

## **Who's Bad? Attitudes Toward Resettlers From the Post-Soviet South Versus Other Nations in the Russian Blogosphere**

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Communication in social media is increasingly being found to reproduce or even reinforce ethnic prejudice and hostility toward migrants. In Russia of the 2010s, with its world's second largest immigrant population, polls have detected high levels of hostility of the Russian population toward *migranty* (migrants), a label attached to resettlers from Central Asia and the Caucasus. We tested the online hostility hypothesis by using the data of 363,000 posts from the Russian-language *LiveJournal*. We applied data mining, regression analysis, and selective interpretative reading to map bloggers' attitudes toward *migranty*, among other ethnicities and nations. Our findings significantly alter the picture drawn from the polls: *Migranty* neither provoke the biggest amount of discussion nor experience the worst treatment in Russian blogs, in which Americans take the lead. Furthermore, Central Asians and North Caucasians are treated very differently.

*Keywords: blogosphere, ethnic attitudes, migrants, big data, topic modeling, Russia*

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Public discussions about immigrants have been proven to influence popular attitudes to immigration (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009), as well as to form negative stereotypes and prejudices (Allport, 1954) closely connected to on-the-ground intergroup conflicts (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Those include hate crime and violence between migrant and ethnic groups (Hall, 2013), although this connection is not absolute (Dancygier, 2010). Thus, research on attitudes toward migrants and ethnic minorities has been gaining the attention of communication scholars and other social scientists. However, research traditionally has been done via polling (Ju, Park, Shim, & Ku, 2016), qualitative field research, or media discourse analysis (Geissler & Poettker, 2009; King & Wood, 2001).

Social media analysis may broaden our knowledge about public attitudes, notably toward ethnicity and migration, in a number of ways. First, user utterances are examples of bottom-up "oral-written speech" (Lutovinova, 2008) free from restrictions experienced by media texts and from pollster-generated agendas. User content thus presents a naturally emerging public opinion; simultaneously, in such countries as Russia, it is also an embodiment of an "alternative public sphere" (Bodrunova & Litvinenko, 2013; Kiriya, 2012). Moreover, social media as large repositories of publicly uttered attitudes, by virtue of being public, may influence offline attitudes and behavior, which makes them an even more important object of study (Bagozzi, Dholakia, & Pearo, 2007).

Second, since the early years of Internet research on migration, diasporas, ethnicity, and race (Nakamura, 2002) to date (Santana, 2015), evidence has been growing that online communication reproduces, rather than smooths, offline power disparities. Reconstructing attitudes from large user post collections may help verify or question this evidence but also may reveal contexts of perceptions of various migrant groups, that is, self-generated topics related to migration and ethnicity that never emerge from the formalized and predetermined structure of surveys and/or editorial agenda-setting priorities. Studies of online public perceptions of migration and ethnicity based on big data are still rare (Bartlett & Norrie, 2015; Bodrunova, Litvinenko, Gavra, & Yakunin, 2015; Pietraszewska, 2013). A range of works have been dedicated to the analysis of online hate speech and of cyberbullying toward migrants (Ben-David & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016), but neither of these research fields allows for comparative analysis of ethnic attitudes in user-generated content.

In this article, we seek to partly cover this gap by reconstructing the attitudes of the Russian-speaking online community to a range of ethnic groups labeled *migranty* (migrants) in public discourse, as compared with other most widely discussed ethnicities. Despite being the second biggest world's attractor of immigrants (United Nations, 2013), Russia has so far been a rare case in English-language studies of attitudes toward migrants and ethnic minorities (Alexseev, 2010; Bessudnov, 2016; Foxall, 2014; Gorodzeisky, Glikman, & Maskileyson, 2015; Herrera & Kraus, 2016). The Russian word *migranty* used throughout this article captures the phenomenon of perceived migrants, those who "look like" newcomers (mostly from the post-Soviet South), independent of their real story of relocation. It is seldom used to mark Belarusians or Ukrainians, and, furthermore, it indicates that migration and ethnicity are inseparable in the Russian public discourse.

All of these considerations led us to formulate our research questions on migrants in their relation to other ethnicities: In user texts, are *migranty* discussed more than other ethnicities? Are they perceived

as worse than other groups, and in which aspects? Are they depicted stereotypically and/or with prejudice? In what contexts are they discussed? And are there notable differences in attitudes between various ethnicities within migrancy?

To answer these questions, we adopted a post-Allport approach (Allport, 1954) that links emergence of prejudice to underlying perceived threats (D'Ancona, 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Our starting assumption was that migrancy would be perceived as a threat because of their growing social visibility, and thus would be covered more intensely and negatively than other ethnicities, and also stereotypically and uniformly. Furthermore, we distinguished between different types of threats. In the literature, migration is usually divided into economic and cultural (D'Ancona, 2015) or, in a more nuanced way, into realistic (connected to social and economic well-being) and symbolic (connected to values and beliefs; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Building on this, we also distinguished perceived political threats (connected to the position and security of one's ethnic group/nation among others at the international arena). Here, we not only dealt with immigrant ethnicities available for face-to-face communication but also compared them with external groups that reside in their nation-states and enter people's imagination predominantly through international news. Thus, we discerned four major semantic contexts in which threats may be constructed by users: social, economic, cultural, and political. We expected the political context to prevail in the coverage of external nations, whereas migrancy would be depoliticized and "socialized."

Next, we discuss the relevant literature and briefly reconstruct the recent history of immigration to the European Russia and the discourses surrounding it to formulate our hypotheses. To test them, we employed a mixed methodology applying big data methods, statistical analysis, and interpretative reading to a data set of more than 363,000 user posts from the *LiveJournal* blog platform published during February–May 2013. During that period, *LiveJournal* was the leading blog platform for political discussion in Russia.

