

Eryk PIESZAK

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

ORCID: 0000-0002-8086-3935

## Russian Conservatism as a Right to Justify War from the Perspective of Moral Foundations by J. Haidt and Groupthink Syndrome by I. L. Janis

**Abstract:** In this article, the author attempts to describe something called Russian conservatism. He then considers why Russian society may succumb to such ideas, what belief in Kremlin propaganda may lead to, and whether there are grounds to believe that we already have evidence that Russian society is heading in a specific direction. The author refers here to two researchers and their understanding of group processes. The first is Jonathan Haidt, and the second is Irving L. Janis. I refer to J. Haidt because of his research on moral behavior. In his 2012 book (Haidt, 2014) – *The Righteous Mind* – he asks in the subtitle: Why are good people divided by religion and politics? It can be paraphrased: why are good people able to murder other good people because of religion and politics? Here, we will refer to the Kremlin's ideology, which is conservatism in Russia, and ask ourselves: is there any counterweight to it? Then we will consider whether Russian society has really become so polarized that there is no balance between people with a conservative and, for example, liberal approach, in order to refer to I. L. Janis's research (Janis, 1982) on group behavior, including extensive research devoted to the groupthink syndrome, to explore whether it can be assumed that this type of thinking has already occurred in Russia.

**Key words:** Russian conservatism, moral foundations, groupthink syndrome

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When on February 24, 2022, Russian troops launched their criminal invasion, extending the military operations conducted in Ukraine since 2014, the time of disbelief began that it was possible at all. How did it happen? How could the Russians do this? Why does Russian society support Putin and the Kremlin's propaganda? The questions asked were accompanied by the conviction that just as it should not happen, it should not or cannot last long.

Constant presumptions about Putin's illness, a change in public opinion in Russia, an attack on the Kremlin's authorities appeared one after another in the media like wishful thinking, conjuring reality.

A year after these events, more and more often we ask ourselves not when this war will end, but whether any end is possible. And if so, what will happen after it, at what point in history will the world find itself.

Assuming that Russian society is different (see Horbowski, 2012), just like its history, it is difficult to answer such a question.

However, despite different cultural conditions, Russians, similar to other societies, must be subject to certain rules. Obviously, experiences, culture and history affect the specificity of different regions of the world and this cannot be forgotten. Nevertheless, something must motivate a person to act. Even if an action is irrational, it must have a cause.

In order to answer the question of how long this war will last and what will happen after it (certainly, apart from the need to rebuild the economic infrastructure as this will be necessary regardless of how the war ends), it is essential to determine what Russian society can believe in, what conditions it can be guided by and what they can lead to.

Thus, I will try to briefly reconstruct what is called Russian conservatism. Next, I will check why Russian society can succumb to such ideas, what faith in the Kremlin's propaganda can lead to, and whether there are grounds to believe that we have already had evidence Russian society is moving in a particular direction.

I would like to refer to two researchers and their understanding of group processes. The first will be Jonathan Haidt, and the second – Irving L. Janis.

I allude to J. Haidt due to his research on moral behavior. In his 2012 book, *The Righteous Mind*, in the subtitle he asks the question: *Why are good people divided by religion and politics?* (Haidt, 2014). This question can be paraphrased: why are good people able to murder other good people because of religion and politics? I will refer to the ideology of the Kremlin, which is conservatism in Russia, and ask myself: is there any counterbalance to it?

Next, I will ponder whether Russian society has become so polarized that there is no balance between people with a conservative and, for example, liberal approach. Then it will be possible to explore if, referring to the research of I. L. Janis (Janis, 1982) on group behavior, including an extensive study on groupthink, this type of thinking is already dominant in Russia.

Both of these concepts can certainly be criticized. But I do not want to dwell on that. Instead, I would like to consider their usefulness for the analysis of real social processes.

Thus, the studies of the two researchers mentioned above will be used to analyze Russian conservatism and its consequences.

