

War's Shadow: Exploring Multifaceted Strategies in the Politics of Fear

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Abstract

This study delves into the intricacies of approaching politics of fear in general, with a particular focus on Russia. The author unveils different approaches to defining the politics of fear and describes its various dimensions, including instrumental, discursive, emotional, socio-political, and psychological aspects of fear manipulation. Through the analysis of fear-based tactics targeting the opposition, elites, and regime supporters, the study uncovers the intricate strategies to maintain control and suppress dissent in Russia today. However, the author underlines that the politics of fear in Russia has its limitations. For the majority of the previously depoliticized society, the opposite politics of pacification is implemented.

KEY WORDS: *politics of fear, politics of pacification, political strategies, Russia's war in Ukraine, political repressions, social anxiety, dissemination of fear.*

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1. Introduction

The discourse surrounding the politics of fear in Russia is expanding, gaining significance, particularly in light of the ongoing conflict with Ukraine, which has not only affected Ukrainian territories but also impacted Russian citizens. Russian society appears divided into two distinct groups: those deeply entrenched in political affairs and the broader populace. For the former, a climate of fear dominates, stifling dissent and fostering caution. Conversely, the latter experiences a depoliticized environment, characterized by a politics of pacification [20] aimed at maintaining societal inertia.

Both strategies converge on a common goal: suppressing dissent to preserve stability, especially during times of conflict. This article delves into Kremlin policies targeting politically engaged individuals, analyzing the dynamics of fear in politics and its impact on Russian society. It also delves into the philosophical underpinnings of fear, highlighting its pervasive influence on individual and societal behavior.

It was the French author Michael de Montaigne who wrote "The thing I fear most is fear" [14]. Of course, the entire history of mankind is marked not only by the use of fear in politics but also by a desire to free itself from it [17]. The Russian political philosopher N.A. Berdyaev wrote about the phenomenon of fear: "Fear is the foundation of the lives of this world... The most terrifying people are those who are consumed by fear. Fear is destructive... it governs the world. Power, by its very nature, employs fear. Human society was constructed on fear. Therefore, it was built on lies because fear breeds lies... Fear always conceals the truth... it is connected not only to lies but also to cruelty... Not only are the masses ruled through fear, but the masses themselves rule through fear... Fear distorts consciousness and hinders our ability to know the truth" [4].

The above statements of the philosopher draw our attention to the fact that fear, as a negative emotion, is a constant companion of individuals and society. In everyday life, it manifests itself as an instinct for self-preservation from objectively existing threats. A significant portion of fears is generated by society. Fear, to the highest degree, is a political sentiment. However, we should emphasize that this feeling can arise in conditions of both real and imagined, illusory, and false dangers, but it is experienced as real. The quality of life in society depends on the intensity of this social sentiment [16].

The overarching aim of the article is to understand the current state of social sentiment in Russia and its implications for the country's future trajectory. Key questions addressed include the nature and measurement of the politics of fear, its utilization in Russian governance, and the populace's receptiveness to such strategies.

2. Theoretical Framework

While there is no single, universally accepted definition of the politics of fear, summarizing the existing views on the problem gives us an opportunity to identify five main methodological approaches that have been encountered in the academic literature. Each of these approaches attempts to analyze and understand the politics of fear through its unique focus and perspective.

These focuses and perspectives are:

1. The strategic and instrumental use of fear as a tool by those in power - Instrumental approach.
2. The ways in which fear is discursively produced, disseminated, and reinforced by the regime and other social actors - Discursive approach.
3. The affective dimension of fear and its impact on individuals and groups - Emotional approach.
4. The power dynamics, institutional structures, and societal conditions that are both shaped by the politics of fear and contribute to its production - Sociopolitical approach.
5. Individual and collective psychological processes that underlie the politics of fear - Psychological approach.

The instrumental approach is one of the most popular and widely discussed in the literature. It emphasizes the utilization of fear by those in power, focusing on its strategic and instrumental use to control and manipulate the public. The instrumental approach is frequently employed as a methodological framework for analyzing the politics of fear, particularly in the context of US society facing concerns such as terrorism and other external threats.