### **Representations of Migrants in Old and New Media: A Literature Review**

Public discourse on migration has been long studied, originating in research on coverage of migrants in traditional media (Migration Observatory, 2013; Triandafyllidou, 2013), developing to online media (Miloni, Spyridou, & Vadratsikas, 2015) and finally user-generated content (Bartlett & Norrie, 2015). The latter studies are still particularly scarce, but some valuable insights may be drawn from traditional media research. Most have found that the prevailing stance on migrants is negative. Most often, migrants are connected with illegality, (lack of) security, water metaphors (e.g., inflow and influx), and sometimes economy-related concepts (Migration Observatory, 2013; Rasinger, 2010). Gemi, Ulasiuk, and Triandafyllidou (2013) revealed that coverage of migrants, as European journalists state, is overwhelmingly political and negative, whereas a minority of nonpolitical frames is positive and related to getting aid, integration, and success; similarly, Foster, Cook, Barter-Godfrey, and Furneaux (2011) showed a counterdiscourse challenging negative stereotypes about Muslim and Arab immigrants in Australia. That is, migrant-related connotations are easily grouped into four aforementioned contexts: political (merging with international relations), economic (e.g., costs vs. benefits for locals), social (e.g., crime and infections vs. integration and success), and cultural (e.g., disobedience to local traditions vs.

multiculturalism). But, so far, media studies do not relate their findings to the respective types of threats developed in prejudice theories. Also, we have not found any media research trying to differentiate between ethnicity-based hostility and migrantophobia: In most cases, it is hard to say whether immigrants are treated negatively because of their ethnicity or newcomer status.

Research that links migrants to the Internet has been dominated by studies of e-diasporas and minorities online, including migrants' online behavior, their use of online resources for their specific needs, online migrant communities, (re)constructing ethnic identities at a distance, and, generally, empowerment of minorities via the Internet (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Oiarzabal & Reips, 2012). Because in this study, we focused on representation of migrants and ethnicity by the dominant group of Russian-speaking users, we leave the important topic of e-diasporas outside this overview.

Another large stream of related literature discusses detection and countering online hate speech and cyberbullying against migrant, ethnic, and religious groups. Many of those studies developed methodological approaches to the problem (Hughey & Daniels, 2013) and methods of automatic hate speech detection (for overview, see Agarwal & Sureka, 2015), and others raise ethical questions (Cammaerts, 2009; Douglas, 2007). But even those who study hate groups or hate discourse in depth (Ben-David & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016; Gemignani & Hernandez-Albujar, 2015) aimed to find specifically negative content rather than to map a spectrum of attitudes toward many ethnicities. As an exception to this trend, Santana (2015) investigated online comments to the news on a stricter migration law in Arizona and described high emotionality, negativity, and a range of attitudes toward Latin American immigrants (described as cockroaches, scumbags, rats, bloodsucking leeches, dogs, to name a few). He concluded that incivility undermines democratic deliberation potential of the Internet. Bartlett and Norrie (2015), who applied automatic methods to analyze British Twitter, however, came to very different conclusions. They found that the majority of tweets opposed stricter regulation of migration and were supportive of immigration and quite neutral in tone. Thus, attitudes toward migrants expressed online may vary greatly depending on country or platform, and relevant research is still too scarce to detect universal trends.

Research on the Russian media is mostly in line with negative findings. The press portrays migrant communities as problem-related (Blokhin, 2013), connecting them to crime, additional expenses for the local population (Mal'kova, 2006), and dangerous infections (Regamey, 2011). Karpenko (2004) found that Caucasians (*kavkaztsy*) are often portrayed as "unwelcome guests" versus "hosts," whereas only rarely journalists find some excuses for immigration. Regamey (2011) also argues that, by 2010s, the images of *kavkaztsy* had been replaced with those of unskilled foolish Central Asian workers with poor command of Russian, all of them termed *Tajiks*. Analyzing news bulletins on *Pervy Kanal* and *Rossiya 1* federal TV channels, Hutchings and Tolz (2015) came to slightly differing conclusions: They reveal hushing-up of ethnic tensions, diversion of attention to other countries, avoiding ethnic topics in election periods, and "media's embarrassment" in reporting ethnic crises when the Kremlin is facing controversies in its own nation-building policy. Salimovsky and Ermakova (2011) found hate expressions in online comments to Russian news, including direct appeals that representatives of certain ethnic, religious, and social groups should be beaten, killed, hanged, or shot, or have their graves desecrated. Other Russian scholars have argued that empowering via the Internet is not working for ethnic migrants in Russia, and

nationalist groups lead public discussions on migrant-related issues both online and offline (Bodrunova,, Litvinenko, Gavra, & Yakunin, 2015; Verkhovsky, 2011). This situation partly originates in the recent past of Russia.

### **Migration and Immigrants in Late USSR and New Russia**

#### ***Soviet and Post-Soviet Policy in a Discursive Context***

Russia's contemporary migration issues have been strongly influenced by the USSR's policies on migration and ethnicity and their subsequent semiabolition. In the late Soviet time, the resettlement regulation combined "Iron Curtain" policies with a countrywide compulsory residence permit (*propiska*), which created the well-known difficulties in individual and group resettlement within the USSR. In addition, a "national-territorial delimitation" policy provided each officially recognized ethnic group its territory, but significantly limited relocation outside it. All of this contributed to higher levels of ethnic homogeneity within regions. Today, the importance of visual attributes of ethnicity in the discourse on migration stems from these preconditions, as well as from the highly primordial Soviet policy on "nationality." The Soviet elites had to grant some rights to multiple ethnic groups while preventing them from acquiring true political independence or impact. Therefore, they actively institutionalized "nationhood" and "nationality" as "fundamental social categories sharply distinct from statehood and citizenship" (Brubaker, 1994, p. 49). At the same time, they promoted the umbrella concept of "the Soviet people" as the equivalent of a nation designed to cement the heterogeneous society.

With the fall of the USSR, most of these policies collapsed. Although access to most public goods is still connected to *propiska*, the latter no longer controls flows of rural-urban and/or westward migration within Russia. Furthermore, Russia has visa-free regimes with most post-Soviet countries. As a result, for the past 25 years, Russia has accepted the second biggest immigrant population after the United States (United Nations, 2013), ex-Soviet countries being its main donors ("Demografiya," 2016). To be fair, the share of the immigrant population (7.7%; United Nations, 2013) and the intensity of internal migration (6-10%; Esipova, Pugliese, & Ray, 2013) have been moderate compared with other countries. Thus, Russia ranks only 55th worldwide for the share of migrants in the population (Popescu, 2012). However, migrants have become very visible against the nearly absent ethnic migration of the Soviet times. That is why mostly cultural, not economic, threats have been reported as factors of hostility. The most important among them are on-street visibility based on phenotypical and behavioral differences, low command of Russian, and religious differences (Bessudnov, 2016; Regamey, 2011).

