

## **Monopoly is the Message: Banal Nationalism and Autocratic Legitimation**

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**ABSTRACT.** Most discussions of the relationship between nationalism and legitimation describe moments of conflict and contention in democracies or democratizing states. Michael Billig's landmark (1995) treatise on banal nationalism indirectly countered these studies by examining how nationalism becomes passive and taken for granted in Western democracies. Billig's description of unwaved flags and rote recitations of national anthems illustrates the many instances when national sentiment recedes into the background of normal life until activated. However, surprisingly few scholars have examined how banal nationalism works in autocracies – or even if it works in the same ways. In general, authoritarian states seek to decrease direct political participation and demobilize mass publics. Rather than bolstering autocratic legitimacy, activated nationalist sentiment may galvanize a regime's extremist challengers and jeopardize the stability of the regime's control. As such, dictators may prefer to render attachment to the nation as unexceptional and ordinary, yet there has been little work on the ways that autocrats use nationalism for legitimation. In this paper, we theorize that the means used to produce banal nationalism vary from democratic to autocratic states. We then examine the methods by which authoritarian states attempt to establish a monopoly on the production of nationalist practices, and thus render nationalist practices as pervasively unnoticed aspects of daily life. This relationship is illustrated through paired comparisons of Russia and Ukraine, as well as China and Taiwan. Through this paired, cross-regional comparison, we seek to identify common tactics utilized by authoritarian regimes in making the nation a routinized, predictable aspect of everyday life. These findings may therefore be significant for the broader comparative literature on authoritarianism, which generally eschews the power and influence of ideas and identities in accounting for the durability or fragility of autocracy.

Key words: authoritarianism, hybrid regimes, banal nationalism, legitimation

Word count: 12,642

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## *Introduction*

How does nationalism go from blatant to banal? Since the publication of Michael Billig's landmark work *Banal Nationalism* (1995), significant scholarly attention focused on mapping varieties of banal nationalism and explaining how nationalism goes from banal to blatant – that is, how banal nationalism might be mobilized or activated. Most of this work followed Billig's lead in assessing banal nationalism as characteristic of established Western democracies, for which “nationalism” is perceived as something violent and exotic that happens to other (eastern) nations. Yet with the rising number of established autocracies in the world over the last decade (V-Dem Institute 2018), scholars of authoritarianism started to examine their varied claims to legitimacy and the uses of nationalism as a form of autocratic legitimation (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017; Gerschewski 2013; Goode 2012). Nevertheless, we still lack an understanding of how banal nationalism works in autocracies, nor do we have a good explanation for how nationalism goes from blatant to banal (rather than the reverse).

The difficulty of achieving banality despite the regime's overwhelming advantage in resources as well as political and media control points to a broader theoretical problem of explaining how banality is achieved, in general. For non-democratic regimes, it is easy to understand why autocrats (and would-be autocrats) might desire banality: the nation can be a powerful source of legitimation - indeed, it may be an unavoidable source of legitimation where new regimes owe their existence to prior nationalist mobilization. In hybrid or authoritarian regimes, legitimacy-seeking or legitimation can be elusive where autocrats must create substitutes for the ballot box as the ultimate expression of popular sovereignty. Once it is taken for granted that the regime and nation are indivisible, with the regime and its agents as the legitimate spokespersons for the nation, it requires far less effort to discredit and co-opt

opposition. Banality as a strategy for legitimation also potentially reduces elite uncertainty about the regime's durability and lengthens time horizons for decision-making. Hence, there are clear incentives for autocrats to promote banality, though it is unclear how those incentives might be realized. Explaining how banality is achieved also raises the methodological concern of how one observes or even measures banality, particularly in non-democracies where public expressions of regime support are often poor guides to privately-held sentiments (Scott 1990; Kuran 1991; Wedeen 1999).

In this paper, we propose a framework for conceptualizing *banalization*, or the process of converting state-promoted national images, symbols, and practices into pervasively unnoticed facets of the nation's everyday life. The next section makes a theoretical case for the concept of banalization in the context of the broader constructivist literature on nationalism and nation-building in post-communist states. The following section considers the peculiarities of researching banalization in authoritarian and hybrid regimes which draw attention to the ways that the means of achieving banality vary with type of regime. While new regimes have an interest in pursuing banalization, its unfolding depends upon quotidian practices outside of elites and official policies. To examine how these processes work in practice and to establish whether regime type credibly matters in relation to modes of banalization and outcomes, we then examine the course of banalization across four case studies which vary principally in terms of regime type and success or failure in banalization: Russia, Ukraine, China, and Taiwan.

### *The mystery of how nationalism becomes banal*

How does the nation become so omnipresent that it is pervasively unnoticed? Michael Billig's (1995) pathbreaking work examined the pervasiveness of nationalism in Western societies in the

form of “banal nationalism,” symbolized by the unwaved flags that hang unnoticed in front of post offices. Billig proceeded from the observation that the nation has already become a banal reality in democratic Western states, pointedly contrasted with the “hot,” “noisy,” or “blatant” nationalism that characterizes mobilizational cycles. The nation is continually reproduced in the ways that it is flagged in daily speech, particularly in the kinds of deixis that identify *we* and *ours* with the nation. Crucially, the constant presence of banal nationalism makes it possible for “hot” nationalism to be triggered and mobilized even in seemingly stable and pacific industrial democracies.

What is missing in this work is an understanding of how the nation *becomes* a banal, taken-for-granted fact of daily life. If a crucial contribution of Billig's work (and the many works it inspired) was to demonstrate how blatant nationalism might arise from a pervasively unnoticed banal nationalism, it stops short of considering how the nation went from blatant to banal in the first place.<sup>1</sup> One may draw clues from the first wave of constructivist works that identify long-term historical processes of modernization and linguistic assimilation or vernacularization (A. D. Smith 2011) as crucial to spreading the notion of the nation as an imaginable and sovereign entity. However, there are limits to how far one can press the historical analogy of nation-building in Europe from the industrial revolution through the 19th century. Most importantly, in the contemporary world the existence of nations is already a taken-for-granted repository of state legitimacy.

A similar argument might be made with reference to the literature on nation-building. Nation-building refers to the construction of national majorities as the source of legitimate authority in modern states (Mylonas 2012). Similar to banalization, it concerns state actions

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<sup>1</sup> Billig mentions in passing the notion of *enhabituation* as a means by which this process might occur but, to be fair, his task was to challenge the assumption that Western democracies are somehow immune to nationalism.

intended to cultivate national unity (or at least the unity of a core national group with the state), usually as a complement to the institutional, legal, administrative, and coercive processes involved in modernization and state-building (Kolstø 2004). While nation-building policies can powerfully shape the lives of ethnic majorities and minorities, they do not necessarily explain the means by which national identities promoted by the state come to be taken for granted in daily life. Crucially, the traditional focus on nation-building as an elite-led, top-down process neglects that elites rarely craft new national identities from scratch, instead drawing upon vernacular practices and repertoires – indeed, state-sponsored national projects are likely to fail if they do not resonate with the broader public's daily experiences (Whitmeyer 2002). As Polese (2011, 40) observes, nation-building includes “not only the policies adopted at the national level, but also the way people react to them. Such an approach would acknowledge the role of the people in the production of the political and see the role of human agency as crucial in the definition of the nation-building project.” The implications for studies of banal and everyday nationalism are that banalization might be sought by new regimes, but that the process is largely dependent upon social practices beyond ruling elites and institutions. In this sense, examining banalization as a process effectively bridges between the literatures on banal nationalism and everyday nationalism (Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Goode and Stroup 2015; Skey and Antonsich 2017).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that the terms “everyday ethnicity,” “everyday nationhood,” and “everyday nationalism” are not often distinguished in the literature, though they share the same core focus on social practices, repertoires, and performances that are constitutive of national identities.

### *Conceptualizing banalization as a regime process*

Banalizing processes are understood, here, as *the forging of banal ties between a regime and core nation*, for instance after regime change or a critical juncture in state-society relations. Assuming that all new regimes will engage in an initial flurry of legitimacy-seeking and flag-waving, banalization might be conceived as a consolidation period during which the state actively and conspicuously promotes the nation in daily life, particularly as long as the prior regime (colonial, communist, or authoritarian) remains an active object of politics and popular reference point for assessing the performance of successor regimes. In contrast to the nationalizing states famously discussed by Brubaker (1996), then, we might instead talk about *banalizing* states as occupying this consolidation period.<sup>3</sup> During this interval, the state and its challengers impose and incentivize contending visions of nationality, bringing the nation into markets, ballot boxes, and classrooms. It is during this period that official repertoires are established that, if successfully banalized, become integrated into citizens' daily routines.