One of the most famous authors of this approach is the American professor Corey Robin. In his book "Fear: The History of a Political Idea" [17], he refers to political fear, that is defined as a fear experienced by people due to the potential harm to their collective well-being, such as fear of terrorism, panic stemming from rising crime, anxiety over a decline in morality, or intimidation by authorities or groups. Robin distinguishes political and individual fear and emphasizes that political fear originates in society or has social consequences. Individual fears, such as fear of flying or fear of spiders, are products of our own psychology and experiences that have minimal impact on others. In contrast, political fear arises from conflicts within and between societies.

Robin defines the politics of fear as the deliberate manipulation of fear by political actors to shape public opinion, maintain authority, and legitimize policies that would not otherwise be accepted. Fear, according to Robin, can be used to rally support, create divisions, and marginalize dissenting voices.

A one more prominent representative of the instrumental approach, an American political theorist and professor, Sheldon Wolin in his book "Democracy Incorporated. Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism" [21] also examines a form of managed democracy and how fear is employed by political elites to justify the expansion of state power and curtail civil liberties in the United States.

He discusses the role of political elites, the influence of money in politics, the erosion of civil liberties, and the manipulation of public opinion through mass media. Wolin also analyzes the role of political parties, the impact of globalization, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few. As well as Robin, Wolin views the politics of fear as a mechanism employed by political elites to maintain and consolidate power in democratic societies.

A political theorist and former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada Michael Ignatieff has written extensively about the politics of fear. In his book "The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror," Ignatieff examines the ethical dilemmas and challenges posed by fear-based politics, particularly in the context of counterterrorism measures taken after the September 11 attacks in New York.

Ignatieff argues that the politics of fear involves the instrumental use of fear by politicians to justify exceptional measures and policies, often in response to perceived threats. He explores the trade-off between security and civil liberties and questions the extent to which fear should be allowed to shape political decisions. Ignatieff emphasizes the importance of balancing security concerns with the preservation of democratic values and individual rights.

We can conclude here that the instrumental approach focuses on the strategic use of fear by political actors in decision-making and the establishment of authority regardless of the type of political regime.

The discursive approach examines how fear is constructed and disseminated through language, discourse, and narratives. It analyzes the processes through which fear is discursively produced, spread, and reinforced by the ruling regime and other social actors. The highlighting of a discursive approach as an independent perspective is attributed to the ideas and viewpoints expressed in the works of Brian Massumi and Ruth Wodak.

Brian Massumi, a Canadian philosopher and the editor of the book "The Politics of Everyday Fear" [12], explores fear as a discursive construction that is mediated through media, rhetoric, and political narratives.

His main focus was on examining the widespread presence of fear-mongering mechanisms in American society, with a particular emphasis on the influential role of the media. The key objective was to highlight the tangible impact on individuals, the ultimate target of fear-inducing technologies. These technologies can be understood as power apparatuses designed to imprint habitual patterns, predispositions, and associated emotions—especially hatred—that contribute to the creation of social divisions, the preservation of hierarchies, and the perpetuation of systems of domination.

Massumi states that the nature of fear extends beyond being merely an emotion. Instead, it can be understood as the objective manifestation of subjective experiences within the context of late capitalism. Fear encompasses the way images and commodities exist, and it encompasses the self-generated impacts that arise from their circulation, even in the absence of a solid foundation.

Ruth Wodak, an acclaimed Austrian linguist and social scientist, has made significant contributions to the investigation of fear discourse from a discursive approach. One of her notable books that delves into this subject is “The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse” [22]. In this book, Wodak explores the ways in which right-wing populist movements and politicians employ fear as a rhetorical and discursive strategy to gain support, shape public opinion, and advance their agendas. She examines case studies from various countries to illustrate the discursive techniques and ideologies utilized by these actors.