In the USSR, external ethnicities with their own statehood were easily politicized in the Soviet public discourse by being described as either political enemies or friends, whereas internal ethnicities, deprived of any political component, were "ritualized" and "culturalized." Although this politicized versus ritualized division may be inherent to perception of ethnicity in the trivial public mind (Eriksen, 1993; Krejčí & Velimsky, 1981), it is still unclear whether it persists in Russia and whether it feeds the respective perceived threats—political or cultural.

### ***Attitudes Toward Migrants: Russia as a Case***

Research on attitudes toward migrants has been gaining importance globally (for an overview of cross-country comparative studies, see Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010), and particularly in Europe, where the number of immigrants has been growing together with the feeling of threat (Sari, 2007), both economic and cultural (D'Ancona, 2015). Compared with other societies, Russia is not the most intolerant toward migrants (Mayda, 2006); however, as in many European countries, the trend has been negative. According to a 2016 World Values Survey (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>), from 1995 to 2011, in Russia the proportion of people not willing to have migrants as neighbors tripled from 11% to 32%. National pollsters reported a 15% growth of negative attitudes toward migrants between 2006 and 2012, whereas the proportion of those favoring stricter immigration laws is reported to have grown by 13% in nine years (All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 2013). Although by 2012 fewer respondents claimed that they felt hostility toward people of any other ethnicity (19% against 34% in 2002), approximately 60% throughout the entire decade kept thinking that the inflow of some ethnic groups should be restricted ("Mezhnacional'nye otnosheniya," 2012).

The major change in attitudes happened around 2006; that year, a violent conflict between migrants and locals in the town of Kondopoga gained all-Russian resonance (Foxall, 2014), giving a start to recurring similar conflicts in other places, including Moscow (Bodrunova,, Litvinenko, Gavra, & Yakunin, 2015). As some experts have noted, recent grassroots nationalism is additionally supported on the state level, forming "state/elite xenophobia" (Regamey, 2011; Shlapentokh, 2007). In the popular mind, migrants often have been associated with "stealing" jobs from locals (economic threat), disrespecting local traditions (cultural threat), and bringing crime and infections (social threat), whereas virtually the only positive effect—mentioned by a visibly smaller proportion of people—has been migrants' readiness to fulfill unattractive work for low payment (Pokida & Zybunovskaya, 2010; Public Opinion Foundation, 2014). We sought to see whether these connotations have been reproduced in the blogosphere.

The existing research provides mixed evidence on whether attitudes toward migrants vary based on the ethnicity of the assessed migrant group. Pokida and Zybunovskaya (2010) show that the most negative attitudes are expressed toward migrants from both in-Russian and foreign Caucasus and Central and Southeast Asia, whereas migrants from the Ukraine–Belarus–Moldova triangle, Europe, and other parts of Russia are mostly perceived neutrally. The only welcome group is migrants from the respondents' own provinces. Bessudnov (2016) draws a less nuanced, but virtually identical picture. When an open question is asked, all of the top "hated" ethnic groups mentioned by respondents, except the Chinese, happen to be either from the Caucasus or Central Asia ("Mezhnacional'nye otnosheniya," 2012). Given that the Chinese and other East Asian migrants mostly settle east of the Urals, and most blogs are produced in the European part of Russia where East Asians are not widely mentioned, we leave out the Chinese and define the groups of migrancy as follows: (1) Central Asians (*aziaty*), including Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzs, and Turkmen (but not Kazakhs, as "a different scenario" ["Special Report," 2004]); (2) North Caucasians, including Dagestani, Chechens, Ingushi, Ossetians, and the pejorative "kavkaztsy" (Caucasians); and (3) South Caucasians, including Azerbaijani (*azery*), Armenians, Georgians, and the pejorative "kavkaztsy."

### Research Hypotheses

We assumed that the ethnic groups, with whom locals, including bloggers, engage in direct interaction, would attract more attention than distant ethnic groups. This should be especially true given that this interaction is problematic, which follows from negative media representations of migrancy.

*H1: In the Russian-language LiveJournal, the biggest volume of ethnic-oriented discussion is dedicated to migrancy, especially to North Caucasian and Central Asian ethnicities.*

Similarly, we assumed that migrancy would be portrayed in the most negative way. In measuring negativity, we relied on our earlier work on discursive intolerance (Koltsova & Taratuta, 2003), which we viewed as ranging from polarized hierarchical division (construction of "superior us" vs. "inferior them") to direct calls for violence. To operationalize negative portrayal, we suggested six indicators that capture the presence of general negative versus positive attitude toward a group or its representative, statements of a group's superiority versus inferiority, victimization of a group versus its "aggressorization," solidarization versus alienation, a group's perceived peril, and calls for violence against a group or its representative.

Furthermore, we used indirect markers of discursive discrimination, borrowing from the theory of discriminative minority coverage. Thus, van Dijk (1988), who focuses on race, ethnic, and migrant groups' coverage in news, summarizes typical discursive strategies of discrimination, including us–them opposition, generalization, and selective quotation ("we" are given voice, whereas "they" are given coverage). Bell (1998) emphasizes the importance of characters' actions for understanding news structures, and Koltsova (2011), building on both theories, suggests that the proportion of cases in which representatives of a certain group are denied speech or action can indicate the degree to which this group is discriminated against. Developing such indicators of discrimination as speech and action, we differentiated, first, between direct, indirect, and no speech, as well as between individual action, aggregated action, and no action, given that aggregated action is a type of overstatement leading to (negative) stereotyping.

*H2: Migrancy are underrepresented in terms of speech and action. They are represented by indirect speech and aggregated action rather than by direct speech and action of individuals. Migrancy receive the most negative coverage of all ethnic groups and are portrayed as the most alien and aggressive.*

Given the types of perceived threats and the typical contexts of coverage of migrants discussed above, we think that purely political coverage would be more typical for distant ethnic groups associated with their countries in posts on international relations, whereas migrancy, who engage in direct relations with the locals, would be discussed on a more personal level and thus employ contexts other than politics.