The virtue of thinking about banalization as a consolidation period or threshold is that it helps one to identify how the process varies with political regime. In relatively open or competitive political regimes, banalizing dynamics might be likened to supply-side market policies in which success depends upon market convergence and standardization of a finite range of national images and nationalist claims, which in turn come to be popularly accepted as normal and desirable. Crucially, banalization in open political regimes benefits from the availability of electoral legitimacy, such that it can develop within, alongside, or even in spite of political

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<sup>3</sup> In distinguishing nationalizing processes from banalizing processes, both sets of processes share the notion that the state contains a core nation or nationality, and are justified by claims that state action is needed to strengthen the nation. To these, nationalizing processes further add claims to ownership of the state by the core nation, complaints that the core nation is weak or unhealthy, and arguments for state action to address current or past injustices against the core nation. (Brubaker 2011)

competition. Indeed, one of the crucial findings in much of the existing literature on banal and everyday nationalism in democratic or democratizing states is that people (especially youth) often resist or react with ambivalence to elites' attempts to mobilize publics along ethno-national lines (Brubaker et al. 2006; Fenton 2007; Fox 2004). Instead, the content and boundaries of national identities are elaborated through daily social interactions.

In closed or autocratic regimes, banalizing dynamics relate to *regime* legitimacy rather than state legitimacy (Connor 2002; Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). Compared to open political regimes, legitimizing autocratic politics requires more than convergence around a shared range of national images since convergence still leaves room for interpretation and contestation over the right to rule. Rather, banalizing autocracies advance justifications for the restriction or elimination of political competition, the minimization or elimination of citizens' political subjectivities, and active support of a ruler or ruling elite as essential for the preservation of the homeland (Schatz 2009; Koch 2013). As a result, banalizing autocracies may easily become nationalizing autocracies.

These differences in banalizing dynamics also suggest that modes of banalization differ among with regime types: while banalization might be sought by democratizing as well as autocratizing states, there are distinct differences in the ways that unwaved flags don't wave (to paraphrase Billig). In open and hybrid regimes, banalization entails *incentivization* to stimulate competition and convergence. The state initially plays a crucial role in proposing national self-images and repertoires. New regimes may adopt an incentivization strategy for a variety of reasons, including commitments to competitive politics but also simply the inability to dominate politics. Under the prior regime, disparate interests may previously have been unified by a common mobilizational frame (such as resisting empire). However, the dissemination and

acceptance of national images and narratives in open regimes depends upon a range of public and private actors in political, economic, and civil society, in cooperation with the state. Forest and Johnson (2011) present supporting evidence in comparing monument creation across post-communist regimes, finding that nearly half (48%) of public monuments in democratic regimes are privately sponsored compared to just 30% in hybrid regimes and 25% in authoritarian regimes. **A sign of successful incentivization is that the state no longer remains the chief supplier of national images and narratives;** the tie between state and core nation is no longer a matter of policy but social and cognitive structure, or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990). ***Incentivization thus succeeds as a strategy for banalization to the extent that multiple, autonomous social and economic sectors are drawn into the re-production of banality, and that citizens come to routinely care about national symbols and repertoires in their daily lives.***

By contrast, banalization in non-competitive and closed regimes is dominated by the regime and involves the *monopolization* of overt displays of loyalty to state and nation, followed by mimicry and conspicuous public acceptance. In practical terms, monopolization is difficult for hybrid regimes as they are often beset by problems related to weak institutions and economic performance (Levitsky and Way 2010).<sup>4</sup> Banalization via monopolization involves the imposition of regime-created or regime-sanctioned national tropes. Similar to other new regimes, the state begins as chief supplier of national images and narratives, but with an eye towards establishing the regime's right to rule and excluding challengers. The dissemination of national images depends less on acceptance across a range of public and private actors than transmission throughout clientelist networks.

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<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the extent to which regime transitions are driven by societal participation “from below” rather than imposition “from above” (or externally) potentially bears crucial implications for whether successor regimes pursue incentivization or monopolization. However, examining this hypothesis would go well beyond the scope of this paper.



Among actors in political and economic society, monopolization succeeds as a strategy for banalization once the repetition of regime-supplied images and narratives becomes understood to be a sign of acceptance into (or affiliation with) the regime, while their re-circulation becomes a routine cost of doing business or a means of communicating authority by paying tribute to power. Turkmenistan under Suparmarat Niyazov provides an extreme illustration, where the translation and publication of the core text of Niyazov's personality cult, *Rukhnama*, became an informal requirement even for international corporations seeking to secure state contracts (Halonen 2008).

Monopolization is attractive for autocrats seeking security and stability as it tends to have the effect of delegitimizing opposition, producing scapegoats for the nation's ills, and inducing social conformity (Bar-Tal 1997). Meanwhile, the imposition of symbols of the new national order remains blatant for ordinary citizens. From a popular perspective, then, *monopolization may be said to have succeeded as a strategy for banalization to the extent that citizens cease to care about the routine imposition of national symbols and repertoires by the regime in public life. By the same token, citizens whose livelihood or welfare depends upon the regime come to understand the political expectation of routinely caring even in the absence of explicit threats or coercion.* However, monopolization as a means to banalization makes it difficult for regime actors and for outside observers to distinguish between successful banalization and popular dissimulation – itself a potentially powerful technique of power, as Wedeen (1999) depicted in Hafez al-Assad's Syria. As one might expect, such **success in monopolization is contingent on the ability of the regime to continue to dominate and patrol the boundaries of national expression.** Consequently, unsanctioned national expressions – even if not oppositional – may be treated as political threats in autocratic regimes. Openly pointing out banal nationalism in

such contexts is to draw attention to that which is not publicly acknowledged for fear of social or political sanction, even if (or perhaps because) it is officially treated as if it were widely accepted.<sup>5</sup>

While the discussion to this point has focused on conceptualizing the choices made by new regimes to incentivize or monopolize representations of the nation in daily life, such choices do not exclusively follow a change of regime. Where states face critical challenges that threaten a regime's claim to legitimacy, they may seek to alter legitimation-seeking practices or even to attempt a different mode of banalization. One expects that such shifts in legitimation are most likely to occur among hybrid regimes. Tellingly, Forest and Johnson's (2011) study of public monuments in post-communist states finds almost twice as much discursive activity in hybrid regimes compared to *either* democratic or authoritarian regimes. Hence, a turn to monopolization (along with de-democratization) may be pursued for regime maintenance or even survival where hybrid regimes fail to secure legitimacy through incentivization. Less frequently, stable regimes are occasionally vulnerable to internal ruptures resulting from the crystallization of long-term changes or sudden exogenous shocks. At such junctures, they face a crucial decision of whether to re-commit to the regime's established mode of banalization or to risk the political uncertainties of altering their basis of legitimation.

*Methodological challenges: When nationalism turns banal in a forest, does it make a sound?*

To these theoretical issues, one might add a crucial methodological concern in operationalizing banal nationalism: if by "banal" one means that the nation is *pervasively unnoticed*, then asking

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<sup>5</sup> The tendency to suppress one's own views for fear of social consequences is well known in the social sciences and has been addressed variously as social desirability bias (D. L. Phillips and Clancy 1972), third person effects (Davison 1983), and preference falsification (Kuran 1995).

people about national symbols and government policies in surveys or interviews is not just counter-productive in calling attention to them but also unsound in that such methods operationalize blatant rather than banal nationalism. In addressing these kinds of concerns, the literature on everyday nationalism relies primarily on indirect observation (mainly ethnography and interviewing) to observe the ways that ethnicity and the nation are invoked across power differences in social interactions (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Goode and Stroup 2015; Bonikowski 2016).<sup>6</sup> There are myriad ways that individuals invoke the nation in everyday life but often go unnoticed precisely because they are pervasive. Indirect observation (especially ethnography) is useful for observing everyday nationalism because it allows such practices to emerge naturally in social interaction. However, this ethnographic preference is not without problems: first and foremost, it is time and resource intensive, making it highly inefficient as a research tool. In theoretical terms, it may become even less efficient where banalization has been most successful such that the rules of being and becoming national are indistinguishable elements of everyday life.

Second, much of this literature remains focused on Western democracies, while researching everyday nationalism in non-democratic regimes raises potential risks to both researcher and respondents that may make indirect or covert observation less desirable.<sup>7</sup> In considering alternatives to indirect observation, Fox (2016) recommends that scholars seek out the "edges of the nation," proposing the use of breaching experiments to tease out the nation

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<sup>6</sup> In this fashion, everyday nationalism as an approach reveals the ways that the nation is woven into the fabric of daily life, but it goes further than 'banal nationalism' in delving into quotidian interactions through which individuals exercise agency by leveraging, invoking, or even rejecting the nation.

<sup>7</sup> On the practical and ethical challenges of conducting fieldwork in non-democracies, see Glasius et al. (2017) and Ahram and Goode (2016).

particularly among populations that are just learning to become national such as immigrants or schoolchildren.