According to Wodak, fear discourse often involves the construction of “Otherness”, where certain groups or individuals are portrayed as threats to society. This process contributes to the reinforcement of stereotypes, stigmatization, and the fostering of hostility and prejudice. Wodak emphasizes the need to critically analyze fear discourse and its underlying power dynamics in order to understand how it operates and to counteract its potentially harmful effects. Overall, Wodak’s work underscores the significance of fear discourse as a tool of persuasion and control, shedding light on its role in shaping social attitudes, policies, and intergroup dynamics.

The discursive approach views fear as a socially constructed phenomenon that influences perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors, which aligns it with the instrumental approach. However, the discursive approach sets itself apart by specifically analyzing the technologies used to generate social fear, thus distinguishing it as a unique approach among others.

The emotional approach specifically delves into the subjective experiences, emotional responses and psychological impacts of fear in political contexts. It emphasizes the affective dimension of fear and its impact on individuals and groups.

Martha C. Nussbaum, an influential American philosopher, in her book “Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice” [15], examines the specific types of emotions that are essential for citizens in order to uphold and maintain a just society or a society that strives for justice. Nussbaum focuses on the emotional dimension of politics and its impact on democratic societies. Among other emotions Martha C. Nussbaum examines fear and its impact on democratic processes and public discourse. She sees the politics of fear as an instrumentalization of fear by political actors to control and manipulate public sentiment. Nussbaum argues that excessive fear can undermine democratic values and inhibit rational deliberation, calling for the cultivation of alternative emotions such as empathy and love.

What distinguishes the emotional approach from other approaches is its emphasis on understanding the affective aspects of fear, including the emotional states, responses, and influences it generates. In summary, the emotional approach in the study of the politics of fear highlights the affective dimensions of fear and its influence on individuals and collective behavior.

The sociopolitical approach considers the broader social, political, and institutional factors that shape the politics of fear. It looks at power dynamics, institutional structures, and societal conditions to understand how fear operates and influences the relationship between the regime and different actors.

Talking about the representatives of this approach we should first of all mention Wendy Brown who is an American political theorist. In her book “Walled States, Waning Sovereignty” [5], Brown explores the phenomenon of walls and barriers erected by nation-states as a response to globalization and the perceived threats to sovereignty. Brown argues that fear plays a significant role in the justification and implementation of walled borders. She contends that the fear of losing control, the fear of cultural and economic insecurities, and the fear of transnational threats (such as terrorism and immigration) contribute to the construction of physical barriers.

Brown highlights how the fear is utilized by political leaders and governments to justify securitization measures, including the construction of walls. Fear is often employed as a tool to mobilize public support for these measures, presenting them as necessary for protecting national security, cultural identity, and economic well-being.

Another prominent representative of a sociopolitical approach is Arjun Appadurai, an Indian-American anthropologist and social theorist. His book “Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger” [2] examines the dynamics of fear, anger, violence, and social conflict in the context of globalization, migration, and cultural encounters. Appadurai explores how the intensification of global interactions and the movements of people, goods, and ideas can create conditions of insecurity, fear, and resentment. He argues that these conditions can lead to the emergence of violence and anger, particularly when they intersect with issues of identity, ethnicity, religion, and nationalism.

Didier Fassin, a French anthropologist and sociologist, also has a number of writings that touch upon fear as it relates to issues of security, policing, and the management of populations. In his work “Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing” [7], Fassin examines fear as a mode of social control within the context of policing. He explores how fear is used by police forces to maintain order and control in urban environments.

Fassin also engages with the broader politics of fear indirectly in his work on humanitarianism, migration, and borders. In a book “Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present” [8], he examines the securitization of borders, the politics of asylum, and the management of populations in the context of migration. This work touches upon the use of fear in shaping immigration policies, border controls, and the treatment of migrants. Fassin’s research primarily focuses on the ways in which fear operates within sociopolitical contexts, examining its manifestations in relation to power dynamics, social control, and the management of populations.