*H3: Discussions on migrancy-related topics go within socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Discussions would link migrancy to public spaces (markets, customs, construction areas), social problems (diseases, crime), and cultural practices (celebrations, religious feasts), and not to political issues.*

As stated, there is mixed evidence whether migrancy in Russia are perceived as a unified group or as a constellation of ethnicities provoking different attitudes, but the level of negativity toward some of them in polls does not vary much.

*H4: Migrancy provoke similar attitudes by bloggers.*

## Method

### ***Finding Ethnicity-Related Topics and Posts***

To compare bloggers' attitudes toward migrancy with those toward other ethnic groups, we needed to form a sample of posts on ethnicity that would be in some sense representative of the blogosphere or at least of *LiveJournal* and would include all ethnic issues that were indeed covered by bloggers. Finding texts on ethnicity among multiple user posts is harder than on well-defined issues such as brands or personalities, as ethnicity is harder to detect through a set of keywords because of the high lexical variability of this topic.

Topic modeling is a group of mathematical algorithms that aims to address such tasks: It automatically mines topics in large text collections, analyzing word co-occurrence in individual texts, without demanding any keywords or other prior knowledge from researchers. In the output, researchers get lists of so-called "top words" and most probable texts for each topic. We have given the detailed description of topic modeling and its limitations elsewhere (Bodrunova, Koltsov, Koltsova, Nikolenko, & Shimorina, 2013; Koltsova & Koltcov, 2013). Here, we briefly note that we used the latent Dirichlet allocation (algorithm with Gibbs sampling; Griffiths & Steyvers, 2004; authors' C++ implementation). To fight the algorithm's instability, we performed five runs with 400 topics each. For each topic of the first run, we found its closest equivalent in other four runs using Kullback–Leibler and Jaccard similarity metrics. Topics that matched with the value exceeding a certain threshold were considered identical and were grouped into "bunches" used for further manual interpretation. Topics that repeated multiple times were given preference as more stable and thus more reliably representing the "really existing" discourse.

### ***Sampling and Processing of the Data Sets***

Our data set consisted of all posts by the 2,000 top bloggers ranked by the Russian *LiveJournal's* blogger rating and posted within 11 weeks (February 4 to May 19, 2013). This period was selected as it did not contain large-scale political or ethnic-colored events that might have distorted the results. Top *LiveJournal* bloggers were selected as "influencers" who, in earlier research, had proved to produce meaningful and politically relevant discussion (Etling et al., 2010; Koltsova & Koltcov, 2013). Also, our tests showed that, in samples going beyond top *LiveJournal* bloggers, the number of automated accounts (commercial bots) rose substantially. Furthermore, there were fewer interpretable topics, whereas those that were interpretable did not differ between top and ordinary bloggers (Koltsova, Koltcov, & Alexeeva, 2014). Random sampling from less sophisticated Russian social networking sites, even when done on a large scale, produced so few ethnicity-relevant messages that their analysis proved unfeasible. This means that our early goal to extract ethnicity-related texts from a representative sample of social media

users turned out to be an ill-posed problem: Those who posted such texts were not representative by definition.

We therefore focused on the users who did post relevant texts. It is important to note that because *LiveJournal* metadata are extremely scarce, the Russian-speaking bloggers we studied may include individuals of different ethnicities and nationalities, and the voices of some groups may be less well represented than others. We underline here that we studied the *LiveJournal* ethnicity-related discourse as such, including all of its possible biases and distortions whose detection was in fact the main goal of this research.

The sample included 363,579 posts. After cleaning, lemmatization, and stop-words deletion, the corpus contained 1,072,283 unique words and 103,933,786 instances.

From five 400-topic runs, we obtained 2,000 topics that produced 952 bunches, with one to five topics in each. Of them, 137 (14.4%) were related to ethnicity. These were defined by finding ethnonyms among the top words with probability of  $\geq .002$ . The list of ethnonyms was formed from the Russian census, United Nations, and other official data and supplemented by para-ethnonyms (e.g., *Cossacks*, *Asians*) and ethnic pejoratives (ethnophaulisms). The list did not differentiate between stateless ethnic groups, nations, and nominations by country (i.e., Gypsies, Italians, and Egyptians were all included). The 137 relevant bunches accumulated 341 topics (17% of 2,000 topics in five runs). This exceeded the levels that we had reported earlier on different data sets with 100-topic runs—11–12% (Koltsova & Koltcov, 2013) and 8.5–9% (Bodrunova et al., 2013)—and confirmed our assumption that ethnic discourse should be mined at the level of  $\geq 400$  topics. After manual inspection of ethnicity-related bunches, we found out that some topics within them were not quite identical (e.g., a French-related bunch contained two topics on French cuisine and three topics on Gerard Depardieu moving to Russia). We divided some bunches into sub-bunches, thus obtaining 154 units.

Of those 154, we selected the 33 most stable ones and performed manual coding of 30 posts in each, documenting topic/post metadata (10 variables), topics (three variables per topic), posts (five variables per post), and all ethnonyms in the posts (12 variables per ethnonym). As a result, we received codings for 990 posts and 1,872 occurrences of 264 ethnonyms in them; after grouping ethnonyms for statistical analysis, we received 126 ethnic groups coded. Then, we filtered out the posts with no ethnic characters and noninterpretable codings (when an ethnicity was just mentioned, but could not be coded substantially); the final data set contained 492 posts with 1,119 ethnonym coding entries.

Thus, we received the following data sets: Data Set 1 (“full download”), comprising 363,579 posts, 1,072,283 stems, 952 bunches, and 154 discussion topics (bunches); Data Set 2 (“ethnicity-related sample”) comprising the 990 most relevant posts in the 33 most stable ethnicity-related bunches, with 264 found ethnonyms, 126 grouped ethnonyms, and 1,872 ethnonym mentions; Data Set 3 (“ethnonym-containing subsample”) comprising 492 posts with coded ethnonyms and 1,119 interpretable coding entries for 101 ethnonyms (25 ethnicities of Data Set 2 were those just mentioned).