In observing banalization as a regime process, one might expect that the "edges of the nation" are not limited to newly-inducted individuals or groups who are becoming national. Rather, the nation's edges might be thought of as being everywhere visible until they become banal - in other words, banalization entails not consensus on what the nation means, but rather the emergence of a relatively stable repertoire of social practices that conform to a socially-assumed (if not enforced) acceptance of the state's or regime's preferred version of the nation. The methodological implications of this approach to banalization are significant in opening the door to direct observation and even experimental approaches, particularly where banalization is examined in relation to broader political or economic phenomena like autocratization or economic development (Goode and Stroup 2015).

To our knowledge, there is no established or accepted way to observe, measure, or test for banality or banalization (Fox and Ginderachter 2018). For the purpose of elaborating the relationship between regime types and modes of banalization, we selected pairs of cases from different world regions that each began with relatively similar starting conditions in terms of type of regime (autocracy, hybrid, or democracy) and mode of banalization (incentivization or monopolization): Russia and Ukraine, China and Taiwan (see TABLES 1 and 2). In addition, each case faced either a threat to legitimation or a change of regime that exposed failure in prior banalization and presented opportunities to change modes. The advantage of this approach is that it permits us to observe variation both within and across cases and across regions, such that we can rule out explanations for the success or failure of banalization that are specific to a particular world region. These cases are thus useful as "pathway cases" that relate abstract models to the

real world and help to elaborate potential causal mechanisms (Gerring 2017, 105–14). In terms of data, the case studies draw from a variety of observations as well as secondary literature that fall short of the systematic analysis required for causal analysis. Rather, the case studies are intended to elicit the relationships between regime type and mode of banalization and to suggest hypotheses concerning the directionality and salience of those relationships for future testing.

Within each case, we examine adjacent historical periods that are marked by distinctive regimes and modes of banalization. While our case descriptions bear some elements of process-tracing, banalization by nature is not event-driven but occupies “settled times” (Bonikowski 2016). In looking both at the state’s attempts to incentivize or monopolize the nation as well as popular responses, our approach thus comes closer to the notion of “practice tracing” than process tracing, insofar as we treat social practices as possessing causal power and as “the generative force thanks to which society and politics take shape; they produce the very concrete effects in and on the world.” (Pouliot 2015, 241) What is observable in each case is the nature of the regime and the banalizing practices adopted or attempted. The trickier side of the analysis, of course, concerns the observation of success or failure. For two of the cases – Russia and China – the authors rely upon extensive fieldwork conducted in both countries for separate projects that involved practice-oriented observations of ethnic and national identities in daily life, as well as lengthy professional familiarity with both countries. For the remaining cases, we rely on secondary sources.

#### *Russia: From failed incentivization to autocratic monopolization*

In the 1990s, Russia’s post-Soviet regime failed to achieve banalization through incentivization. Boris Yeltsin’s attempts to craft new state and national symbols required not just the invocation

of a prior regime, but the replacement of the Soviet Union's vision of modernity and imperial nationhood.<sup>8</sup> His government advanced a civic definition of nationality, though he soon sacked his first Minister of Nationalities Valerii Tishkov who championed the civic national project. An attempt to incentivize Russian nationality took the form of a national essay competition, though it ultimately failed to inspire (K. E. Smith 2002). Yeltsin faced an opposition-minded parliament throughout the 1990s and was forced to adopt new national symbols by decree. The collapse of the Soviet state thus left a vacuum in terms of unifying national symbols and institutions, while the government's ministry for elaborating and implementing nationalities policy gradually fell prey to personalist power struggles and intrigues (Goode 2019).

Consequently, the meaning of being Russian was left to be elaborated on a quotidian level through collective practices of grief and discourses of bereavement that Serguei Oushakine (2009) describes as a "patriotism of despair." Even in the advertising sector, there was little interest in elaborating brand attachment to Russian national identity aside from some attempts to link to the pre-Soviet Tsarist era (Fabrykant 2018). This situation persisted until the 1998 crash, and then only because large multinational brands exited the market and allowed Russian companies to respond (Morris 2005). To this day, Russians often remember the 1990s as the "least patriotic time" to be Russian.<sup>9</sup> In daily life, Yeltsin appears almost nowhere in public space and some even refer to the 1990s simply as the time "before Putin."<sup>10</sup>

The failure of banalization under Yeltsin meant that there were few constraints on Vladimir Putin in imposing a set of state repertoires designed to bind his regime to the core

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<sup>8</sup> In a sense, the absence of ready-made symbols and narratives for post-Soviet Russia echoed the challenges later faced by Serbia after 1999. As Spasic (2017, 41) observes, there is confusion over "what kind of entity the national deixis (we, our, here) refers to. Where does the homeland begin and end?"

<sup>9</sup> Author's field notes. Tiumen', Russia, July 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Author's field notes. Perm', Russia, November 2015.

nationality. Putin initially followed Yeltsin's lead in promoting state patriotism and traditional values as crucial for Russia's development (Putin 1999). Rather than seek a clean break with the Soviet past, he instead sought a clean break from the 1990s. Real movement on officially adopting state symbols only came after Putin's *Unity* faction shared leadership of the Duma with the Communist Party following the parliamentary elections in 1999. With the Communists' support, Yeltsin's wordless and unfamiliar national anthem was replaced with the Soviet-era anthem with new lyrics penned by one of its original authors (Kolstø 2006).

By the end of Putin's first term, the emergence of United Russia as a dominant party (Reuter 2017) and the muting of ideological challenges moved the Kremlin firmly in an autocratizing direction. Rising authoritarianism was matched by a monopolistic approach to banalization in which state-sponsored symbols and narratives were imposed in top-down fashion and widely disseminated through state institutions, media, and programs. Though it was little noticed at the time, one of the first moves in promoting state patriotism in public life was the introduction of the State Program for Patriotic Education (SPPE) in 2001, (Pravitel'stvo RF 2001). The SPPE served as a foil for involving various social and economic sectors in the promotion of state patriotism through central funding for academic conferences, business fairs, and especially sporting events and competitions. In this sense, it could plausibly be viewed as an attempt to incentivize patriotism, though it also provided a means to monopolize patriotism's meaning and content.

During the 2000s, the state's promotion of patriotism centered on "the rehabilitation of fatherland symbols and institutionalized historical memory, the instrumentalization of Orthodoxy for symbolic capital, and the development of militarized patriotism based on Soviet nostalgia." (Laruelle 2009, 154) The government solicited and funded the creation of new military-patriotic

films and broadcast media (Gillespie 2005; Norris 2012). Soviet history was rehabilitated in Russian education, with an emphasis on the Second World War and the Soviet state's achievements as a world power. A step-change in the promotion of state patriotism occurred first with the 2011-2012 election cycle, and then in 2014 with the Sochi Olympics and the annexation of Crimea. Election protests in 2011-2012 deeply shook the regime, as nationalist and liberal opposition joined forces in mass demonstrations for fair elections (Kolstø 2016b; Laruelle 2014; Popescu 2012), along with high profile elite defections exemplified by the departure of Putin's long-time ally, Aleksei Kudrin, from the government, and the oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov's candidacy in the 2012 presidential election. These challenges unfolded against the background of rising social protest sentiment and declining economic performance. Faced with these threats, Putin's regime moved to advance a deeply conservative social and political agenda that promotes cultural conservatism, anti-Westernism, and state patriotism, or what Sharafutdinova (2014) characterizes as a shift from "sovereign democracy" to "sovereign morality." In practical terms for state-society relations, this meant the state's withdraw from its informal "nonintrusion pact" with society – the unspoken understanding that the state would not interfere with citizens' private lives in exchange for their acceptance of the regime (Petrov, Lipman, and Hale 2014).

Following the Sochi Olympics, the annexation of Crimea, and the launching of an undeclared war in eastern Ukraine in 2014, state patriotism became a daily fact of life. In domestic politics, the consequences include record levels of popular support for Putin as well as a chilling of dissent (Suslov 2014; Teper 2016). The regime's campaign in Ukraine resulted in the fragmenting of nationalist opposition in domestic politics (Kolstø 2016a; Verkhovsky 2016). Despite Russia's growing international isolation and the imposition of international sanctions, funding for the State Patriotic Education Program soared, rising to 1.67 billion rubles in 2016



(Pravitel'stvo RF 2015) compared to its original, largely symbolic budget of 130 million rubles in 2001 (Blum 2006). Also noticeable was a shift in the government program's priorities: while previous plans through 2012 emphasized historical celebrations (especially May 9<sup>th</sup>) and propaganda, the 2016 plan allocated more than a third of its budget (628.7 million rubles) for "youth military preparation." Budgets for commemorative activities and traditional propaganda steadily declined while mobilizational and competitive activities increased nearly four-fold (Goode 2018, 265–67).

Turning to the societal level, to what extent can one say that the Kremlin's strategy of banalization via monopolization has been successful? Over more than 60 in-depth interviews conducted with Russian citizens in Tiumen in 2014 and Perm in 2015-2016, respondents commonly reported becoming aware of the regime's promotion of patriotism within the last five years.<sup>11</sup> Far from becoming banal, respondents tended to associate state patriotism with noisy parades and media campaigns (though not with elections or voting). Similarly, every discussion of contemporary patriotism in focus groups began with virtually the same items: Putin, Sochi, Crimea.