David L. Altheide’s work on the politics of fear, titled “Terrorism and the Politics of Fear” [1], primarily falls within the sociopolitical approach as well. The scientist explores the role of fear in contemporary society, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of terrorism. He argues that fear has become a pervasive force in political discourse, media representation, and public perception, shaping the ways in which we understand and respond to acts of terrorism. He suggests that fear is

strategically employed by political actors and media institutions to advance particular agendas, justify security measures, and maintain social control.

So, the sociopolitical approach views fear as a social and political phenomenon that is shaped by power relations, social structures, and broader socio-political dynamics. From a sociopolitical perspective, fear is not solely an individual psychological experience but is shaped and influenced by larger social forces.

The psychological approach delves into the individual and collective psychological processes that underlie the politics of fear. It focuses on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, examining how fear influences decision-making, attitudes, responses, and psychological well-being.

While the field of investigating the politics of fear from a psychological approach is vast and continuously evolving, there are several prominent scholars who have made notable contributions, serving as evidence of the significance of this approach.

Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist and professor at Yale University. In his book “Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View” [13], Stanley Milgram explores the factors that influence individuals’ obedience to authority, even when it involves inflicting harm on others. Milgram’s experiments involved participants who were instructed to administer electric shocks to another person (an actor) under the guise of a study on learning. The shocks were not real, but the participants believed they were. Milgram found that many participants were willing to continue administering shocks, even at high levels, when an authority figure instructed them to do so.

Milgram suggests that fear plays a role in this obedience to authority. Participants may experience fear of repercussions or punishment if they refuse to comply with the instructions. The presence of an authority figure, with their perceived power and legitimacy, can create a sense of fear and anxiety in individuals, leading them to obey even when it goes against their own moral judgments.

The second representative of this approach is a renowned psychologist and professor emeritus at Stanford University Philip Zimbardo. Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment [23] highlighted how situational factors and power dynamics can lead individuals to engage in abusive behavior. His work provides insights into the potential role of fear and authority in the context of oppressive systems.

Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment demonstrated how fear, both experienced by prisoners and induced by guards, played a role in shaping obedience to authority. The fear of punishment or retribution can lead individuals to comply with orders, even if they go against their personal values. At the same time, Zimbardo has discussed how fear of rejection or social isolation can drive individuals to conform to group norms. The fear of being different or ostracized can lead people to adopt beliefs or behaviors that align with the group, even if they may personally disagree. Zimbardo has explored the role of fear in deindividuation, which is the loss of self-awareness and individual identity in group situations. When individuals feel anonymous or part of a crowd, they may experience reduced fear of personal consequences, leading to increased aggression or risky behaviors.

Thus, the scientist has emphasized the potential for fear to be manipulated by authority figures or institutions as a means of control. The instillation of fear can be used to maintain power, discourage dissent, or foster obedience to those in positions of authority.

An American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton examines in his book “Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of ‘Brainwashing’ in China” [11], the psychological processes and techniques used in totalitarian regimes to manipulate and control individuals’ beliefs and behaviors. Lifton explains how totalitarian systems instill and exploit fear in individuals as a means of control. The regime creates an atmosphere of constant surveillance, uncertainty, and potential punishment, which induces fear and keeps individuals compliant. He discusses how the pervasive fear experienced within a totalitarian system can have profound psychological and social effects. It can lead to heightened anxiety, self-censorship, conformity, and the suppression of critical thinking. The author argues that fear is employed to break down individuals’ existing beliefs, values, and sense of self, making them more susceptible to accepting the ideology and control of the regime.

Lifton also explores the transformation of fear within the totalistic environment. Initially, individuals may fear punishment or reprisal for non-compliance, but over time, their fears may shift to internalized forms, such as fear of betraying the ideology or fear of being ostracized by the group.