J. Haidt (Haidt, 2014) points to individual differences in the tendency to interpret information in moral categories as the reason for adopting liberal or conservative ideologies (Graham, Haidt, Nosek, 2009, pp. 1029–1046). Haidt puts his theory of morality in opposition to the classical Piaget-Kohlberg theories of morality, arguing that “our moral judgments are based not on rational reasoning, but on moral intuitions resulting from the emotional evaluation of certain social stimuli. According to him, the source of conservatism is a biologically conditioned readiness to interpret as immoral situations related to defying authority, breaking social norms and opposing group hierarchy” (Haidt, 2014, p. 228). Haidt justifies this by, among other things, indicating that people are able to make moral judgments in an automatic and immediate manner, as opposed to creating justifications for these judgments, which require conscious and cognitively expensive reasoning. He also states that people stick to their judgments in the vast majority of moral cases, even in situations where they do not find any logical justification (Piątkowski, 2018, p. 103) for the violation of taboos in the domain of purity and sexuality. As in theories relating to the behavioral immune system, J. Haidt states that moral feelings are warning signals of a threat. He points out that these are defense mechanisms of two types. “First of all, he interprets negative emotional reactions to violations of cleanliness standards, in accordance with the concept of propensity to disgust, as forms of individual defense against potential infections. Secondly, referring to the evolutionary theory of group selection, it indicates that moral emotions related to situations of disrespect

for authority and social norms can be treated as mechanisms to protect the group from violating its cohesion” (Piątkowski, 2018, p. 103).

I would like to clarify some issues that definitely make it difficult to read human behavior. When we look at our own behaviors, and even more so at others, we think they are rational, while many studies say that they are not. Social psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman, who in 2002 received the Nobel Prize of the Bank of Sweden in the field of economics, in his research repeatedly shows that man does not act rationally, which often causes both mistakes and quick correct decisions (Kahneman, 2022). Similarly, J. Haidt demonstrates that not entirely rational behavior of people, e.g. with conservative views, can inhibit progress that is consistent with rational thinking, which ultimately leads to development, but without unnecessary anarchy (Haidt, 2014).<sup>1</sup> I am not saying that I am praising non-logical behavior, but accepting that sometimes people do not follow logic, and that can have both positive and negative effects.

Moreover, when we analyze with some sensitivity why the societies of Islamic states or Russian society behave in the way they do, we run the risk of accusation of being too empathetic simply because we attempt to understand social action. Thus, when I try to show that the behavior of the Russians is justified (often unacceptable for us), I do not intend to justify or whitewash them, but to understand the situation with the intention of being able to find a way of dealing with Russia, and even more so with the Russians. The war in Ukraine will not end by eliminating the Russians – this is probably understandable for everyone.

The fact that the Kremlin’s authorities create public moods by means of propaganda and use them is obvious. What is important, however, is whether this way a force is arisen whose views coincide with what Putin wants, or whether we are coping with some kind of counterbalance that may become a source of resistance and even rebellion.

It is also obvious that terrorism, whether Islamic or Russian, is a crime. However, it is worth considering why propaganda works and falls on fertile ground, what elements of social mood it builds or how it creates social approval or even satisfaction with the actions. It is hard to believe in just intimidation.

Doctrine is important here, but it always exploits the public mood, explaining (often lying) the processes taking place. Propaganda lies, but social processes are real. The social processes we are talking about are: economic transformations, the departure from a planned economy towards a free market, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the departure from the model of power and the transition towards a specific Russian democratization. All this must have undermined the sense of stability in Russia.

Important issues of life, which Russians do not have to associate only positively, are democracy and prosperity. In propaganda, they are a vague promise to be fulfilled in the future, it is not entirely clear in what form.

The error of thinking in the world of the free market economy consists in recognizing that man is primarily interested in material well-being, which leads to rational (Kahneman, 2022) actions aimed at achieving this goal, and that no ideas attract people more than wealth. The error of democracy may, however, consist in one case in the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting here that the fascist apparatus with its leader A. Hitler during the Second World War had many rational ideas on how to reduce the cost of killing a person – by introducing the invention of the production line in extermination camps (Bauman, 2012).

voters can be 'bought' (see Klepka, 2012/13, pp. 43–52; Churska, 2007) (literally or through marketing activities) (Haidt, 2014), and in the other in forcing "belief in proper order." An example of the second possibility can be both the Islamic State and Russia.

Communities can also meet their higher needs in other ways than through the use of material goods. This causes leaders such as Putin to implement their criminal ideas with public support, referring to values that take the form of conservatism, instilled by tradition in subsequent generations.

Let us try to observe what elements of conservatism Russian propaganda uses. Is it conservatism and how is it different from party conservatism in democratic countries? I will refer to the idea of the history of conservatism, but also to J. Haidt's vision of political dichotomy. He observes a natural division in democratic societies into liberal and left-wing parties<sup>2</sup> (to some extent anarchist), striving for social change and progress, and conservative parties. To conclude the thought of the author of the *Righteous Mind* in the simplest way it can be inferred that both parts of society are necessary for development. On the one hand, development is the work of a part of society with a liberal-leftist attitude, on the other hand, thanks to the conservative part of society, it is orderly and conscious. J. Haidt notes that these groups of voters, who are necessary for the social good, unfortunately, due to the marketing nature of the elections, are at odds with each other (as it is easier to send messages to the bickering and radicalizing voters). Meanwhile, social changes, if they are to lead to social development and not civil war, require the cooperation of the aforementioned groups.