When probed on the ways that individuals encounter or practice patriotism in daily life, however, a distinction between private and public patriotism emerged. Public patriotism involves official state repertoires, celebrations, and performances. Attitudes toward public patriotism are complex: on the one hand, Russians view state patriotism as inauthentic and even opposed to what they perceive as genuine patriotic sentiment. Many are convinced that the majority of their fellow citizens are patriots in the sense of being loyal to Putin's regime. Yet they also view state patriotism as something that normal states "do" – an expected and even necessary task of

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<sup>11</sup> Fieldwork for this research was funded by a Fulbright research grant over 2014-2016. The author is grateful to Valeriia Umanets (Perm') and Ekaterina Semushkina (Tiumen') for their research assistance.

government. Among pensioners in particular, the perception that the state stopped promoting patriotism after the Soviet Union's collapse was a significant complaint ( though an equally significant complaint was that the state often gets it wrong).

By contrast, private patriotism relates to one's family, friendship networks, social morés, and the "little motherland" (usually meaning one's place of birth, though sometimes simply one's hometown). Unlike public patriotism, private patriotism is viewed as authentic because it bears emotional weight. If patriotism is generally defined in Russia as "love for the motherland," then private patriotism comes closest to this ideal in that it springs from an affective tie. In focus groups, for instance, some participants privatized public events by stressing the opportunity to be together with their loved ones – even if only to watch the evening news.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, Putin's attempts at banalization by way of monopolization has had mixed success. The state continues to regulate and supply the use of patriotic symbols, narratives, and tropes – for instance, by offering presidential grants for patriotic projects or contracting for patriotic celebrations. Federal and regional governments provide the resources, rubrics, occasions, and space within which state patriotism may be practiced, but the regime carefully patrols the boundaries of patriotic expression, making it risky for ordinary citizens (and their social networks) to innovate. On a societal level, there is significant unevenness in the advancement of banalization. In focus groups, pensioners and state employees largely embraced state patriotism. This does not mean that they are uncritical of the Kremlin – indeed, they frequently complain about social policy and corruption – but they tend to accept state patriotism as both common sense and personal. Entrepreneurs are a different story: while not necessarily opposed to the regime, they perceive state patriotism as blatant and they are not ambivalent about

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<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Oleg Lysenko and his team at Perm State Pedagogical University for organizing and conducting these sessions.

it. On the other hand, students are the very definition of ambivalent, effectively lumping together public and private patriotism in equal measures.

*Ukraine: Hybrid regimes and ambivalent banalization*

Ukraine has always been characterized by intense territorial divisions that reflect historical, demographic, and linguistic legacies. These divisions are most commonly represented as regional divisions between Eastern Russophone and Western Ukrainophone populations (Liber 1998), though there was great variation among and within Ukraine's administrative regions in the 1990s (Birch 2000). In the face of these territorial and cultural challenges, Ukraine's elite feared that the new state could be significantly weakened from within by the persistence of Russian language and culture which, in turn, could be converted into support for sacrificing Ukrainian statehood in favor of merging with Russia and/or Belarus.

Simultaneous with the vote for independence from the Soviet Union in December 1991, Ukrainians elected Leonid Kravchuk to be their first president. Kravchuk's government initially pursued nation-building policies ("Ukrainianization") intended to bolster the attachment between Ukrainian ethnicity and the state. In part, these were crafted around the promotion of Ukrainian language (already adopted as sole state language in 1989) and the rehabilitation of symbols and figures associated with the resistance to foreign occupation in Ukraine's history. For many (particularly in western Ukraine and especially among Ukrainian diaspora populations), Ukrainianization necessarily included recognition of the war-time Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) as national heroes. In turn, this stance also entailed casting Russia as a significant cultural Other and the Russian state as a persistent threat to Ukraine's sovereignty.

Under Kravchuk, the military actively pushed Ukrainianization in the form of soldiers' patriotic training with the intent that this national idea would then filter back into society. (Fesiak 2002, 149) However, this training turned out to be counter-productive. With the rejection of Soviet-era historiography, the Ukrainianization program came to rely chiefly on foreign-supplied books and resources, often provided by nationalist emigres living in the West. As a result, the use of a falsified Soviet history in the military was replaced by "a Ukrainian nationalist version" (Fesiak 2002, 157) that disenchanting a large portion of the officers as well as the rank and file. More broadly in educational reform, the new government pushed nation-building in primary, secondary, and higher education (Janmaat and Piattoeva 2007, 535).

However, after Kravchuk's electoral defeat in 1994 by his former Prime Minister, Leonid Kuchma, one observes similar dynamics unfolding between the hybrid regimes in Ukraine and Russia in the 1990s. Analogous to Yeltsin's Russia, Kuchma's government faced significant territorial (though not open separatism) and ideological challenges until his defeat of the Communist Party's candidate, Petro Semenenko, in the 1999 presidential election. Kuchma then moved the regime increasingly in a patronal direction, consolidating rule around his personal network. The government adopted an ambivalent posture towards nation-building, including its orientation towards the Soviet past and the place of Russia and Russians in the present. On language policy, Kuchma promised to make Russian a second state language during the 1994 campaign but he never followed through – in fact, he learned Ukrainian and used it in both public and private (Shevel 2002, 405) – instead agreeing to Ukrainian as sole state language in the 1996 constitution with Russian classified as a minority language (Polese 2011, 42). By 1998, all teaching was required to be in Ukrainian though with the possibility of using other languages when national minorities were present. Ostensibly this led to a transformation of language

teaching throughout the country as parents increasingly chose Ukrainian schools for their children. Elsewhere in public life, the use of Ukrainian in educational and political settings increasingly became commonplace. These successes led Shevel (2002) to observe that politics was driving acceptance of the state's right to set the terms for language and generally of the state's legitimacy.

Despite these successes on paper, there remained significant popular skepticism about Kuchma's regime. Institutionally, its ambivalence in cultural policy reflected increasingly personalist regime dynamics (Riabchuk 2002). Ukrainianization in the military fell prey, in part, to the rapid cycling of ministerial and agency leadership (Fesiak 2002). Similarly, the promotion of a coherent nationalities policy was undermined by the near-constant turnover in the government's nationalities ministry (Goode 2019, 152–53). Kuchma not only remained flexible on regional language use (Ukrainian or Russian), but accommodated both anti- and pro-Soviet historical commemoration on the regional level (Kulyk 2011). Particularly thorny were commemorations of Soviet-era holidays – particularly November 7<sup>th</sup> (or October Revolution Day) and May 9<sup>th</sup> (or Victory Day) – whose resonance varied significantly with individual regions' experience of Soviet rule. Eventually November 7<sup>th</sup> was re-branded as the Day of National Reconciliation in 2000, though commemorations “triggered dueling rituals in most urban centers, which were distinctly of a non-national nature; they sought to pass judgments on the Soviet experience by either aligning the regime with glory or with terror.” (Wanner 1999, 121) In similar fashion, observances of Victory Day reinforced “regional cultural differences that build on regionally variable experiences of Soviet rule.” (Wanner 1999, 117)

Ideological and territorial divisions re-emerged in the Orange Revolution in 2004. Activists primarily from Ukraine's western and central regions were motivated by a combination

of anti-elite populism and nationalist framing of opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko, as pro-Western, and Kuchma's hand-picked successor, Viktor Yanukovich, as pro-Russian (Kuzio 2012). While Yushchenko's government attempted to promote a pro-Western form of nation-building, it lacked the capacity to follow through – particularly in the face of enduring regional divisions. On the national level, Yushchenko's powers were weakened by constitutional reforms and in 2006 he lost support in parliament. Yanukovich won back the presidency in 2010 as “the champion of Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine,” though he lacked a clear ideological message or appeal (Kudelia 2014). While he attempted to crack down on opposition and notoriously jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko, he never succeeded in establishing political dominance and was toppled from power by popular mobilization (again) in 2014.

Regardless of their orientations towards Russia or the West, Ukraine may be said to have had three hybrid regimes in the 2000s-early 2010s led by Kuchma, Yushchenko, and Yanukovich. Given the relative continuity in type of regime throughout the 2000s, it is perhaps unsurprising that educational reform remained largely unchanged through the decade – not changing when an increasingly defensive Kuchma sided with Putin's Russia for support, and not after the Orange Revolution in 2004 despite expectations of a renewed Ukrainianization (Janmaat and Piattoeva 2007, 538–39). The reason for this continuity has less to do with policy success or geopolitical orientation than the ways that administrators, teachers, and students re-negotiated the gap between formal or legal requirements concerning the use of Ukrainian in classrooms and official communications and daily practice. In public administration education and training, for example, Kolisnichenko and Rosenbaum (2009, 938) note that the top universities in the country often lacked specific policies concerning ethnicity and diversity and simply resolved issues concerning language use on an informal basis. Given that these

institutions' programs were directly responsible for training civil servants, it would be not surprising if their students converted this observed experience into informal administrative practice after graduating.