To interpret the data sets, we used a range of methods, from word frequency analysis to binomial logistic regressions. For regressions based on Data Set 3 in which dependent variables were binary (e.g., Caucasian/not Caucasian), individual ethnicities were grouped because of scarcity of data, resulting in the following aggregated groups: migranty, Europeans, Americans, Jews, Central Asians, other Asians, North Caucasians, other countries of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS; includes post-Soviet states except for the Baltic states and Georgia), indigenous Russian, Ancient, and other (not all of them shown in tables). South Caucasians were too few to form a separate group, but they were included into migranty with Central Asians and North Caucasians.

## Results

### *Hypothesis 1: Volume of Attention*

We looked at four metrics to judge whether migranty dominated the blog discourse: (1) absolute frequencies of ethnonym use, Data Set 1; (2) number of mentions in coding, Data Set 2; (3) number of the topics in which they formed top words, Data Set 2; and (4) number of topics in which they were dominant ethnicities, Data Set 2 (see Table 1 for migranty and some ethnic groups; data on individual ethnicities are available on request).

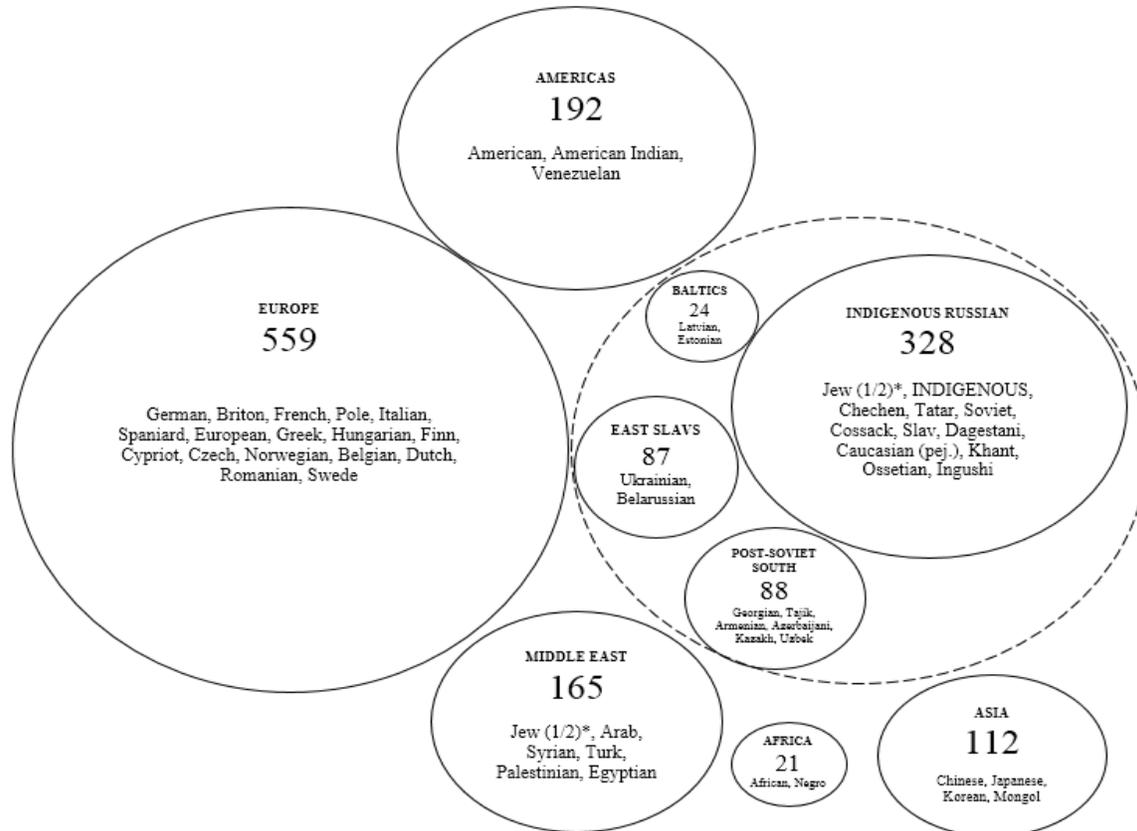
**Table 1. Visibility of Ethnicities/Ethnic Groups in the Data Sets  
(Migranty Ethnicities vs. Most Discussed Ethnicities).**

| Group           | Data Set 2                |  | Data Set 1 | Data Set 2           |                      |                            |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--|------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|                 | Mentions,<br>( <i>n</i> ) | Interpretable<br>codings, ( <i>n</i> ) | <i>K</i>   | <i>K<sub>f</sub></i> | <i>K<sub>c</sub></i> | <i>K<sub>c</sub>/K</i> (%) |
| North Caucasian | 73                        | 43                                     | 12         | 6                    | 6                    | 50                         |
| South Caucasian | 53                        | 14                                     | 10         | 9                    | 1                    | 10                         |
| Central Asian   | 36                        | 24                                     | 8          | 2                    | 6                    | 75                         |
| American        | 159                       | 125                                    | 15         | 8                    | 7                    | 47                         |
| German          | 149                       | 96                                     | 11         | 8                    | 3                    | 27                         |
| Jew             | 116                       | 79                                     | 9          | 5                    | 4                    | 44                         |

*Note.* *K* = number of topics with the ethnicity or ethnic group in top words; *K<sub>f</sub>* = number of topics focused on ethnicity or ethnic group; *K<sub>c</sub>* = number of topics contextual for ethnicity or ethnic group; *K<sub>c</sub>/K* = contextuality index.

The results showed that H1 should be rejected. Americans, Germans, and Jews were mentioned more often than any other nationality in the entire collection. By top words, continental Europeans, indigenous peoples,<sup>2</sup> Britons, and Americans led, whereas North Caucasians, South Caucasians, and Central Asians were mentioned much less than West or Central and Eastern Europeans, a bit less than Britons or Americans, and comparable to Germans, Jews, East Asians, Cossacks, or Tatars. When migranty were mentioned in the ethnicity-related posts, they were also nonsalient in absolute numbers, being mentioned in 161 cases of 1,872 (8.6% of Data Set 2), whereas Euro-Atlantic, post-Soviet, and Middle East nations dominated (see Figure 1).