Is Russia conservative? Haidt's essay shows that in societies we inherently have both a 'progressive'<sup>3</sup> and a conservative part. Therefore, important questions relating to Russian conservatism concern the possibility of creating a state based on the principle of conservatism, as well as on the type of conservatism.

After the turn towards a free market economy and the principles of democracy during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, which was not clearly perceived by the public (although Yeltsin fought against NATO enlargement, he left behind social dissatisfaction not only resulting from the decline in the wealth of society, but also from the declining importance of Russia in the world) (Danilewski, 1991, p. 179), clear symptoms of a departure from this direction in the rise of Vladimir V. Putin to power can be observed. In Russia, there is a return to the traditions of the USSR, although in a completely different way, more like a return to the tradition of tsarist power with the restoration of Christian values in the form of authority subordinated to the Orthodox Church.

After Putin came to power, real steps were taken to return to the tradition associated with the achievements of the USSR. One of the symptoms of a course change is the change of the anthem's melody to that of the Soviet Union and the extraordinarily grand celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 2005.

We are not discussing conservatism here yet, but returning to a certain tradition. This more noticeable shift towards rhetoric is related to the conservatism of 2012 (Doro-

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<sup>2</sup> It should be strongly emphasized that the left-wing and liberal parties are similar in the desire to change the world, but what they strive for is definitely different. And just because of that, J. D. Haidt treats them as similar (Haidt, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> This is how we call this part of society that is heading towards liberalism, the left and state institutions striving to change. The quotation marks here mean that it is not progress only in a positive sense.

szczuk, 2018, pp. 295–313). The Kremlin-linked elites are beginning to rebuild and consolidate Russian society around Russian values such as Orthodoxy, family, a strong state with strong leadership, and protection from external threats such as sexual promiscuity.

An important element of this ideology was to emphasize the cultural heritage of Russia, its history and identity. On the one hand, we have a return to positive thinking about the achievements of Soviet Russia, on the other hand, Orthodoxy becomes synonymous with Russianness (Lazari, 1995, p. 58).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept of 'Ruskij mir' (Russian world) and opposition to the West became a response to the failures of the presidency of B. Yeltsin (Wierzbicki, 2011, p. 116). The idea of Russia as an empire of tradition comes to the fore, referring to the religious tradition of the Orthodox Church, respecting the self-determination of multi-ethnic nations. These ideas are in line with Putin's anti-Western rhetoric, which aims to rebuild the Russian empire.

At this point, I will try to outline the conservatism in the context of which I want to consider the views of the ideology of rebuilding the Russian empire. In this case, the Russian tradition clearly plays a significant role, not always coherent and logical in various contexts, but strongly influencing Russian society.

Thus, it may concern traditionalist conservatism, obviously specifically modified by Kremlin ideologues.

Joseph de Maistre, considered the creator of the concept of conservatism in the traditionalist version, calls for the reconstruction of the old political order, which was destroyed in 1789 by the French Revolution (Trybusiewicz, 1968). Certainly, in modern Russia, the tradition to which one can refer is not only the pre-revolutionary order, although in the style of the presidency of V. V. Putin, we can observe a strong power modeled on the tsar. His guarantor is the religious order supported by the authority of the Orthodox Church. However, strong Russia is both tsarist Russia and Russia winning the Second World War. This is Russia before the changes initiated by Gorbachev and introduced by Yeltsin; strong, independent Russia, where the Russians decide on the fate of the Russians. The crisis that befell the Russians during the transformation could be identified with the entry of Western capital into Russia. This could give the impression that the transformations, which are profitable for only a few, are beneficial for international corporations or external investors who earned a great deal of money on investments in Russia (Toczek, 1992).

Overthrowing the revolution in the sense of traditionalist conservatism means in Russia the overthrow of the free-market and democratic transformations (obviously, to a certain extent), a return to strong Russia, whose territory will include the territories of the countries created after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

If it is impossible to return to the state from before, you should at least try to save what you can from the period of the previous era. It can be added that for Russian traditionalism it is important – as in evolutionary conservatism – to preserve society and tradition, and not only to destroy new ideas.