As Polese (2014, 68–69) observes, in Russophone regions like Odessa the use of Ukrainian or Russian became a way of demarcating between “official” and “unofficial” time in classrooms. Elsewhere, politicians alternated between Russian and Ukrainian depending on the audience, while daily operations within Russophone regions and municipalities continued to be conducted in Russian except when communicating with Kyiv. At such times, one of Polese’s informants reported that “people start panicking and the hunt for Ukrainian speakers begins. They will be asked to translate the content of the fax and send it. Kiev will receive a fax from Odessa [Russian speaking city] in Ukrainian and will be positively surprised. The national language is Ukrainian and Odessa speaks Ukrainian.” (Polese 2011, 46)

Throughout the 2000s and early-2010s, it is difficult to characterize banalization by incentivization as a success. Citizens did not come to routinely care about national symbols and repertoires in their daily lives, but neither was the state able to impose them from above. As a result, citizens learned to elaborate and negotiate local practices that sustained formal appearances of compliance even as they carved out spaces for local interpretations and language preferences. There is a logic to this insofar as the push and pull of national and regional politics around national symbolism throughout the period kept those symbols and associated repertoires blatant rather than becoming banal. The exception perhaps is found in consumption practices, where one finds evidence of progress in banalization outside of political or administrative engagements. For instance, a 2010 market survey of Ukrainian beer drinkers found surprisingly that 19% ranked Ukraine as producing the best beer in the world, ranking behind German (28%)

and Czech Republic (25.5%) but ahead of Russia (11.5%). When asked whether foreign imported beers were better than those made in Ukraine, 65.6% disagreed. Moreover, 66% claimed that their preference shifted from foreign to domestic brands. The report's authors considered their findings as clear evidence that anyone seeking to enter the Ukrainian market would need respect "their significant nationalistic feelings." (Khmel'nyts'ka and Swift 2010, 97)<sup>13</sup>

Following the toppling of Yanukovych's regime in February 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine seemingly diminished the salience of territorial divisions in most of the rest of the country (Kulyk 2016).<sup>14</sup> Petro Poroshenko's government still faced ideological challenges from pro-Western liberals as well as increasingly organized and vocal nationalists (Ishchenko 2018). Early policies were suggestive of movement towards a monopolization strategy with the renewed supply of state-sponsored national narratives concerning the "Revolution of Dignity" via a newly-established Institute of National Memory, the adoption in 2015 of far-reaching decommunization laws (Shevel 2016), and a renewed push for Ukrainian language teaching and usage in daily life (Kulyk 2018). The effects of these policies and the general political context are palpable in citizens' daily lives. While survey-based research suggests a rising acceptance of Ukrainian civic identity (Kulyk 2016; Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018), ethnographic research finds ongoing differences in the ways that Russophone and Ukrainophone citizens interpret and value national membership in their daily lives.

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps even more remarkable about these findings is that the survey was conducted in Simferopol' (the capital city of Crimea), though the authors provide no description of respondents' language of choice or national identification.

<sup>14</sup> However, Fisun (2017) notes that that weakened central state and steps towards decentralization have permitted the growth of regional political regimes that limit Kyiv's influence.



Significantly, the changes observed in the daily salience of national belonging since 2014 may have more to do with the effects of conflict with Russia than the regime's success in banalizing national identification. During her research in western Ukraine, Seliverstova (2017) notes a clear difference in the household items associated with being Ukrainian: while Ukrainophones tended to go for official or even nationalist symbols (like flags) linked with loyalty to the state, Russophones opted for more neutral cultural and artistic symbols (such as poetry, or arts and crafts).<sup>15</sup> In evaluating changes in patriotism among rural smallholders in western, central, and southern Ukraine before and after Euromaidan, Mamonova (2018) notes that attitudes concerning the desirability of rural life, appreciation for the use of land, and future perspectives all changed remarkably from 2012 to 2016. However, attitudes to the state remained unchanged in viewing oligarchs and authorities as pursuing their own interests and failing to provide help to smallholders. The difference in patriotic orientations is not regime change so much as the activation and development of civil society in rural areas. A similar observation is made by Bulakh (2018), who associates increased patriotism with the activation of "consumer citizenship" – especially in the form of consumer boycotts of Russian goods.

*China: Regime crisis and successful re-monopolization*

During the Mao Era from 1949 to 1976, revolutionary ideology compelled mass mobilization of the Chinese public behind the regime's campaigns, and provided the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) legitimacy (Perry 2007). However, since the start of the era of Opening and Reform in 1978, the CCP, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, diminished the

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<sup>15</sup> This should not be read as suggesting that Russophones are somehow less loyal, but that they are sensitive to the prominence of Russia and Russian language as political Others and therefore seek out non-political ways to signal their loyalty to Ukraine.

centrality of Maoism, and sought other bases of legitimacy. Accounts of Deng's leadership, both contemporary and retrospective, emphasize his desire to move past the throes of ideological Maoism in order to govern in a post-ideological pragmatic mode (Naughton 1993; Schell and Delury 2013). In so doing, Deng staked the CCP's right to rule on its ability to improve China's economic state. Schell and Delury (2013, 259–97) comment that Deng “made economic development the *raison d'être* of both the Communist Party and contemporary Chinese life.”

Loosening controls on expression in the early reform period, paired with economic openness enabled criticism of Mao, and calls for political reform. Playing off of Deng's “Four Modernizations” campaign, activists and artists in early 1979 began to call for a “fifth modernization”: democracy (Spence 1991, 653–75). Throughout the 1980s, China's economic liberalization both opened new pathways to prosperity, while also exposing citizens to the vicissitudes of the market's cycles of boom and bust. Frustrated with the lack of governmental reform, activists launched a number of demonstrations over the decade, culminating with the student-led protests in Tiananmen Square in April and May of 1989. Faced with a rapidly deteriorating hold on power, and demands for democratization which threatened the survival of the regime, the party-state declared martial law, and brutally cleared the square on June 4, killing an untold number, and shattering illusions that Deng would one day embrace the Fifth Modernization of democracy (Meisner 1999, 483–514).

Following the violent suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests, the CCP began a rigorous study of regime collapse around the world in order to prevent future mobilization against the regime (Chen 2010; Teets 2014, 67–68, 94–95; Wilson 2009). The Tiananmen protests exposed the limitations of relying on growth as a strategy for legitimation. The de-politicization project of the Deng era rendered legitimation on the basis of economic

advancement alone ineffective for sustaining CCP control (Laliberté and Lanteigne 2008; Shambaugh 2008; Shue 2010). As the 2000s began, the Fourth Generation of leadership under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao began to pursue new strategies for state legitimation, ultimately advocating the party-state's role as guardian of China's revival as a nationalism legitimating frame (Gries 2004; Zhang 1998). The party's reliance on nationalism as a legitimating tactic to buttress popular support for CCP rule has since become a core strategy to ensure regime survival. The party-state's severe repression of challengers, and proactive inculcation of nationalist values eliminate any grounds for either territorial or ideological divisions within China, achieving successful monopolization over nationalism, and rendering nationalist politics utterly banal.

To emphasize the ties between the party-state and China's national resurgence, the CCP initiated a program of mandatory patriotic education in schools and propaganda touting the regime's accomplishments since the Chinese Communist Revolution. Shuisheng Zhao (1998) observes that the party-state undertook a new, revived patriotic education movement as a response to the "three belief crises"<sup>17</sup> that motivated the 1989 Tiananmen protests (289). As such, patriotic education aimed to guard against future anti-regime mobilization by teaching "correct" understandings of history and social attitudes (Wang 2008). Such lessons seek to sponsor a nationalism rooted in a love of the state (*aiguo*) that yields loyalty of citizens, and sparks a desire to sacrifice personal interest in service of the state (Zhao 1998). Through propaganda, the state continues to transmit the party-state's values and objectives, and communicates norms of appropriateness concerning social and political matters to China's mass public (Landsberger

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<sup>17</sup> These three crises are known as *sanxin weiji* (三信危机) and listed as: crisis of faith in socialism (*xinxin weiji*, 信心危机), crisis of belief in Marxism, (*xinyang weiji*, 信仰危机), and crisis of trust in the party (*xinren weiji*, 信任危机).

2001; Brady 2017). Chinese state media feeds the Chinese public a steady diet of nationalist sentiments as one of these positive messages (Guo, et al. 2007).