In addition to the previously mentioned scholars, it is worth noting the contributions of prominent researchers such as Hannah Arendt and Stanley Cohen in the field of studying the politics of fear using the psychological approach. Although not a psychologist by training, Arendt’s work on totalitarianism and the banality of evil offers insights into the psychological dimensions of fear and conformity in authoritarian contexts [3]. Cohen’s research on moral panics and the construction of public fears provides insights into the ways in which authoritarian regimes can manipulate and exploit public anxieties to consolidate power and control [6].

Thus, psychological approach first of all considers how fear can be exploited or manipulated by political actors to influence individuals’ political behavior.

Overall, these approaches offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of the politics of fear, highlighting its strategic, discursive, emotional, sociopolitical, and psychological dimensions. By examining fear from diverse methodological perspectives, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of its role in shaping political dynamics and societal outcomes.

3. Data and Methodology

Methodologically, the study takes an interdisciplinary approach encompassing both content analysis [18] and critical discourse analysis [9] in order to understand what methods are used by authoritarian states in order to implement the politics of fear.

This study aims to illuminate the evolving discourse in Russian media during the first year of the war, spanning from February 24 to December 31, 2022. The research draws on a diverse array of sources, including Russian media, official documents, and speeches.

The dataset encompasses content from key information agencies and newspapers, as well as official documents and speeches from government figures. The selected information agencies, Ria Novosti, TASS, and Interfax, stand as pillars of the Russian media landscape, providing a broad perspective on the national narrative. Additionally, influential newspapers—Moskovsky Komsomolets, Kommersant, and the official newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta—contribute nuanced perspectives to the study.

Government documents, official communications, and speeches were extracted from the President of the Russian Federation’s website (kremlin.ru) and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation’s website (stat.mil.ru). These platforms were chosen for their authoritative status and central role in disseminating information related to the Russian war in Ukraine.

The research design employed a multi-step approach to analyze the collected data comprehensively.

1. Scan Interfax Monitoring System. The Scan Interfax monitoring system facilitated a systematic analysis of the Russian media landscape. Relevant articles and messages were extracted using predetermined keywords. A total of 10,000 articles were initially gathered, with subsequent ranking by relevance. The top 2,300 articles were selected for further in-depth analysis.
2. NVivo Software Analysis. The selected articles underwent content analysis using NVivo software. This method allowed for the identification of patterns, themes, and sentiments within the media content, providing a deeper understanding of the narratives presented.
3. Critical Discourse Analysis. Employing critical discourse analysis, the study delved into extra-discursive behaviors of political actors. This approach enabled a nuanced exploration of the socio-political dynamics during the specified period.

4. Results

The analysis of the politics of fear in Russia reveals a complex and multifaceted landscape shaped by historical, social, and political factors. This section presents the key findings from the examination of various methodological approaches to understanding fear in Russian society, including the instrumental, discursive, emotional, sociopolitical, and psychological perspectives.

Table 1.

Three types of fear-based politics - targeting opposition, elites, and supporters

	<i>Opposition</i>	<i>Elites</i>	<i>Regime supporters</i>
<i>Instrumental approach</i>	Repressions	Coercion and Control, Patronage and Rewards, Co-optation and Fragmentation	Cultivation of Enemy Perceptions
<i>Discursive approach</i>	Othering and Marginalization	Cultivation of Loyalty and Dependence	Othering and Stereotyping, Symbolic Politics
<i>Emotional approach</i>	Self-censorship, Avoidance, Radicalization, Emigration, Psychological distress	Compliance and Loyalty, Self-Preservation	Dissemination of Fear (self-regulated emotion)
<i>Socio political approach</i>	Suppression of Dissent, Erosion of Democratic Space, Polarization and Divisions	Consolidation of Power, Fear-driven Compliance, Limited Autonomy and Independence	Justification of Repressive Measures, Social Pressure and Conformity
<i>Psychological approach</i>	Fear and Anxiety, Self-Censorship, Paranoia and Mistrust	Instrumental Rationality	Group Identity and Belonging, Cognitive Biases

In Russia, it’s crucial to recognize three distinct dimensions of fear-based politics, each tailored to specific societal groups. Firstly, tactics target regime opponents, including activists and journalists. Secondly, elites are intimidated to prevent dissent within influential circles. Lastly, even regime supporters are kept under fear to ensure compliance. These strategies

predominantly impact politically active individuals. By understanding these dimensions, we gain a more nuanced insight into the varied effects of fear-based politics across different segments of society.