Conversely, when we talk about conservatism in the nationalist version, Joachim Diec (Diec, 2013, p. 314) reminds us, Jarosław Bratkiewicz rightly divides the Russian nationalism of the 1990s into 'all-Russian' (represented, among others, by Eurasianists or Yuri Boroday) and 'Great Russian' (which he attributed to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy,

among others). While the representatives of the first option are characterized by a desire to unite various ethnicities in a great empire, welded by a common political and cultural goal, the supporters of the ethnic option emphasize the need for a 'Russian revival'. It is to increase the power of the state without losses on the side of the dominant ethnicity and switch to a historical and territorial division of the state combined with Russification. This kind of thought inspired many Russian nationalists of the post-communist period. It applies to the greatest extent to the moderate 'Greater Russian' milieu, part of which at the end of the first decade of the third millennium was concentrated around the 'Wo-prosy' magazine.

This assessment appeared to be valid even in the nationalist environment referring to scientific research assumptions, far from aggressive unambiguity. In 2009, Sergei Balandin emphasized that the fundamental difference between the Christian and Jewish ethical quantification is that while the former extends a categorical imperative to the whole of humanity, the Talmudic tradition in choosing Judaism restricts its principles to the world of Judaists themselves (Баландин, 2009, p. 226).

However, it is difficult to assume that the concept of nationalism referring to Christianity in the form of Putin's idea of a nation of state Russians (россияне) is realistic. It is rather a fantastic concept as it is hard to imagine that the dominant ethnic self-identification would disappear (Diec, 2013, pp. 315–316).

In addition to traditionalist and nationalist conservatism, we can also talk about evolutionary one. "Conservatives-evolutionists were not content with preserving society and tradition. Some conservative thinkers considered and consider only traditionalism to be proper conservatism, and for them evolutionary conservatism is the incarnation of liberalism" (Wielomski, 2007).

Traditionalists respected and respect institutions such as hereditary monarchy and aristocracy. Evolutionists 'preserve' old values even in conditions of democracy unacceptable to traditionalists. Thus, if we look at the changes in the behavior of some politicians, we will understand why people belonging to conservative parties sympathize to some extent with liberal ideas.

Let us now take a closer look at the conservatism promoted by Kremlin propaganda. First of all, Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin are defenders of classical conservative values on an international scale, such as religiously based morality, national tradition, family, differentiation between good and evil, well-established morality and unambiguous cultural identity (Walicki, 2015, p. 46). The very concept of the 'Russian world' means Putin's turn towards 'nativeness', towards what is Russian in the broad sense of the word.

A return to Russian 'nativeness' may become a neo-conservative response to dynamic globalization processes, an alternative to Western solutions. The idea that justifies this approach is the idea of a 'Russian world', as well as integrative Eurasianism. Due to its spiritual traditions, historical experience, and geopolitical importance (Averjanov et al., 2014, p. 134), Russia is the obvious center and dominant entity in such integration, both from the point of view of propaganda and playing this role in the times of the USSR.

According to Putin's words from a speech in 2014, everyone who loves Russia wants freedom for Russia, freedom for Russia itself, its international independence, freedom for Russia as a unity of Russian culture and other national cultures, and freedom for the

Russian people, and above all, freedom of faith, the search for truth, creativity, work and property' (Putin, 2014). These words are intended to show the role of Russia itself in the renewal process, which stands in opposition to Western countries.

In the light of conservatism, the West is synonymous with decline, degeneration of universal human values and a juggernaut of individualism lacking lasting social ties. As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century conservative thought, the West is now classified as an enemy of traditional values, patriotism. In Putin's rhetoric after 2012, the West is presented as a synonym for decadence and a threat to 'holy' Russia (Doroszczuk, 2018, p. 300).

From the Western perspective, we have a lot of reserve for the role of Russia and its influence on the world. However, while Russia cannot be at the forefront of global conservatism, it can actively influence the public opinion of Western countries whose societies are experiencing an identity and social crisis (Rudnicki, 2016, p. 110). Thus, one can understand not only the Russian message, but also why Russians believe in it.

Obviously – as Andrzej Walicki emphasizes (Walicki, 2015, pp. 37–49) – Russian conservatism is particular, conditioned by typically Russian problems. As such, it cannot aspire to be a real alternative to the rest of the world. There is no doubt that Russia under Vladimir Putin's presidency is experiencing a revival of conservatism and traditional values, patriotism, with the state authorities actively supporting the heritage of Russian conservative thought. In Vladimir Putin's speeches, which present a program of action, patriotism and the unification of citizens around national values and goals are emphasized.

