16. <https://www.rt.com/russia/563546-russia-belarus-west-respect/>.
17. <https://www.rt.com/russia/563587-medvedev-nuclear-weapons-ukraine/>.

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Author contributions

CRediT: **Matvei Makeev**: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Joshua Alley**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Marco Bastos**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Data Availability Statement

The database curated for this study is available upon request from the research team.

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