<sup>2</sup> This group does not include North Caucasians, despite their location.



**Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the ethnicities (with number of mentions  $\geq 8$ ) in Data Set 2. \*For Jew, the number of mentions was divided in two, as this ethnicity was located approximately 50/50 in Russia and the Middle East in the bloggers' posts.**

However, there are two considerations worth addressing. First, to assess the real salience of migrancy in the blogs, it may be more informative to look at relative frequencies of use of ethnonyms in Data Set 1 compared with those in colloquial speech. The results of the comparison with the colloquial-speech section of the national corpus of the Russian language (Lyashevskaya & Sharov, 2009) provided less support for dominance of Euro-Atlantism, and the evidence for "post-Soviet South" nations was mixed: South Caucasus nations were discussed notably below average (Armenians, 0.96; Azerbaijani, 0.95; Georgians, 0.88), whereas North Caucasians and Central Asians were discussed much above average (Tajiks, 4.95; "Caucasians," 2.21; Uzbeks, 2.18; Chechens, 1.34). Eight of the top-12 ethnicities discussed two to five times above average were "border" ethnicities for Russians: Tajik, Ukrainian, Estonian, Chinese, Belarussian, Caucasian, Uzbek, and Finn.

Second, if North Caucasians and Central Asians are discussed much above average, why don't they form multiple salient topics? The point is that some ethnicities tended to appear in many topics without being their core content; rather, they were dragged into discussion as "context." We therefore also looked at the ratio of core/contextual use of ethnonyms (see Table 1, Contextuality index).

Our analysis showed that all ethnicities clearly split into two groups: those with their own agendas and "contextual" nations. For example, South Americans were always the focus of the topic; East Slavic ethnicities, Tatars, Arabs, Turks, and Germans seemed to have agendas centered around them, as did South Caucasians. In sharp contrast, North Caucasians and Central Asians (similar to Britons, Americans, Jews, and East Asians) were dragged into the topics not directly related to them.

### ***Hypothesis 2: Speech, Action, and Negativity***

#### *Direct/Indirect Representation*

Direct/indirect representation was assessed via the speech and action variables. Absolute frequencies give the impression of migrancy being well represented both with speech and action, albeit not always directly or individually.

A more nuanced picture is provided by binomial logistic regressions run on Data Set 3 (see Table 2). We contrasted the most discussed ethnic groups—Americans, Europeans, and Jews—to migrancy on the whole, as well as to North Caucasians and Central Asians taken separately.

Americans are the only group whose probability of not being speechless is statistically significant, but their speech tends to be indirect. North Caucasians and migrancy may be equally both speechless and speaking, but when they speak, they are given direct voice. Americans are also the only group whose probability of not being deprived of action is statistically significant. Together with Europeans, they are granted coverage of their real actions, whereas Central Asians are clearly described as a nonacting group. Thus, we can see H2 to be partly proven for action and wrong for speech.

**Table 2. Binomial Logistic Regression Results for the Speech and Action Variables.**

| Group            | No speech | Direct  | Indirect | No action | Real action | Aggregated action |
|------------------|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|
| Migrancy         | -0.181    | 1.009** | -0.410   | 0.402     | -0.300      | 0.007             |
| North Caucasians | -0.146    | 1.106*  | -0.658   | -0.182    | -0.057      | 0.196             |
| Central Asians   | -0.092    | 0.940   | -0.583   | 1.051*    | -0.772      | -0.178            |
| Jews             | -0.407    | 0.013   | 0.504    | 0.341     | -0.584*     | 0.361             |
| Europeans        | 0.159     | 0.593   | 0.025    | -0.226    | 0.257*      | -0.131            |
| Americans        | -0.575**  | 0.298   | 0.609*   | -1.607*** | 0.407*      | 0.322             |

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $.05 < p \leq .001$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

*Positive/Negative Coverage*

As stated, treatment of the ethnicities by bloggers was coded with six “interpretative” variables:

- Attitude (negative, neutral, ambivalent, positive)
- Superiority (superior, ambivalent, neutral, inferior)
- Aggression (aggressor, ambivalent, neutral, victim)
- Solidarity (nonstranger, neutral, alien-positive, alien-ambivalent, alien-negative)
- Menace (dangerous, nondangerous)
- Call for violence against an ethnic actor (yes, no)

To test the aforementioned, we conducted logistic binomial regressions for Data Set 3 on these variables (see Tables 3 and 4). We see that all migrancy were covered negatively, especially North Caucasians who were, indeed, covered more negatively than Americans, Central Asians, and migrancy. However, neither Americans nor Europeans were covered positively; Americans, North Caucasians, and Europeans were never described as victims, but often were described as aggressors. Also, North Caucasians and migrancy were described as inferior.

**Table 3. Binomial Logistic Regression Results for the Attitude, Aggression, and Superiority Variables.**

| Group            | Positive  | Negative | Victim    | Aggressor | Inferior  | Superior |
|------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Migranty         | -0.138    | 1.188*** | 0.010     | 0.259     | 0.825**   | -0.563   |
| North Caucasians | -0.087    | 1.421*** | 0.237     | 0.956***  | 0.805*    | -0.230   |
| Central Asians   | -0.198    | 1.287**  | -0.208    | -0.357    | 0.852†    | -18.595  |
| Jews             | 0.236     | -0.050   | 0.381     | -0.258    | 0.225     | -0.066   |
| Europeans        | -0.541**  | -0.123   | -0.222    | 0.452***  | -0.847*** | 0.015    |
| Americans        | -2.399*** | 1.061*** | -1.793*** | 0.866***  | 0.281     | 0.087    |

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $.05 < p \leq .001$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . † $p < .073$ .