In his speeches, Putin returns to the concept of the 'Russkiy mir'. Russkiy mir means "a human community of Orthodox Christians living in the unity of faith, rituals and customs" (Szalimowa, 2000, p. 16). For Russians, Russia is not just a territorial state, but a separate world with its own culture that goes beyond Russian territory.

In order to implement its strategies, including the spread of ideas, the Kremlin has developed a system of proxy groups that support the implementation of Russian political goals. Their common goal is to promote the concept of the 'Russian world' (Lucewicz, 2016, p. 2).

In this way, Putin, together with the other Kremlin authorities, expresses and promotes the conviction that there are more and more circles in the world advocating the restoration of traditional values which have been the moral and spiritual foundation of civilization for centuries. Putin included a traditional family, spiritual and humanistic values, and the diversity of the world among them (Putin, 2013). It is easy to see that the vision presented here is not only attractive, but can be perceived as very positive.

From the perspective of Poland, a former member of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact, it is difficult not to get the impression that these values were not important to Russia in the times of the USSR. It was more like a longing for them. However, the ideas themselves are consistent with what conservatism preaches around the world and what is important to conservatives.

In Russia, already in 1991, we can notice strong anti-Western sentiments associated with the weakening of the influence of the USSR, and then deepening after the collapse of that year (Danilewski, 1991, p. 179). For example, in the concept of Mikołaj Danilewski, the West is perceived as striving to marginalize the importance of Russia. To prevent this, Russia should create an alliance of Slavic states and ensure the stable devel-

opment of Slavic history and culture. Although many elements here suggest the concept of the 'Russian world', Danilewski did not use this term (Doroszczuk, 2018, p. 304).

The image of Russia as the guardian of tradition and conservatism is suggestive to the Western public opinion, but it is also attractive to the opinion of Russians, for whom Russia as such has always been of value.

It should be noted that this vision of Russia is of great importance to Russia itself. It influences Russia's decisive policy, which uses Russian conservatism as an ideological justification for the policy of securing Russian national interests in the post-Soviet sphere (Doroszczuk, 2018, p. 303).

It is worth noting, apart from Putin's clearly conservative statements, a certain inclination towards the idea of progress. The development of Russia is to counterbalance conservatism. *Russkiy mir* is not so much stopping in one place as striving for change while maintaining a certain order. Putin has described himself as a pragmatist with a conservative mindset. According to the Russian president, conservatism is "based on traditional values, but also an indispensable element of development" (Putin, 2013). Hence, it does not concern stagnation or recovery, but the way to the set goals, maybe some kind of taking advantage of the opportunities offered by free trade, the flow of people and technology. Development seems essential here.

One can also add, following the head of the Russian state, that "The meaning of conservatism is not that it prevents the forward and upward movement, but that it prevents the downward movement into chaotic darkness, prevents it from returning to its original state" (Putin, 2013). As this quote may imply, Russian conservatism opposes a complete return, return to some primordial state of chaos.

Conservatism does not mean going backwards, it just means no mindless forward momentum.

Such flashes in statements clearly indicate Putin's awareness of public sentiments that do not want a complete return to the past, just as they do not want mindless progress.

Thus, if we look at the vision of conservatism that has been maturing in Russia since the 1990s, and has been detailed and propagated by the Kremlin's propaganda in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, on the one hand, we consider conservatism that defends tradition (quite selectively and often with a lot of contradictions), on the other hand, this conservatism has a certain evolutionary character – it is not progress yet, but a harbinger of a safe change.

It is worth adding that Russia's actions in Ukraine from 2012 to 2022 and its involvement in the Syrian conflict aroused interest, but also fears about Moscow's ability to manipulate information and the content of political discourse, which is addressed not only to Russians, but also to a foreign audience. After the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, support for Putin in Russian society reached 85% (Lewinson, 2015). The high public support translates into approval of the conservative program content of documents and speeches, accompanied by imperial nostalgia and an attempt to recreate Russia's status.