In the era of Xi Jinping, the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguo Meng*) campaign provides the most visible example of the party-state's monopolization of nationalist discourse. The Chinese Dream provides a universal framing device for political action, and the party-state employs it in rhetoric to delimit and draw boundaries around acceptable expression of nationalism. Xi announced the campaign shortly after his appointment as General Secretary of the CCP in 2012 declaring that, "to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of the Chinese people in modern times" (Xi 2012).<sup>18</sup> Though almost intentionally vague, William Callahan (2013) noted that the campaign was suffused with idealistic aspirations about a glorious future wherein a strong China could tell its own story, unencumbered by western notions of progress.

As such, in the years following its announcement the *Zhongguo Meng* provided the CCP with a broad header that could encompass a diffuse and ill-defined array of vaguely nationalist initiatives. Propaganda displays touting the so-called "Twelve Core Socialist Values"<sup>19</sup> adorned the front gates of neighborhoods and on the sides of buildings.<sup>20</sup> A poster at the entrance to a pedestrian overpass bridge in Xining presents an image of the Great Wall superimposed with bold red text that announces, "Realizing the Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation is to achieve a strong state, a revitalized nation, and a prosperous citizenry!"<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Here I follow David Kerr's English translation of the speech, See; (Kerr 2015, 2). A full transcript of the Chinese text can be found at the website of the China Media Law Database:

<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/11/29/speech-at-the-road-to-rejuvenation/>

<sup>19</sup> The Twelve Core Socialist Values are divided into 3 tiers: national values (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony), societal values (freedom, equality, justice, rule of law), and personal values (patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship).

<sup>20</sup> Field Observations, Beijing, September 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Field Observations, Xining, May 2016

Others make similar appeals to the public to build national solidarity. A poster on a public street in Linxia listed the content of campaign in detail, proclaiming, “The Chinese Dream: Share together the spirit of family. Build together the Chinese nation. Form together the ideological foundation of the community. Solidify the Chinese nation.”<sup>22</sup> Still another, plastered on a wall outside the campus of a university in central Beijing depicts white doves flying over the Gate of Heavenly Peace at Tiananmen Square with golden text that implores, “Raise the national spirit. Fulfill the Chinese Dream.”<sup>23</sup>

The non-specific content of the campaign results in a message that remains diffuse and inchoate, and allows for nearly limitless reproduction. Posters in stations the Beijing subway link the development of the subway system to the campaign, presenting the words “China Dream” and “Subway Dream” next to one another above an image of a speeding train.<sup>24</sup> In Jinan, signs at Baotouquan Springs Park beseech visitors to fish at the patriotically named “Diaoyu Island Fishing Area,” imploring, “Go fishing at Diaoyu Island, and fulfill your patriotic dream.”<sup>25</sup> Even some commercial enterprises manage to appropriate the language of the campaign. A pop-up fireworks stall in Yinchuan did so to great effect during the 2016 Lunar New Year, naming its largest—and most expensive—fireworks package “The Chinese Dream.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite spawning myriad interpretations, the Chinese Dream successfully established the party-state’s monopolization on nationalist discourse. Even though Chinese citizens developed individualized understandings of the campaign, and attached their own personal aspirations to the greater program of national revival, these understandings of how to participate in the nation

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<sup>22</sup> Field Observations, Linxia, June 2016

<sup>23</sup> Field Observations, Beijing, August 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Field Observations, Beijing, August 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Field Observations, Jinan, October 2015

<sup>26</sup> Field Observations, Yinchuan, February 2016

all find grounding in the terms set by the party-state. Rather than challenging the CCP's hegemony as guardian of the nation, these individual Chinese Dreams seek fulfillment through the agenda set by the party-state.

While the call to participate in the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" aligns with obviously national aspirations, the rhetoric of the campaign also resonates on a personal level (Kerr 2015, 2–3). Often, respondents echoed the official language of the campaign when describing its purpose. One respondent, an academic from Zhejiang in his late 20s, contended that, at least officially, the Chinese Dream was about "restoring China to the position of global superiority that it enjoyed during the Tang, Ming or even Qing dynasties." Another, a 24-year-old graduate student of psychology from Beijing directly reiterated Xi's statement that the Chinese Dream was about "achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." However, unlike other campaigns of the past, Xi's Chinese Dream stood out to her, a woman normally unconcerned with political events. She explained, "The Chinese Dream gives me a new kind of feeling. It's got a very human touch."

Some saw the Chinese Dream as a means for addressing and correcting societal ills. One, a professional secretary from Jinan in her early thirties, hoped that the Chinese Dream could serve as a remedy for what she saw as the inherent selfishness that had grown up in China during the era of Reform and Opening. She lamented, "(a lot of my Chinese compatriots) always strive for jobs where they can make a lot of money through cheating people." An 18-year-old high school graduate from Jinan expressed similar sentiments when asked about her assessment of the campaign. Voicing a degree of frustration with her generation, she hoped the Chinese Dream's aspirations might resonate with young people who, "only care about their own enrichment, spending money, buying luxury goods, and having fun."

In his (2017) assessment of the state of nationalism within China, Alastair Ian Johnston suggests that, contrary to narratives that loom large in the popular press, attitudes in China do not reflect a rising tide of extreme nationalism, but rather the percentage of the Chinese public holding extreme nationalist viewpoints is waning. However, Johnston's observations may also suggest another possibility: nationalism in China is merely becoming banal. With the party-state establishing a clear body of orthodox nationalist beliefs and practices, the angry and extreme nationalism written about in the international press may slowly be replaced with the mundane nationalist displays of rote memorization, internalization, and replication of the party-state's line.

*Taiwan: Failed monopolization, successful incentivization*

Taiwan presents a surprising case of successful incentivization rendering nationalism banal. Indeed, for several decades following the ruling Kuomintang (KMT), or Nationalist party's retreat from mainland China to Taiwan, the subject of national identity on the island was anything but banal. The KMT's arrival brought with them a wave of *waisheng ren* (Mainlanders), increasing after the fall of the party to the CCP on the Chinese mainland in 1949.<sup>27</sup> As the KMT, led by strongman Chiang Kaishek, attempted to reassert control over the island following 50 years of Japanese colonialism ending in 1945, the regime enacted a strict policy of Sinicization (Shu 1997; Dreyer 2003; Pate 2016; Hsiau 2018). As such, Taiwanese (*bensheng ren*) began to see the KMT as an occupying power representing Mainlander interests.

The KMT's push to restore a "Chinese" identity on Taiwan coincided with authoritarian

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<sup>27</sup> A word on demographics in Taiwan: ethnic Han Chinese, largely of Hoklo and Hakka heritage, whose ancestors arrived before 1895 are frequently referred to as Taiwanese (*bensheng ren*). Han Chinese who came after Japanese colonialism in 1945 are frequently referred to as Mainlanders (*waisheng ren*). The non-Han residents of Taiwan, who are largely speakers of Austronesian languages are often referred to as Taiwan Indigenous People, or Aboriginal Taiwanese (*yuanchu min*). For further discussion, see Wei-Der Shu (1997).

retrenchment in the form of the KMT's enactment of martial law on the island. Sinicization pushed mainland-standard Mandarin language education, print media, broadcasting, and cultural programming. As the KMT promoted 'being Chinese' as associated with patriotism and modernity, it simultaneously suppressed markers of local *bensheng* identity. *Bensheng* elites became targets for either cooptation or outright repression by the KMT (Lo 1994). Most notably, the "228 Incident" of 1947, in which the KMT forcefully put down local protestors through arrests and executions, began a period of martial law known colloquially as the "White Terror" (*baise kongbu*) (Fleischauer 2007; S. Phillips 1999, 292–97).

Under martial law, expressing facets of Taiwanese identity were treated by the KMT as 'unpatriotic' (Shu 1997; Hsiau 2018). Dreyer (2003) notes that during this period, "Students were required to learn Mandarin and speak it exclusively; those who disobeyed and spoke Taiwanese, Hakka, or aboriginal tongues could be fined, slapped, or subjected to other disciplinary actions." Such aggressive enforcement of Sinicization provoked strong resentment and resistance to the KMT. As Pate (2016) suggests, due to the suppression of political opposition and the severe program of cultural engineering, "the KMT, literally the 'party of China,' became associated with venality and cruelty in Taiwan."

As the KMT fled to Taiwan in defeat in 1949, Sinicization became necessary for maintaining claims to the mainland. Nationalization had begun under provincial governor Chen Yi as a deliberate strategy for reincorporation of the island into the Chinese fold after retrocession from Japan in 1945. Rigger explains that for the KMT's continued survival, "it was necessary to enforce political conformity, inculcate nationalist zeal, rebuild economic prosperity, and acquire military might" (Rigger 2014, 25–29, 35). Allen Chun (1996, 2000) contends that the KMT's adoption of Sinicization policies represent an endeavor on the part of the regime to



instantiate “traditional Chinese culture” on the island, and establish the regime as the guardian of “Chineseness” in opposition to the Chinese Communist Party on the mainland. These claims, Chun maintains, were necessary in order to “legitimize the existence of a Republic of China as (sic) ‘imagined community,’” and maintain territorial claims over a mainland administered by the CCP (Chun 2000).