**Table 4. Binomial Logistic Regression Results for the Solidarity and Menace Variables.**

| Group            | Close    | Alien          |                |              | Dangerous |
|------------------|----------|----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
|                  |          | Alien positive | Alien negative | (aggregated) |           |
| Migranty         | 0.414    | 0.933*         | 1.049***       | 1.177***     | 0.096     |
| North Caucasians | -1.366   | 0.104          | 1.408***       | 1.261***     | 0.466     |
| Central Asians   | 0.993†   | 1.765**        | 0.407          | 0.793‡       | 0.024     |
| Jews             | 0.673    | 0.984*         | 0.053          | 0.391        | -0.662*   |
| Europeans        | -0.783** | -1.140*        | -0.512*        | -0.762***    | 0.208     |
| Americans        | -18.668  | -17.950        | 0.712**        | 0.542*       | 0.723***  |

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $.05 < p \leq .001$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . † $p < .075$ . ‡ $p < .067$ .

The solidarity variable demonstrates significant divergence among migrancy. Central Asians were described as alien, but in positive terms, and North Caucasians were alien in negative terms; also, Americans were negatively alienated. Europeans, however, were neither close nor alien. As to menace, only Americans were perceived as definitely dangerous; Jews were described as "never dangerous," which is perhaps explained by the fact that many Russian-speaking Jewish authors of *LiveJournal* write about themselves.

#### *Variable Correlations*

Attitude correlated significantly with other interpretative variables, but with varying strength. It correlated with menace (Cramer's  $V = 0.399$ ), solidarity (Cramer's  $V = 0.376$ ), and aggression (Cramer's  $V = 0.306$ ). Thus, alienation and aggression are important for interpretation of how negative attitudes toward an ethnicity may be constructed. Counterintuitively, superiority, speech, action, and call for violence do not help in deconstructing attitude, as Cramer's  $V$  was 0.184, 0.168, 0.132, and 0.116, respectively.

Hypothesis 2 proved partly true. Migrancy, indeed, were covered negatively; North Caucasians (Caucasians, Dagestani, and Chechens, as seen from absolute numbers) were the most negatively perceived groups described as the most aggressive, alien, and also inferior and active, thus having a "barbarian" image. Central Asians, on the contrary, were represented in a mixed way: treated negatively, but as nonactive and not much alienated. But it was not migrancy who got the worst overall coverage: Americans were unambiguously negative, aggressive, negatively alien, and dangerous. Europeans were also treated as disliked and aggressive, whereas Jews were nondangerous and perceived positively, even if alien. Thus, the relation between an ethnic group's menace and the migrant status of the group is questionable: in fact, some external nations may appear equally menacing.

#### ***Hypothesis 3: Context of Discussion***

We created the context variable that coded posts (not ethnicities) as political, economic, social, cultural, mixed, other, or nondefinable.

In absolute figures, the political context dominated the coverage of every aggregated ethnic group, except Central Asians (see Table 5). The cultural context was the second popular, but it was unevenly spread among ethnicities. The economic context was nearly absent. Central Asians, besides having the lowest share of political texts (more than twice lower than the closest competitor), exceeded other groups by the share of social posts. This feature had strong support in the regression results (see Table 6). North Caucasians were behind external nations in the share of political posts, albeit ahead of the others, and they possessed the second largest share of social posts, which was also seen from the regression: They were not unlikely to be politicized, and their belonging to the social context was weaker than that of Central Asians. When both were grouped into migrancy and united with South Caucasians, social context won. Cultural context was reserved for ancient and indigenous Russian ethnicities, whereas Europeans and Jews were not unlikely to be covered in the cultural context.

**Table 5. Contexts of Discussion of Ethnic Groups and Context Ratios.**

| Group              | Political context (%) | Socioeconomic context <sup>a</sup> (%) | Cultural context (%) | Social to political context ratio | Cultural to political context ratio |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Migranty           | 42.9                  | 35.7                                   | 11.2                 | 0.83                              | 0.26                                |
| North Caucasian    | 54.5                  | 29.1                                   | 7.3                  | 0.53                              | 0.13                                |
| South Caucasian    | 52.9                  | 5.9                                    | 35.3                 | 0.11                              | 0.67                                |
| Central Asian      | 11.5                  | 69.2                                   | 3.8                  | <b>6.00</b>                       | 0.33                                |
| American           | 64.0                  | 20.0                                   | 7.2                  | 0.31                              | 0.11                                |
| European           | 62.1                  | 6.3                                    | 21.3                 | 0.10                              | 0.34                                |
| Jew                | 50.6                  | 10.1                                   | 20.3                 | 0.20                              | 0.40                                |
| Indigenous Russian | 33.8                  | 12.7                                   | 45.1                 | 0.38                              | <b>1.33</b>                         |
| CIS nationalities  | 63.9                  | 11.5                                   | 9.8                  | 0.18                              | 0.15                                |
| East Asian         | 65.6                  | 3.3                                    | 19.7                 | 0.05                              | 0.30                                |
| Ancient            | 26.4                  | 0.0                                    | 66.0                 | 0.00                              | <b>2.50</b>                         |
| Other              | 61.8                  | 5.7                                    | 26.8                 | 0.09                              | 0.43                                |

<sup>a</sup>The figures for the economic and social contexts were grouped, as figures for economic context were low and the contexts merged in a qualitative reading of blog posts.

**Table 6. Binomial Logistic Regression Results for the Context Variable.**

| Group            | Political | Economic | Social    | Cultural  |
|------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Migranty         | -0.606**  | -0.662   | 2.040***  | -0.888*   |
| North Caucasians | -0.086    | -0.034   | 1.463***  | -1.349*   |
| Central Asians   | -2.345*** | -17.270  | 3.323***  | -2.003*   |
| Jews             | -0.257    | -0.425   | -0.010    | -0.139    |
| Europeans        | 0.359**   | 1.728*** | -1.777*** | -0.108    |
| Americans        | 0.349†    | -0.181   | 0.988***  | -1.423*** |

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $.05 < p \leq .001$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . † $p < .076$ .

#### Variable Correlations

Context was significantly, but weakly, related to attitude: The social context led in negativity, followed by political context, whereas the cultural context was the least negative. This means that Americans were negatively politicized, Europeans were politicized ambivalently, and negativity toward Central Asians and North Caucasians was related to social problems (this relation was stronger for Central Asians).

In general, the association of a certain context with ethnicity was significant, but modest (Cramer's  $V = 0.161$  to  $0.334$ ), which means that contexts within the coverage of each ethnicity did mix, albeit in different proportions. To illustrate this, we qualitatively describe a few topics devoted to Central Asians and North Caucasians.