Since the beginning of his third presidential term, Vladimir Putin has consistently referred to conservative ideology. In this way, he legitimizes the Kremlin's new political strategy, which aims to stabilize the regime and block the political mobilization of society around liberal slogans. This strategy is also intended to strengthen the legitimacy

of the existing model of power, describing it as 'traditional' for Russia, and to justify the government's repressive and anti-Western policy. Moreover, it includes the policy of reintegration of the post-Soviet space under the aegis of Moscow, in particular the annexation of Crimea and the Novorossiia project. The strategy was formulated as a response to the activation of supporters of liberalization in Russia – the new middle class and part of the administrative and business elites, which at the turn of 2011/2012 openly manifested their disappointment with the regime. However, the discrepancy between the Kremlin's conservative phraseology and the actual behavior of the ruling elite proves that the Kremlin's 'conservative project' is purely instrumental, which in the long run undermines its credibility in the eyes of Russian society and calls into question its effectiveness.

Therefore, it is difficult to answer what conservatism is as it contains elements of traditionalism, nationalism and evolutionism. This is a kind of conservative eclecticism, which is not so much a coherent idea as simply an ideology promoted by the Kremlin.

Let us now try to relate the visions of Russian propaganda to the side of moral theory. According to Haidt (Haidt, 2014, p. 215), one can often get the impression that in psychological research conservatism is treated as a form of mental handicap. It is worth noting that classically in psychology, conservative views are described as the result of a strict upbringing and other negative childhood experiences, leading to various developmental dysfunctions, e.g. hostility towards people or excessive fearfulness. Psychologists often associate conservatism with such negative phenomena. Overall, it gives the impression that conservatives are treated as people who have been denied the opportunity to become liberals. "Traditionally, the sources of conservative beliefs are seen in many pathologies of mental and social functioning, which may lead to the conclusion that properly functioning individuals should adopt liberal beliefs" (Piątkowski, 2018, p. 89).

In 2004, Haidt began to extend the model of social intuitionism. This resulted in the theory of moral attitudes, which was developed jointly with Joseph Craig and Jesse Graham (Haidt, 2014, p. 15–16) and aimed to explain cross-cultural differences in morality. The theory assumed that there are at least five innate moral attitudes upon which cultures develop their different moralities (Haidt, 2014, pp. 180–205). Haidt tries to present the division in society into conservatives and forces here called progressive. He points to five moral foundations that are important for moral and political attitudes (Haidt, 2014, pp. 177–205).

These five foundations can be contrasted with their countervalue: care/injury, honesty/deception, loyalty (towards group)/betrayal, power (authority)/subversion, sanctity (purity)/degradation.

According to Haidt, referring to the MFQ, in which 132,000 people were surveyed until 2011 (after: Haidt, 2014, p. 217), liberals (or more broadly, all groups focusing on progress) primarily support the foundation of care and justice, while conservatives almost equally support all foundations, and most of all authority, virtue and loyalty to the group.

Thus, if we look at the analysis of Russian conservatism, it highlights the value of a leader, the sanctity of Russia believing in Orthodox principles and loyalty to the group. Moreover, we can notice that care and justice are also important here, but definitely less so – to the extent that in propaganda they appear as a promise or fight for

justice with the West, which is a certain way of caring for the nation and the Russkiy mir in general.

As it can be observed, a counterbalance to conservative thought is practically impossible in Russia as the latter is supported by the law, censorship and propaganda. Admittedly, in Putin's speeches we have some traces of more liberal thought, or at least striving for some form of progress, but this is not a counterbalance to conservatism. Rather, we can speak of some traces of a counterbalance incorporated into the idea of conservatism.

There is also no possibility of turning back from such important ideas as the authority of a particularly strong leader, or belonging to the Russkiy mir, to a group of broadly understood Russians. It is only possible to depart from virtue in the form of submission to Orthodoxy towards the more general idea of the Russkiy mir – an idea within which the Orthodox faith is contained, but 'holiness' consists in faith in Russia. A virtue is rather a defense, a crusade in the name of the Russkiy mir.

It is worth noting that when analyzing the Russian thought contained in propaganda messages, we strongly turn to the group model, which is the solution to most problems. Russia, Russkiy mir is the answer to most of the problems not only of Russians, but also of the world. Therefore, we will consider the issue of problems with group polarization and the transition to functioning in a group that adopts homogeneous views. It concerns support for Putin and the ideology he creates. Here we will look at Russia from the perspective of the groupthink syndrome. I. L. Janis points to "mental deterioration, reality testing and moral judgment that result from intra-group pressures" (Janis, 1972, p. 9), which may explain the unreflective support for Russian propaganda.

