

Weapons of mass division: Sputnik Latvia's Russophobia narratives and testing the rejection-  
identification model in Russian speakers in Latvia

Online supplemental materials

## **S1 – Data selection and analysis**

### **Data selection**

Insights discussed in this section are taken from a broader content analysis (found in the [online repository](#)) that sought to identify the different narratives that Sputnik Latvia’s projected into the overall Latvian information space (in both Latvian and Russian language). The initial corpus captured all the articles published by the Russian-language site of Sputnik Latvia (<https://lv.sputniknews.ru>) between December 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 and February 28<sup>th</sup> 2022. We scraped this data prior to the ban being enforced on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022<sup>1</sup>. This amounted to a corpus of 1140 articles, which was then pruned to determine whether the articles were of relevance to the analysis. 479 articles were removed, which were mainly short factual updates on the weather or traffic, or focused on topics irrelevant to Latvian society. Of this remaining 661 articles, 100 were randomly sampled from each month to create a final corpus of 300 articles.

### **Data analysis**

The lead author began the narrative analysis by reading the articles chronologically and noting topics or themes that were repeated. As new topics were identified, the previous coding was sometimes adjusted to adapt to the new coding categories. From this documentation process, we used this thematic and topical categorization to aid identifying several strategic narratives, “storylines...deliberately designed to achieve political objectives” (Coticchia & Catanzaro, 2020, p. 7). The identified strategic narratives were subsequently formalized into a codebook, which was used by three human coders to systematically log if a narrative was present in an article. Two coders read the original Russian-language versions, while one coder read translated versions of the articles. The

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<sup>1</sup> The articles are now not legally accessible in the European Union.

coders underwent a training process on 5 percent of the corpus, which was used to familiarize themselves with the codebook. After this initial training stage, any differences in interpretation or nuances in language were clarified. The rest of the corpus was then distributed and coded, whereby 25 percent of the articles overlapped to enable measurement of pairwise agreement. Reliability tests looking at the inter-rater reliability of this portion indicated that there was strong agreement, particularly for the Russophobia narrative (Cohen's  $\kappa = .87$ ).

## **S2 – Referenced Sputnik Latvia articles**

Sputnik Latvia (2021a) "Какая-то русская деревня": нацпатриотов возмутил новогодний плакат Рижской думы. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20211211/kakaya-to-russkaya-derevnya-natspatriotov-vozmutil-novogodniy-plakat-rizhskoy-dumy-19585085.html> (Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2021b) Генерал воссоединился с солдатами: как прошло перезахоронение останков Якунина в Мадоне. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20211212/general-voossoedinilsya-s-soldatami-kak-proshlo-perezakhoroneniye-ostankov-yakunina-v-madone-19593067.html> (Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022a) Десять лет референдуму за русский язык: без шансов и с голосами неграждан. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220219/desyat-let-referendumu-za-russkiy-yazyk-bez-shansov-i-s-golosami-negrazhdan-20526579.html> (Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022b) Языковая реформа в латвийской школе глазами русского учителя. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220110/yazykovaya-reforma-v-latviyskoy-shkole-glazami-russkogo-uchitelya-19942220.html> (Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022c) Депутат РСЛ просит СГБ проверить высказывания Левитса на предмет разжигания розни. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220209/deputat-rsl-prosit-sgb-proverit-vyskazyvaniya-levitsa-na-predmet-razzhiganiya-rozni-20360612.html>

(Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022d) Аргументация нацистов: заявление президента Латвии о русском языке возмутило РСЛ. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220204/argumentatsiya-natsistov-zayavlenie-prezidenta-latvii-o-russkom-yazyke-vozmutilo-rsl-20294361.html>

(Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022e) Латвия противостоит российскому ТВ методом

"интеллектуальной импотенции". <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220224/latviya-protivostoit-rossiyskomu-tv-metodom-intellektualnoy-impotentsii-20614430.html>

(Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022f) МИД РФ анонсировал меры в ответ на запрет в Латвии

российских телеканалов. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220225/mid-rf-anonsiroval-mery-v-otvet-na-zapret-v-latvii-rossiyskikh-telekanalov-20637458.html> (Accessed

22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022g) В интересах демократии? В Латвии готовят новую волну

запретов российских телеканалов. [https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220223/v-interesakh-demokratii-v-latvii-gotovyat-novuyu-volnu-zapretov-rossiyskikh-telekanalov-](https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220223/v-interesakh-demokratii-v-latvii-gotovyat-novuyu-volnu-zapretov-rossiyskikh-telekanalov-20586665.html)

[20586665.html](https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220223/v-interesakh-demokratii-v-latvii-gotovyat-novuyu-volnu-zapretov-rossiyskikh-telekanalov-20586665.html) (Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022h) "Восстановить Советский Союз": латышка ужаснулась мечтам

своей соплеменницы. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220120/vosstanovit-sovetskiy-soyuz-latyshka-uzhasnulas-mechtam-svoey-soplemennitsy-20092063.html> (Accessed

22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022i) Нацпатриоты собираются мстить памятнику Освободителям

Риги. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220214/natspatrioty-sobirayutsya-mstit-pamyatniku-osvoboditelyam-rigi-20449248.html> (Accessed 22nd March 2022)

0b19 Sputnik Latvia (2022j) Неизвестные облили памятник Освободителям Риги

краской цветов флага Украины. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220225/neizvestnye-oblili-pamyatnik-osvoboditelyam-rigi-kraskoy-tsvetov-flaga-ukrainy-20630089.html>