By correlating the three types of fear-based politics - targeting opposition, elites, and supporters - with diverse approaches to defining it (see Table 1), we develop the following framework to enhance our understanding of the current situation and the strategies employed by the government to implement politics of fear in Russia.

In analyzing the politics of fear in Russia, it becomes apparent that one of the most conspicuous dimensions involves the treatment of the opposition. The opposition contends with a multitude of challenges resulting from the government's utilization of fear-based tactics. These challenges span diverse dimensions, each representing distinct approaches aimed at instilling fear and exerting control over dissenting viewpoints.

Instrumental approach in this case is represented by repressions. Repressions against opposition figures, such as criminal and administrative prosecutions, dispersal of protests, infringement of rights and freedoms, pressure on employees in the public sector, donors of NGOs, and students exemplify this approach. According to "OVD-Info"[24] from February 24, 2022, to December 23, 2023, criminal cases were initiated against 801 opponents of the war. Among them, 297 individuals were prosecuted under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("dissemination of knowingly false information about the actions of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation"), 140 under Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("discrediting the use of the Russian Armed Forces"), and 122 under Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("justification, propaganda, or incitement to terrorism"). Our analysis also reveals a significant number of mentions of cases involving court proceedings and prosecutions against I. Yashin [25], Y. Shevchuk [26], and others. These cases sent a clear message to other dissenters about the potential consequences of challenging the regime.

Discursive approach implements such strategies as othering and marginalization of opposition. The opposition is often portrayed as unpatriotic, foreign-backed agents seeking to destabilize the country. State-controlled media outlets frequently employ rhetoric that "others" opposition figures, depicting them as enemies of the state and the fifth column [27]. Such discourse serves to marginalize and delegitimize the opposition, making it easier to justify repressive measures against them.

Emotional approach is represented by self-censorship, avoidance, radicalization, emigration and psychological distress. The emotional approach highlights the affective dimension of fear and its impact on individuals and groups. In the context of the Russian opposition, fear manifests through various emotional responses and coping mechanisms. Many activists engage in self-censorship, avoiding certain topics or activities out of fear of reprisal. Others may become radicalized, resorting to more extreme tactics as a response to perceived threats. Additionally, some opposition members choose to emigrate to escape persecution [28], while others experience psychological distress, including anxiety, paranoia, and mistrust of others.

Socio-political approach reflects suppression of dissent, erosion of democratic space, polarization and divisions. The socio-political approach considers the broader social, political, and institutional factors that shape the politics of fear. Laws targeting "foreign agents" [29] and "undesirable organizations" [30] restrict the activities of civil society groups and opposition movements, stifling dissent and limiting political participation. Moreover, the deliberate fostering of divisions within society exacerbates tensions and reinforces fear among opposition members.

The psychological approach unveils anxiety, self-censorship, paranoia, and mistrust. The psychological approach delves into the individual and collective psychological processes underlying the politics of fear. In Russia, opposition members experience fear and anxiety due to the constant threat of surveillance, harassment, and violence. This fear often leads to self-censorship, as individuals refrain from expressing dissenting opinions or engaging in activism to avoid repercussions. Moreover, the pervasive atmosphere of fear fosters paranoia and mistrust among opposition circles, undermining solidarity and collective action [31].

Overall, the politics of fear in Russia target the opposition through a combination of repressive tactics, discursive marginalization, emotional manipulation, socio-political suppression, and psychological coercion. These approaches work synergistically to maintain the regime's grip on power and silence dissenting voices, perpetuating a climate of fear and intimidation.

However, the politics of fear extend beyond the opposition to target elites within the political and economic spheres. The government employs various strategies to influence and control elites, utilizing different approaches based on instrumental rationality, discursive manipulation, emotional appeals, socio-political dynamics, and psychological factors.