When groupthink discoveries are considered, various military actions involving irrational actions are cited as a case study (Aronson et al., 1997, pp. 380–381). The groupthink syndrome is usually taken into account when interpreting the behavior of groups that make mistakes in taking decisions, for example, groups of military leaders, groups working on something. However, it is worth considering whether this does not apply to large social groups. While in the first case there can be doubts as to the correctness of this theory, in the case of large social movements, involving the entire social class or nation, this theory sounds quite promising as a way of diagnosing.

It is worth recalling the phenomenon precisely because groupthink can occur in times of aggression, especially when supported by propaganda. In addition, the above analyzes showed that in Russia authority and group are an extremely important element of propaganda. Let us therefore try to consider whether in Russia we can observe groupthink, in which striving to maintain group cohesion and solidarity is more important than realistic reckoning with facts (Janis, 1982).

Groupthink occurs when a group (smaller or larger) is compact, cohesive, provides prestige, is isolated and protected from alternative views, when it is led by one dominant, authoritarian leader, strongly pushing his/her own views, when the group feels stress caused by a threat to it and we can notice poorly developed ways of making decisions (Janis, 1982; Aronson et al., 1997, pp. 380–381).

Today in Russia, thanks to the Kremlin's propaganda and activities related to censorship and the supervision of unanimity by the state apparatus, all of these factors are present. We can observe an absolutely authoritarian leader who makes decisions without explicit procedures. It is difficult to say what data it is based on and what the

procedure for verifying the correctness of the decisions taken looks like. In addition, the state ensures that the facts are properly presented in the media, and people who do not cooperate with the state apparatus or even call an attack on the territory of Ukraine a war are punishable by imprisonment. In addition, access to the Internet has been restricted in Russia, and Russian youtubers are called agents of the West, as evidenced by the supposedly received payouts from Youtube. For the Kremlin, this is open cooperation with the West.

Additionally, Russia is presented in propaganda as threatened by the West, which wants to limit it and deprive it of its eternal role in the region, and even more so in the world. Russia is also threatened from the inside by the Ukrainians. In propaganda, a Ukrainian is presented as a Russian, just like everyone else. There are those citizens of Ukraine who want Ukraine to join Russia, who feel Russian, speak Russian and recognize Kievan Rus as the beginning of the Russian state. However, in the Russian propaganda there is also a Ukrainian cooperating with Western countries, considered a fascist, who wants to weaken Russia by joining Ukraine to NATO and the European Union. Ukrainians from the latter group are considered a threat with which propaganda scares Russian society.

It should also be emphasized that belonging to the *Russkiy mir*, to the world of these values, is, according to this propaganda, extremely ennobling. Not only is it morally desirable, but it is also a path to prosperity, independent of the West and not marked by a departure from one's identity.

According to Janis (Janis 1982), once groupthink occurs, we as a community, a group, begin to feel the illusion of resistance to attack. The group begins to follow what its leader, perceived as its voice, commands, and sees no threat of failure. Everything the group does must succeed. This element of groupthink symptoms could be seen at the beginning of the aggression, when Russian troops were supposed to conquer Ukraine in a few days. Unable to do so, they plodded on, not considering what this war was going to be like. The command of the Russian army did not comply with the requirements of conventional warfare (Roman, 2017). These actions were somehow based on the belief that the whole action would end with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, when Russian troops did not encounter any resistance.

In addition, one of the symptoms of groupthink is a belief in moral conduct. The Russians seem to believe that the attack is not a conquest but a protection against an outside invasion, which would surely have happened had it not been for the 'preventive action'. In addition, since the 1990s, the West wanted to take advantage of Russia and transform it into a state of no strategic importance in terms of power. In turn, its economy was to be subordinated to international corporations.

Russians also stereotype their opponents, which is another symptom of groupthink. A Western fascist, be it a Ukrainian, a citizen of the European Union, the United States or a citizen of a NATO member state, is a morally corrupt person, a person without instilled values, degenerated and reluctant towards everyone else.

It is worth mentioning that indeed in democratic countries where freedom of speech is a value, various pathologies come to light. Conversely, where we observe censorship and propaganda, there is content that does not see the light of day. On the Internet, you can look at people getting drunk to the point of unconsciousness and recording it for

money and fame (Kmieciak-Goławska, 2019, pp. 171–183). In Russia, obviously, we can also notice identical situations, but they are not disseminated by the media.

Another symptom of groupthink is self-censorship, the illusion of unanimity, and the appearance of guardians of unanimity. Everyone starts to think that everyone thinks the same way and they start to watch themselves and others so that opposing views do not emerge.

Looking at the situation in Russia, one should really consider whether Russian society has succumbed to the groupthink syndrome.