(Accessed 22nd March 2022)

Sputnik Latvia (2022k) "Ночной дозор" в рижском парке Победы против вандалов и

провокаторов. <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220228/nochnoy-dozor-v-rizhskom-parke-pobedy-protiv-vandalov-i-provokatorov-20669308.html>

### **S3 – Other examples of Russophobia**

Sputnik Latvia also narrates several instances of anti-Russian sentiment occurring in Latvian society, presenting Latvians as increasingly hostile towards the Russian-speaking minority. Often, Sputnik Latvia pulls online social media content to portray this hostility as endemic. In one sarcastically-toned article, traditional Russian motifs in a seasonal holiday poster cause “a storm of indignation” among the Latvian “national patriots” who question why the Riga city council would use such themes in a design meant for Latvians (Sputnik Latvia, 2021a). Another, more humorously narrated article describes the apparent prejudice displayed by social media users who were “horrified” to discover “that Latvians are not a mass of like-minded fellow citizens” when they encounter fellow Latvians who believe that Latvia should work more closely with Russia (2022h).

Stories of public (and political) sentiment towards Soviet monuments also contribute to the narrative. This, again, threads another identified strategic narrative with the Russophobia narrative – that of the Soviet legacy, where Sputnik Latvia positively renders the history of Latvia’s occupation by the USSR and the Red Army’s role in World War II.

Latvians are accused of wanting to erase Soviet glory, e.g. “...the local government has long wanted to free the state gymnasium from such a historical heritage, which has not coincided with the modern historical discourse for several decades” (2021b). Several articles discuss the intentions of Latvians who, in the prelude to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, defaced the “Victory memorial” commemorating the Soviet army (e.g. 2022i, 2022j, 2022k). Later, Sputnik Latvia speculates if authorities are intending to use the Ukrainian war as a “guise” to demolish the Victory memorial. Here, the outlet presents societal unease against the monuments as evidence of Russian hatred, and although activity mainly emerges from citizens themselves, it is tacitly condoned by the government.

#### S4 – Demographic insights

In table 1, we present the key demographic insights for the respondents that participated in the survey experiment.

**Table 1**

*Demographic insights of survey experiment participants*

Sample characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Ethnicity		
Russian	212	79
Jewish	6	3
Belarussian	10	4
Lithuanian	4	2
Polish	17	6
Ukrainian	12	4
Undetermined	3	2
Region		
Rīga	105	39
Pierīga	40	15
Kurzeme	29	11
Zemgale	26	10
Latgale	60	22

Vidzem	8	3
Education level		
Primary education or equivalent	3	1
Secondary education	34	13
Secondary vocational education	80	30
Higher education/University	151	56

### S5 – Power analysis

To determine the necessary sample size, we ran a Monte Carlo power analysis simulation, testing the proposed indirect effect with a 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, drawing on the aforementioned experimental study by Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt and Spears (2001) to acquire the relevant input. This simulation indicated that approximately 214 participants are required to ensure statistical power is at least 80 percent for detecting the hypothesized indirect effect. Anticipating dropout, we recruited a representative sample of 294 participants.

### S6 - Demographic insights for the focus group

In table 2, we present the key demographic insights for the respondents that participated in the focus group.

**Table 2**

*Description of focus group participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Region	Education level	Citizen of Latvia
Aleksandrs	55	Male	Latgale	Higher Education	No
Natalia	66	Female	Pierīga	Higher Education	No
Marija	21	Female	Rīga	Secondary vocational education	Yes
Jurijs	55	Male	Rīga	Higher Education	No
Tatjana	51	Female	Kurzeme	Higher Education	No

Rita	53	Female	Zemgale	Secondary vocational education	No
Vladimirs	42	Male	Pierīga	Higher Education	Yes

### S7 – Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Running a one-factor confirmatory factor analysis, we obtained unacceptable fit statistics:  $\chi^2(209) = 1232.34, p > .001$ , CFI = .603, RMSEA (90% CI) = .135 (.128, .143), SRMR = .114. The fit could not be significantly improved by item dropping.

### S8 – Exploratory analyses

#### Exploratory analyses

##### *Perceived discrimination as a mediator of group identification*

An exploratory mediation analysis showed the indirect effect of reading the Russophobia articles on identification as a Russian speaker through perceived discrimination was significant,  $b = 0.126$ , 95% CI [0.037, 0.227].

##### *Sense of belonging*

We exploratively examined if exposure to the Sputnik Russophobia narrative predicted significantly lower levels of sense of belonging to Latvian society, as predicted by the ‘rejection-disidentification’ theory (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2018). A Welch two-sample t-test showed sense of belonging was not significantly lower in participants who read Sputnik Latvia’s Russophobia articles than in participants who read the control texts:  $t(263.96) = -0.60, p = .726, d = 0.074$ .

##### *Personal self-esteem*

We repeated our confirmatory analyses but replaced collective self-esteem with personal self-esteem. As with collective self-esteem, exposure to Sputnik’s Russophobia narratives did not result in significantly lower levels of personal self-esteem,  $b = 0.002, \beta =$



.002,  $t(262) = 0.017$ ,  $p = 0.987$ , 95% CI = [-0.222, 0.226]. The indirect effect of exposure to Sputnik's Russophobia narrative on personal self-esteem through group identification, as suggested by the RIM, was also not significant,  $b = -0.027$ , 95% CI = [-0.074, 0.003].