The instrumental approach concerning elites is reflected in coercion, control, patronage, co-optation, and fragmentation. This approach involves the strategic use of coercion and control, where the government employs threats, intimidation, and punitive measures to ensure compliance. The Speaker of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, even advocated for the dismissal of public sector workers who do not agree with the war in Ukraine: "Those who are supported by the state, and therefore by the people, and have betrayed it, should step down from leadership positions in budgetary institutions in the fields of culture, education, healthcare, and other sectors" [32].

Simultaneously, elites are enticed through patronage and rewards, offered lucrative business contracts, political positions [33], or legal protection in exchange for loyalty. The regime also fosters divisions among elites, fragmenting potential opposition and consolidating its power base.

Discursive strategy is focused on cultivation of loyalty and dependence by promoting narratives of national unity and stability. Elites are portrayed as integral to the country's prosperity and security [34], fostering a sense of obligation and

loyalty towards the government. Through discourse, the regime reinforces the perception that cooperation with the authorities is essential for the common good, thereby maintaining elite support and compliance.

Emotionally, elites navigate a complex landscape of compliance and self-preservation, balancing loyalty to the regime with personal interests and security concerns [35]. Fear of reprisal, loss of status, or economic consequences [10] drives many elites to prioritize allegiance to the government, even at the expense of their principles or the welfare of society. The emotional appeal of self-preservation perpetuates the regime's control over elite circles.

From a socio-political perspective, the government's objective is the consolidation of power through fear-driven compliance and the imposition of limits on elite autonomy. Elites who challenge the regime risk losing their influence and privileges, compelling them to acquiesce to government directives to maintain their positions of authority. Limited autonomy and independence curtail elites' ability to challenge the regime effectively, ensuring their continued subordination to state interests. The Prigozhin affair can be considered a notable example of this phenomenon, especially his fate following the appraisal [36].

Due to psychological approach elites operate within a framework of instrumental rationality, weighing the costs and benefits of aligning with or opposing the regime. Fear of retribution, coupled with promises of rewards and protection, influences elite decision-making and behavior. Instrumental rationality dictates that elites will act in their self-interest, aligning with the government to secure their status, wealth, and security, thereby perpetuating the regime's control over elite circles. In the context of Russia, the politics of fear are also directed towards regime supporters, albeit with a different focus and set of strategies. The government employs a range of approaches to maintain support among its base and suppress dissent [21].

Utilizing the instrumental approach, the regime cultivates perceptions of external and internal enemies among its supporters. By framing opposition groups, dissidents, or marginalized communities as threats to national security or stability [25], the government reinforces the narrative of a besieged state. Supporters are encouraged to view themselves as defenders of the regime against purported enemies, fostering loyalty and solidarity in the face of perceived threats.

Through the discursive approach, the regime engages in othering and stereotyping to vilify dissenters and reinforce the superiority of its supporters. Opposition figures are depicted as unpatriotic, disloyal, or aligned with foreign interests, while regime supporters are portrayed as virtuous defenders of the nation united with the government and elite members [37].