If we add to this such effects as: lack of analysis of all possible solutions, unpreparedness for failures, unrealistic perception of the riskiness of the preferred solution or lack of a plan for the eventuality of action failure (Janis, 1982; Aronson et al., 1997, p. 381), the picture that appears to us, in Russian society is very close to the groupthink syndrome, if it has not already succumbed to such thinking.

In Russia, we deal with propaganda that mixes various propaganda tools. Eclecticism in selecting elements of Russian history to which Putin refers in his speeches is intended to evoke a sense of greatness of the Russian nation and cause a sense of injustice and a threat to the Russians, who, after all, with hard work and without sparing blood, built Russia and the world order without fascism.

The departure from economic transformations that would allow Russia to join the free international economy is not dictated by saving the effort an impoverishing society must bear at such times due to high prices or high unemployment. It is dictated by instilling in the nation the feeling that it will not be used by the world economy which would like to seize Russia's wealth both in terms of material and spiritual inheritance.

Relying on social attitudes towards group thinking is so dangerous that it will be difficult to change the direction of action of the entire nation. While in the case of a leader who has unrealistic demands, one can wait for his death (which is often picked up by the media, mentioning either illness or the possibility of an assassination attempt on Putin), while one can still hope for a change of direction when groupthink is government and military authorities (following the military activities in Ukraine, there is no doubt that this is the case), so one can hope that another fraction's rise to power will change the situation.

But what to do not with Putin, not with ideology, not with the government and generals, but with the society that has been aroused to rebuild the Russian empire being destroyed by the West?

The question that arises as to whether we are trying to form groupthink, or whether groupthink has formed itself, is about the direction of Russia for the next ten, maybe twenty years, not how to end this conflict.

For while the government can be changed, persuaded by force, it is difficult to change the opinion of a nation that has believed in propaganda confirmed by each successive victory, but also by each successive defeat. Victory confirms the greatness of Russia, defeat – its destruction by Western fascists.

Obviously, I am not presenting my own views here, but those that may be strengthened in Russian society and are fueled by Russian propaganda.

A question about Russia is a question about Russians. It is worth remembering.

Let us emphasize again that, according to Haidt, a state needs both a progressive and a conservative part to develop. Both are natural components of a normal society.

Currently, one can get the impression that in Russia the vast majority of society is conservative, while in Ukraine – progressive. It is worth considering why this is so and how the other part of society will manifest itself.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Eryk Pieszak

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Eryk Pieszak

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Eryk Pieszak

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Eryk Pieszak

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Eryk Pieszak

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### **Rosyjski konserwatyzm jako prawo do usprawiedliwienia wojny z perspektywy fundamentów moralnych J. Haidta i syndromu myślenia grupowego I. L. Janisa**

#### **Streszczenie**

W artykule autor podejmuje próbę zreferowania czegoś, co nazywamy rosyjskim konserwatyzmem. Następnie zastanawia się, dlaczego społeczeństwo rosyjskie może ulegać takim ideom, do czego wiara w propagandę Kremla może prowadzić i czy są przesłanki do tego, aby sądzić, że mamy już dowody na to, że społeczeństwo rosyjskie zmierza w jakimś konkretnym kierunku.

Autor odwołuje się tutaj do dwóch badaczy i ich rozumienia procesów grupowych. Pierwszym będzie Jonathan Haidt, a drugim Irving L. Janis.

Do J. Haidta odnoszę się ze względu na badania dotyczące zachowań moralnych. W swej książce (Haidt, 2014) z 2012 roku – *Prawy umysł* – zadaje on w podtytule pytanie: *Dlaczego dobrych ludzi*

*dzieli religia i polityka?* Można je sparafrazować: dlaczego dobrzy ludzie przez religię i politykę są w stanie mordować innych dobrych ludzi? Odwołamy się tutaj do ideologii Kremla, jaką jest konserwatyzm w Rosji, i zadamy sobie pytanie: czy istnieje dla niego jakaś przeciwwaga?

Następnie zastanowimy się, czy rzeczywiście społeczeństwo rosyjskie tak się spolaryzowało, że nie ma w nim równowagi między osobami o konserwatywnym a np. liberalnym podejściu, aby odwołać się do badań I. L. Janisa (Janis, 1982) dotyczących zachowań grupowych, w tym szerokich badań poświęconych syndromowi myślenia grupowego, zgłębić, czy można uznać, że w Rosji doszło już do tego rodzaju myślenia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rosyjski konserwatyzm, podstawy moralne, syndrom grupowego myślenia