Monopolization through Sinicization, however, proved unsuccessful. The forceful imposition of Mandarin language, and Mainland Chinese identity provoked resistance from many *bensheng* Taiwanese. A growing opposition (referred to as *dangwai*) considered the KMT an alien, occupying force. In response to the regime’s agenda of forced Chineseness, these *dangwai* activists began to assert a program built on democracy and Taiwaneseeness (Cabestan and Black 2005; Lo 1994). The movement promoted the idea that Taiwan was a separate entity from the Mainland, and therefore its citizens held the right to self-determination rather than be made subject to the rule of the *waisheng*-dominated KMT (Chu 2004). Thus, the core of this nascent opposition movement not only stood as anti-KMT, but also anti-Mainlander, advocating a principle of “Taiwan for the Taiwanese” (Shu 1997; Hsieh 2005; Pate 2016).

Lynch (2002) observes that many activists reached the conclusion that “the only way to achieve democratization would be to assert a distinctive Taiwanese national identity, rooted in the Taiwan people’s unique history.” As a result, Gold (2003) observes, “Taiwanese identity” and “Taiwanese national identity” became linked as the cause of democratization and promotion of a cultural identity intertwined. Despite the KMT’s attempts to reproduce a mainland-oriented Chinese nationalism on the island, the forceful program of Sinicization galvanized a democratic, Taiwan-oriented opposition. Questions surrounding nationalism remained blatant and contested.

By the mid-1980s diplomatic setbacks, including the loss of recognition by the United

Nations, and the loss of official relationships with many states, including the U.S., led the KMT to reassess its geopolitical position. Under the leadership of Chiang Chingkuo martial law ended in 1987. With the political system finally allowing legal opposition parties, major opposition to the KMT consolidated around the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which advocated for Taiwanese Independence (Shu 1997; Chun 2000; Cabestan and Black 2005; Rigger 2014). Discourse about the island's future became, for the first time, the subject of open contestation.

Recognizing the new political realities, and understanding that to win elections the KMT needed to expand beyond its dwindling base of urban *waisheng ren*, Chiang's successor, Lee Teng-Hui, threw his efforts behind "Taiwanization" of politics. Lee's tactics, like abolishing the office of Provincial Governor of Taiwan, and localizing representative districts in the Legislative Yuan by ending the indefinite tenure of mainland representatives elected in 1948, conceded that the Republic of China should be primarily interested in the governance of Taiwan rather than staking claims to the mainland. In advocating for local control of political institutions, Lee nicked one of the DPP's core issues, and shored up support among both *bensheng* and *waisheng* voters (Gold 2003).

Through Taiwanization, the subject of Taiwan's status vis-à-vis the mainland became a matter of domestic public debate, rather than potentially destabilizing challenge to the government's authority. The DPP's role as a formal opposition party meant that it possessed avenues for advocating for Taiwanese identity through participation within the system. The democratization of Taiwan's media also aided the mainstreaming of this debate. Formerly barred from criticism of the KMT, newspapers like *The Liberty Times*, *The Apple Daily*, and *The Taiwan News* were able to offer counter-discourse on the subject of national identity without fear of political reprisal (Hsu 2014).

The pinnacle of Lee's program of Taiwanization came with his 1998 appeal to Taiwan's citizens to abandon *bensheng/waisheng* divisions and instead embrace a more inclusive "New Taiwanese" (*Xin Taiwanren*) identity. Expounding on his vision for a Lee wrote, that "The 'new Taiwanese' who will create a new Taiwan include the aboriginal people, those whose ancestors came here four hundred years ago, and those who arrived only recently. Anyone who lives in and loves Taiwan is a 'new Taiwanese'"(Lee 1999). The term also gained broad acceptance among Taiwan's younger generations, many of whom had lived their entire lives on the island, regardless of where their parents' ancestral homes were. Pate remarks that today, "most young people seem less concerned about the distinction between *benshengren* and *waishengren*. To them, it doesn't matter when a person's ancestors came to the island. All are '*Taiwanren*.'"

Polling conducted in 2015 by the *Taipei Times* largely confirms these trends. Polls reported that 92.5% of respondents between the age of 20-29 chose Taiwanese identity over Chinese when given the choice. Respondents between age 30-39 did so at a rate of 89% (Loa 2015). In part, Pate (2016) contends, such reaction against Chinese identity on the part of young people occurs out of fears that arose after watching Hong Kong struggle to assert its autonomy after reunifying with the mainland. One respondent told him that he feared close ties with China might lead to Taiwan becoming a "second Hong Kong" (161).

Lee's presidency established Taiwanization as a part of the political mainstream. While dissatisfied conservative KMT members like James Soong resisted the changes—with some breaking from the party to form fringe conservative parties that clung to Chinese nationalism like the New Party— Lee's popularity bolstered support for the policy. Further, Chen Shuibian, the first elected president from the DPP, followed Lee, going beyond his claims about a New Taiwanese identity, advocating for a Taiwanese nation with a multicultural populace comprised

of Hoklo, Hakka, Han Chinese, and Austronesians (Rigger 2014). While Chen's policies hinted at independence and establishment of a distinctly Taiwanese sense of nationhood, these positions were not antithetical to or seeking the overturn of Taiwan's political system.

The salience of territorial and ideological divisions over nationalism decreased in the face of Taiwanization and democratization. While the question unification still looms over the island's politics, the localization of seats in the Legislative Yuan, and the recognition of Taiwan as a distinct entity and not merely a province of China, illustrates the KMT's acknowledgement that its future is on Taiwan rather than the mainland. As such, governance of the island has settled into a manageable status quo (Hsieh 2005).

Further, democratization lessened underlying ideological divisions concerning the expression of nationalist identities. Under martial law, the struggle for democracy and the cause of Taiwanese nationalism and independence became intertwined. In this context, ending the primarily mainland-oriented KMT's authoritarian control also required an assertion of a *bensheng*, Taiwanese identity. Now, with the DPP entrenched as a mainstream political party capable of winning legislative majorities and presidential elections, the necessity to enact regime change no longer exists. As Rigger (2003) argues "the absence of consensus on nationality does not spark a crisis, because there is a consensus about the process by which decisions should be made: democracy."

This overview of recent developments in Taiwanese politics suggests that the salience of ideological differences concerning national identification are attenuating if not becoming institutionalized. In other words, incentivization may be viewed as successful to the extent that neither of Taiwan's two major parties achieved monopolization. Further, both parties recognize that territorial change appears unlikely in the long term. As both major parties, and their

positions on unification, and national identity have become entrenched as fixtures of Taiwanese political life, the practice of nationalism has become increasingly banal. Rigger (2011) explains that a large percentage of Taiwan's so called "Strawberry Tribe" of young people feel apathy toward both major political parties, and approach the debate over nationality with ambivalence.

Though the 2014 Sunflower Protests were seen by some as a galvanizing moment for Taiwanese independence sentiment among young people, the electoral failures of the radically pro-independence political party it spawned—the New Power Party—suggest that nationalist politics appeal very little to most of Taiwan's voters. While a Sunflower activist that Rowen interviewed in the aftermath of the demonstrations remarked that the DPP "should prepare to be replaced" if its members attempted to halt independence moments, the splintering of the demonstrators in the aftermath suggest the waning power of the movement (Rowen 2015, 17–18).

In part, the issue of national identity fails to resonate as it once did because the issue pushes out deliberative space for more immediate social concerns. One of Rigger's interviewees lamented that the predominance of the nationalism issue derailed more important debates: "We just need to move beyond the independence and reunification issue and get down with reality, real life; truly focus on important bills, not just get everything tangled up with independence and unification" (Rigger 2011, 93). Ultimately, to Taiwan's youth, the struggles around issues of national identification fall along predictable lines that are both entrenched and enduring. While the rhetoric surrounding the national status of Taiwan may animate political debate, like many other hobby-horse political issues, it, too, has become predictable and banal.

*Comparative Implications: Banalization Strategies and Regime Legitimation*

From a comparative perspective, examining banalization as a regime process holds promise for (a) distinguishing among varieties of regime, as well as (b) accounting for changes in type of regime over time.