Emotionally, the dissemination of fear is a key strategy employed by the regime to maintain control over its supporters. By instilling a sense of anxiety, uncertainty, or insecurity, the government fosters dependence on its leadership for protection and stability. By employing the politics of pacification [20] on one hand, the government simultaneously maintains a high level of societal anxiety [38] to manage these sentiments during times of war. These sentiments are then readily embraced by the populace, leading to their further spread and reinforcing a self-perpetuating atmosphere of fear. For instance, efforts to quell societal unease may involve promoting a narrative of imminent global conflict or the anticipation of a global warfare. This narrative suggests that the war is not exclusive to Russia's involvement in Ukraine but is a global phenomenon involving the entire world, with no escape from its reach. Moreover, the expectation of extensive warfare and the potential for nuclear conflict function as means for regime supporters to reassure themselves, implying that their circumstances and the dangers they confront are not exceptional [39]. Other global conflicts are intentionally exaggerated, like the situation in Israel-Palestine or the UK's involvement in Yemen. From a socio-political standpoint, the government employs repressive tactics and social coercion to ensure compliance among its backers. Any form of dissent or critique is swiftly met with legal repercussions, social isolation, or economic penalties, instilling a pervasive atmosphere of fear and conformity. Even if someone fails to perceive legitimate reasons for initiating war, it's imperative to recognize that once engaged, winning becomes paramount. Failure to secure victory jeopardizes the nation's future. Among regime supporters, apprehension regarding reparations, sanctions, and further humiliations intensifies [40]. Supporters, in turn, feel a strong sense of belonging and identity within their group, fostering unity and allegiance to the ruling regime [41]. Moreover, cognitive biases like confirmation bias and favoritism towards their own group influence their perceptions, further solidifying their support for the government's narrative and worldview.

5. Discussion

The analysis presented in this study sheds light on the intricate dynamics of mechanisms of politics of fear in Russia, highlighting its influence across various societal groups and dimensions. By examining the tactics employed by the government to instill fear and maintain control, as well as the responses of opposition, elites, and supporters, we gain valuable insights into the complex correlation between power, coercion, and manipulation within Russian society.

One of the key findings of this study is the multi-dimensional nature of fear-based politics. This understanding necessitates studying the politics of fear from different approaches. At the same time the politics of fear manifests differently across distinct segments of society. The tactics targeting the opposition, including repressions, discursive marginalization, and emotional manipulation, underscore the regime's relentless efforts to suppress dissent and stifle opposition voices. The systematic use of legal, social, and psychological mechanisms to instill fear among activists and journalists highlights the government's determination to maintain its grip on power.

Similarly, the strategies employed to influence and control elites reveal the regime's adeptness at leveraging patronage, coercion, and emotional appeals to secure loyalty and compliance. By offering rewards, fostering divisions, and exploiting fears of reprisal or economic consequences, the government effectively maintains the allegiance of influential

figures within political and economic spheres. The case of Vyacheslav Volodin's call for the dismissal of public sector workers critical of the war exemplifies the instrumental approach used to coerce compliance among elites. Furthermore, the tactics employed to manipulate regime supporters underscore the regime's adeptness at cultivating a narrative of external threats and internal enemies to foster loyalty and solidarity among its base. Through discursive othering, emotional fear-mongering, and socio-political coercion, the government reinforces its narrative of national unity and stability, effectively silencing dissent and perpetuating a climate of fear.

However, despite the regime's concerted efforts to control the narrative and suppress dissent, this study also reveals cracks in its façade of power and control. The resilience of opposition activists, the emergence of alternative narratives, and the growing discontent among certain segments of society suggest that fear-based politics may not be sustainable in the long term. As the regime continues to escalate its repressive tactics, it risks further alienating its own supporters and exacerbating societal divisions. It leads us to an idea that the politics of fear is not the only strategy that is used by the Russian government to induce the state of societal inaction. It is also the politics of pacification that is implemented.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need for a nuanced understanding of fear-based politics in Russia and its implications for governance, democracy, and human rights. By elucidating the strategies employed by the government to manipulate fear and control dissent, this study contributes to a broader conversation about the nature of authoritarianism and the challenges of democratic resilience in contemporary Russia.

6. Conclusions

The exploration of the politics of fear in Russia through diverse methodological approaches has provided a nuanced understanding of the intricate ways fear operates across different segments of society. This comprehensive investigation highlights the role of politics of fear in shaping power dynamics, influencing individual and collective psychology, and contributing to the broader socio-political landscape. The findings emphasize the regime's strategic manipulation of fear to consolidate power, control narratives, and maintain societal cohesion. As Russia navigates its future, understanding the multifaceted strategies employed in the politics of fear becomes crucial for envisioning scenarios that may either perpetuate or challenge the existing dynamics, ultimately shaping the trajectory of the country's political landscape.

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