In Topic 1-216 in which *migrant* is the top-1 word, Central Asians were discussed within the issue of "visas for compatriots." A new version of the law "On Citizenship" of 2013 adopted an even easier entrance regime for Central Asians by claiming their "compatriotism." The topic discussed the reaction by nonsystemic opposition (both liberal and nationalist); migrants were described in aggregated terms, with a wide range of abstract social unease being attributed to them. Economic issues included dumping on the workforce market, economic barriers between local population and migrant diasporas, capital outflows from Russia to Central Asia, and additional burdens to Russian health care and education. Social issues included growth of crime because of the migrants' slave-like working conditions, language and religious gaps, threats of radical Islamization, corruption in social services where low-profile jobs are occupied by migrants, heroin traffic, and diseases. The only event-based issue was the violent killing of eight-year-old Vasilisa Golitzyna by an Uzbek, but in most cases, it was generalized to "violence by migrants against our kids."

All of these socioeconomic troubles have political implications, as it is stated in the communiqué by Coordination Council of Opposition cited by several bloggers:

Uncontrolled migration undermines Russia's attempts of integration with Europe. European authorities apprehend an inflow of migrants to the EU territory and therefore block introduction of visa-free regime with Russia. . . . Thus, European orientation of our country is put under question (Tor, 2013).

The topic also shows that the ruling elite is not monolithic: The State Duma and Federal Migration Office promoted the law, but mayors of Moscow and St. Petersburg demanded introduction of foreign passports for Central Asian migrants.

Among North Caucasians, Chechens were mentioned most often. For example, they were discussed in the same Topic 1-216 (quite torn into two because of that), but the discussion was centered on Gerard Depardieu's "migration" to Russia and receiving a gift apartment from Ramzan Kadyrov, president of Chechnya. Topic 4-069 ("Islam-centered") depicted Chechens as radical Islamists and instigators of a religious war in Russia. In other topics, including one on the Boston Marathon, Chechens were mostly depicted as "Chechen terrorists," except for one text on how well Chechens and Ingushi served in Red Army and one text that described how Chechen refugees suffered from hostility in Poland, whereas in texts on Russia, there was no sign of moral support to the refugees or after-war resettlers.

Topic 1-041 was dedicated to confrontation between Dagestani and Russians in the Russian North Caucasus. Cases of working slavery and kidnapping organized by Dagestani, scuffles of Dagestani youngsters with Russians, and domestic corruption were depicted. Dagestani and Ingushi were described as impudent, overly free, uncultivated, and mean—"puppies biting the mother" (Russia) while "winning dry" (that is, enjoying privileged treatment by local authorities and escaping unpunished after scuffles and small crimes, unlike the Russians). Only two of 30 texts argued that Dagestani women were industrious and responsive and Dagestani volunteers were working hard to save slaves. In this topic, Central Asians were juxtaposed to North Caucasians as more "easy to live with."

H3 was, overall, confirmed. Cultural context, most prone to positive connotations, was manifestly absent from the coverage of migrancy, whereas the social context dominated. At the same time, qualitative analysis showed that social problems were closely related to political issues, albeit other than those typical for international relations reserved for external nations.

#### ***Hypothesis 4: Uniformity of Attitudes Toward Migrancy***

What migrancy have in common was their exclusion from the economic and cultural contexts of discussion, negative perception, and alienation. Despite that, there were clear divisions in how Caucasians and Central Asians were depicted by the bloggers. As we saw before, Central Asians were contextual, nonacting, and largely depoliticized. They were not treated as aggressors and were alienated mostly as competitors easier to live with; their inferiority was not proven well enough. North Caucasians were described as speaking directly and as aggressive, inferior, and negatively alienated. Qualitative analysis showed that Dagestani were considered powerful barbarians and Chechens were considered terrorists, with rare exceptions, and Central Asians were inactive sources of social trouble. South Caucasians were placed mostly within the political context, either domestic or international, although the data on them were too scarce. As discussed, Central Asians appeared to be the most contextual (in 75% of cases), and North Caucasians were 50%, but South Caucasians appeared as contextual only once (10%). Central Asians and North Caucasians seemed to have become the context for other discussion themes, and South Caucasians had their own agendas "attached" to them. Thus, H4 was rejected.

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our research confirms that offline prejudices are indeed reproduced in the social media that supposedly should serve as an alternative public sphere. At the same time, one of the most striking results not evident from "offline" polls is the relative unimportance of migrant ethnic groups as compared with external ethnic groups/nations. Although polls reveal negative attitude toward migrancy, they attract much lower attention of bloggers than Americans or Europeans; moreover, Americans are covered nearly as negatively and as more dangerous. This, first, suggests that political threats cast by Americans are more disturbing than predominantly social threats coming from migrancy. Second, this poses the question about whether the hostility toward migrants captured by polling is an attitude linked to their immigrant status or a manifestation of a more general hostility to out-groups. In any case, the discovered levels of hostility toward European nations and especially Americans suggest a separate research agenda, especially within the rising tensions on the global scale.

Next, although it has been shown in surveys that immigrant groups differ by the level of hostility toward them, with North Caucasians taking the lead (Bessudnov, 2016), it is not clear what makes people think so. Our research sheds some light on that. It turns out that whereas Central Asians are deprived of agency and are perceived as passive sources of social problems, North Caucasians are covered as active and aggressive, and not entirely depoliticized. At the same time, migrancy are never linked to the cultural context, which suggests that cultural threats are of secondary importance compared with social and political ones. Surprisingly, political threats have never been singled out as a separate type in migration

studies, and this might be an important addition to the threat theory. As for the economic context, it actually blends with the social context; they can be united in the future.

Our analysis of alienation patterns shows that the mental post-Soviet borders do not fully correspond to the formal national borders. Thus, South Caucasus groups are already perceived as distant nations with their own political agendas, and North Caucasians are "enfants terribles of Mother Russia," too alien to be part of the nation (despite being formally within), and Central Asians are still "not alien enough" (despite being formally outside). This confirms our presupposition that migrancy are a perceived and constructed phenomenon.

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