1. **Monopolization only “works” in autocratic regimes such as China and (to a lesser extent) Putin’s Russia, but its success is not guaranteed.** In hybrid and democratic regimes, monopolization is either unfeasible owing to the state’s lack of capacity to dominate (as in Yeltsin’s Russia and Kuchma’s Ukraine) or impracticable because it provokes open resistance that keeps banalizing practices blatant (as in Ukraine and Taiwan during the martial law period).
2. **Among hybrid and autocratic regimes, personalist forms of rule (Russia and Ukraine) appear less likely to succeed than other, institutionalized forms of autocracy (as in China).** Ansell and Fish (1999) suggest an explanation in their conceptualization of legitimation strategies as varying with the relative salience of territorial and ideological cleavages.<sup>28</sup> Where hybrid regimes are riven by ideological and territorial divisions, leaders must constantly manage tensions, neither alienating nor favoring any particular faction to an extent that it threatens intra-regime rupture. It is therefore crucial for leaders to appear to be non-charismatic and “above politics” to remain sufficiently flexible in managing internal divisions. Monopolization is simply not possible, and likely would provoke conflict within the regime. By contrast, the combination of territorial and ideological differences effectively creates a vast market for competing national identity projects. This market potentially makes incentivization

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<sup>28</sup> Though their article addresses personalist forms of legitimation among political parties, their typologies and reasoning may be extended to autocratic and hybrid regime politics.

strategies highly attractive, limited primarily by state capacity as well as coordination problems among elites and state actors within these highly fragmented regimes. Indeed, as in the case of the KMT in the 1980s, a regime may pursue incentivization strategies—the Chiang Chingkuo and Lee Teng-hui did through democratization and “Taiwanization”—as an attempt to forestall forceful overthrow, and prolong the regime’s grasp on power.

3. Patronal (or patronage-based) regimes emerge where territorial divisions are salient but ideological differences are not, as was the case in Ukraine and Russia in the early-2000s. As Hale (2014) points out, ideational factors generally proved to be less relevant for patronal regimes in Eurasia, where leaders rely on their control over crucial resources to organize and bargain with other regime actors. Rather, the overlay of clientelism with regime-supplied images figures mainly in competing for access to the regime rather than competing for power, with the result that the ideational basis of legitimacy may constantly change or adapt. **In patronal regimes, state actors and other elites have little interest in elaborating national identities and repertoires such that *both* incentivization and monopolization strategies are unlikely to succeed.**
4. This potentially changes if patronal regimes shift towards quasi-charismatic forms of legitimation, such that a leader’s status attaches to a distinctive ideological stance and the promotion of that stance throughout the regime (as evidenced in China’s authoritarian retrenchment under Xi, or in Putin’s Russia after 2004). Under such conditions, legitimating ideas are potentially the most binding on the regime as actors must work within an ideological consensus rather than defining the consensus for clients and climbers as in patronal regimes. For this reason, regime actors have a keen interest in

promoting national identities that affirm their right to rule and ensuring that opponents are denied access to those identities and repertoires as political resources (for instance, by protecting ideology from policy-making via credentialization processes). As a result, **quasi-charismatic regimes can least afford to be flexible or adaptable in the ideational bases of legitimacy and they will tend towards monopolization strategies.** Xi's promotion of the China Dream as an all-encompassing nationalist umbrella under which scattershot initiatives fall exemplifies how quasi-charismatic regimes attempt to filter all nationalist expression through the regime's ideological program. However, the persistence of *dangwai* activists promoting Taiwanese identity in the face of the KMT's promotion of Sinicization provides an example of how such attempts at monopolization can fail.

The examination of variation of regimes and banalization strategies within cases further suggests the following generalizations, which merit further investigation:

1. **Sequencing and path dependence matters:** a prior phase of incentivization without change of regime complicates a shift to monopolization (Russia, Ukraine). Similarly, a prior phase of monopolization makes a shift to incentivization risky for regime survival (China, Taiwan).
2. On a related note, **duration in power is no guarantee of successful banalization:** the implicit formula that tends to dominate understandings of banal nationalism is that nationalism combined with time produces banality. Yet the varied time frames among the cases suggest that duration is insufficient to account for banalization successes, especially in the cases of China and Taiwan. An empirical question deserving further investigation



is whether duration in power matters differently for monopolization and incentivization strategies.

3. **The nature of internal divisions contributes to banalization failures:** deep regional fragmentation is difficult to overcome without either opting for federalization/power-sharing/consociationalism or autocratic centralization. In Ukraine's case, the absence of either meant that language and identity politics remained a focus of national politics. In both Ukraine and Russia in the 1990s and early-2000s, the institutional weakness typical of hybrid regimes meant that sub-national regions exercised far greater autonomy on these kinds of issues and arrived at ways to accommodate local concerns even as they subverted the implementation of national policies.
4. **Contested sovereignty does not facilitate successful banalization:** where state sovereignty is contested, national identities are securitized and national loyalties remain a constant focus of politics. While it is tempting to point to evidence of unifying effects of war with Russia in Ukraine after 2014, Taiwan's experience provides a powerful example of the counter-effects of contested sovereignty.

### *Conclusion*

While research on “banal nationalism” has advanced significantly over the last two decades, the emergence of banality and its relationship to regime durability often are implicitly reduced to the sum of nationalizing policies and a regime's duration in power. In questioning *how* a regime achieves banality, this article presents a novel theoretical and empirical approach to understanding the relationship between banal nationalism and non-democracies. Rather than

accept that banal nationalism is an inevitable outcome, it may be treated as a goal that is pursued differently by democratizing and autocratizing regimes.

Differences in the modes of banalization correspond to varieties of political regime. Relatively open, democratizing regimes tend towards the incentivization of national expression, either owing to state weakness or the inability of ruling elites to dominate. As a range of actors in economic and civil society innovate upon a regime's initial supply of national imagery, the nation becomes a common focus of market and political competition and circulates in daily life such that citizens come to routinely care about it. By contrast, autocratizing regimes tend towards the monopolization of national expression, delimiting the boundaries of national expression and ensuring its reproduction through state institutions and patronage networks. As a banal reality, citizens come to understand and accept the expectation of caring about the nation in relation to the state's routines.

A brief comparison of banalization strategies in Russia and Ukraine further suggests that the mode of banalization influences regime trajectories. In both countries, phases of personalist rule marked failed attempts at incentivizing the nation, particularly given the weakness of central states and lack of coordination among elite actors at all levels in elaborating and promoting repertoires of national expression. As politicized national identities fell by the wayside in state policy, patronal regimes emerged in both countries until either major national protests shook the regime to its core (Russia) or forced it from power (Ukraine). Most recently, both countries moved increasingly towards monopolizing forms of national expression, facilitated by the sharpening of ideological differences and the diminished salience of territorial divisions that followed the multiple crises of 2014 and the ongoing state of war between them. The failure of Poroshenko's efforts at monopolization were vividly on display in the April 2019 presidential

election when he was defeated more soundly than any presidential candidate since 1991, by a challenger who pointedly backed away from his cultural policies.

Finally, a regime's mode of banalization bears implications for understanding the scope of citizens' agency in autocracies. While the activation of national sentiment in the course of contention and mobilization are associated with perceptions of 'thickened' time (Sewell Jr. 1996; Beissinger 2002), banalization entails a 'thinning' of time with a related lengthening of time horizons for citizens and elites such that autocracy or democracy comes to be viewed as fixed or inevitable. To the extent that incentivization involves a variety of social and economic sectors in the innovation and elaboration of national identities, citizens have numerous opportunities to engage in discursive and mobilizational action in the name of the nation without the state's explicit approval. Where it proves successful, national identity becomes a source of legitimate authority that is autonomous of the state and accessible by a wide range of social actors. Importantly, this suggests that prior successes in incentivization may be the best constraint against future autocratization, especially where autocratizing regimes attempt to put the genie back in the bottle by monopolizing national images and practices.

By contrast, monopolization excludes participation in discursive and mobilizational activity except where explicitly sanctioned or credentialed by the state. The unintended consequence is the potential politicization of citizens' everyday practices that subvert the state's monopolization of national imagery. In this fashion, both incentivization and monopolization as regime practices put the spotlight on citizens' everyday practices as not just constitutive of national identities, but also as constitutive of institutions and regimes. Focusing on everyday practices in relation to banalization may thus prove a helpful corrective to approaches examining

authoritarianism and nationalism in terms of structures, institutions, or discourses, by restoring the agency of ordinary citizens in the analysis of authoritarian dynamics.

**TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF CASES BY REGIME AND MODE OF BANALIZATION**

	Democratic	Hybrid	Authoritarian
Incentivization	Taiwan (1985-present)	Russia (1991-2004) Ukraine (1994-2014)	
Monopolization			Russia (2004-present) China (1978-1989, 1989-present) Taiwan (1947-1985)

**TABLE 2: REGIME TYPES AND BANALIZATION OUTCOMES**

CASE	REGIME TYPE	MODE OF BANALIZATION	OUTCOME	REGIME CHANGE?
Russia (1991-2004)	Hybrid	Incentivization	Fail	No
Russia (2004-present)	Authoritarian	Monopolization	Mixed	No
Ukraine (1994-2004)	Hybrid	Incentivization	Fail	Yes
Ukraine (2005-2014)	Hybrid	Incentivization	Fail	Yes
China (1978-1989)	Authoritarian	Monopolization	Fail	No
China (1990-present)	Authoritarian	Monopolization	Success	No
Taiwan (1947-1985)	Authoritarian	Monopolization	Fail	Yes
Taiwan (1985-present)	Democratic	Incentivization	Success	No

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