

KEY EVENTS AND “LESSONS” OF RUSSIAN HISTORY IN THE VIEWS AND ASSESSMENTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIANS

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Abstract. The article examines the perception of key events in Russian history by the citizens of the nowadays Russian and their impact on national identity, value orientations and attitudes towards the current political situation. The author claims that historical memory serves as the basis of national identity and a tool for consolidating society, especially in the face of external challenges (for example, the Special Military Operation, international isolation and sanctions), whereas the narrative of the national mobilization before the face of the external threats dominate dominates in the mass consciousness (Victory in the Great Patriotic War, the historical events since 2014). And the liberal reforms of the 1990s (*Perestroika*, transition to a market economy) are perceived as the least significant. So, after 2022, in the official political discourse historical memory has become a key element of the national ideology, minimizing the importance of globalization and emphasizing mobilization scenarios of the past. And under the influence of official discourse and international isolation the Russia's public opinion reoriented on the distinctive path of the national development.

Keywords: *Historical memory, national identity, collective memory, special military operation (SMO), Russia, narratives.*

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1. Introduction

The citizens' views on the national history, being fixed in the collective memory, serve as the basis of the national identity. They form the value guidelines of the nation, influence the perception of the current state of affairs in the country and determine the ideas about the desired strategies for its development (Halbwachs, 2007). Since historical memory is templated, 'woven' from 'narrative habits' (Wertsch *et al.*, 2022), public conventions about the key events of national history and their interpretation (Assman, 2014) endow the past with meanings understandable to every citizen, maintain a lively interest in it. Thus, the images of the past in everyday life endows citizens interested in history with an analytical 'optics', influences their perception of the current situation.

At the same time, collective memorization is an active process that is formed through process of social interaction (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Emotional images of memory are built on the framework of historical facts, revive official memorial structures, link the memories of eyewitnesses and their descendants with national history (Barash, 2023). Examples of the past are constructed in the constant interaction of two interconnected processes: formal history and living human memory. This synthesis creates a special dimension of collective memory, where official narratives are inevitably refracted through the prism of individual and family experience. Public constructions of

the past are constantly tested and adjusted by personal experience and individual memories, in turn, are inscribed in the broader context of collective identity.

The content of historical symbols of a constructivist nature is largely formed by public institutions. This is especially evident in the course of state ‘securitization’ of the past, when the administrative apparatus endows key historical narratives with the status of protected values that determine collective identity. Political presentism, discursive politicization of the national past for the purpose of social consolidation, are strengthening all over the world, when the plots of national historical memory become part of political ideology (Kurilla, 2021). Historical narratives, including the memory of turning points and outstanding personalities (both heroes and antiheroes), are actively used in political ideology, forming a collective identity. Modern politicians, through rethinking the past, create an image of a special path of development, opposing national values to global trends (Wertsch, 2021). Historical memory thus becomes not just a reflection of the past, but an active element of modern politics, when images of the past play ‘the main role in constructing collective identity’ (Repina, 2021).

In addition to the event-based crystallization of national history with the help of the national calendar and the pantheon of national heroes (Nora, 1999), the politics of memory also influences on the current attitudes of citizens. Under the influence of the official historical discourse, citizens are in constant interaction with the national narrative, rethinking not only significant plots of national history, but also adapting collective ideas about the past to their own picture of the world.

2. Problem Statement

In contemporary Russia, the historical narrative performs a dual function: it simultaneously shapes social reality and justifies the continuity of national development as an ‘unbreakable connection between generations’ (Gorshkov & Barash, 2024). By the mid-2010s, historical argumentation had become the key justification for foreign policy decisions regarding ‘originally Russian lands’ (President of the Russian Federation, 2014) and ‘historical territories’ (President of the Russian Federation, 2024). By the 2020s, history had finally become the official political language and the state had taken a tough paternalistic position, legislatively enshrining (through the law banning the rehabilitation of Nazism and amendments to the Constitution) the special status of military history as a matter of national security (Barash, 2023).

The modern historical competence of Russians, their knowledge of national history are largely determined by the close connection of images of the past with the current political agenda, the ‘historicized’ language of Russian public figures. In recent years, especially after the start of the Special Military Operation in 2022 (the SMO) and the sharply increased international isolation of Russia, the activation by the Russia’s authorities of the mobilization discourse, addressed, among other things, to the symbols of national history, the interest of our fellow citizens in the latter has clearly increased. A derivative of the interest of Russians in national history are their positive feelings for their country: both for Russia of the present in its current state and for the prospects, the image of the country’s future.

3. Research Objectives

This determines the purpose of this article: to study the perception of the connection between the past, present and future and the influence of the *national chronotope* on the current value orientations of society, the assessment of the current situation in the country and the choice of development strategies in the context of geopolitical challenges (the Special military operation, international isolation and sanctions).

The objectives of this study are to identify key events in Russian history that citizens persuade as those determined the fate of the country, to analyze the dynamics of perception of historical events in the period from 2020 to 2024, to study the relationship between Russians' assessment of history and their attitude toward Russia's historical path of the development and to determine regional, age and socioeconomic differences in the perception of history.

4. Methodology

The main methodological basis of the study was a mass survey of the population of the Russian Federation using a representative all-Russian regional quota sample, implemented at the Institute of Sociology of FCTAS RAS, Moscow, Russia in 2024, February. The sample size is 2,000 respondents representing the adult (18 years and older) population of the Russian Federation by parameters of gender, socio-professional status, education and type of settlement of residence.

The representativeness of sociological information was ensured by a model of multi-stage regionalized sampling with quota selection of observation units (respondents) at the last stage. Zoning was carried out by federal districts of the Russian Federation using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), Russia, concerning the population of the state.

5. Hypotheses

The hypothesis of the study is that the collective historical memory of modern Russians forms a national chronotope: the perception of the connection between the past, present and future, so that this chronotope influences the value orientations of citizens, their assessment of the current situation in the country and the choice of development strategies in the context of geopolitical challenges (the SMO and Western economic sanctions). It is assumed that key events in national history, especially those associated with national mobilization in the face of an external threat and under the influence of state centralization, play a decisive role in the formation of national identity and political views of citizens.

6. Significance of Study

The study addresses important issues of national identity formation through historical memory, which is especially significant in the context of modern geopolitical challenges and ideological consolidation in Russia. The dynamics of perception of key historical events for the period from 2020 to 2024 are analyzed, the connection between the level of historical competence of Russians and their emotions, as well as views on the future of the country, is revealed. The paper contributes to the study of collective memory,

confirming the ideas of Halbwachs (2007) and other theorists that historical memory is actively constructed through social interaction and political discourse. It also expands the understanding of the role of historical narratives in modern political processes in Russia.

7. Results

History lessons and conclusions about past events are formulated and rethought under the influence of current circumstances. With the beginning of the Second World War, the memory of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War as an example of nationwide consolidation became the basic value foundation of everyday life in Russian society. As a result of the sharp aggravation of foreign policy challenges, the mass consciousness of Russians has reassessed the country's geopolitical priorities: the post-perestroika vector of global integration has been replaced by the mindset of historical sovereignty, the desire to focus on one's own civilizational and ideological values and development goals.

After 2022 national history became for the Russia's citizen a factor in understanding the current situation. The close connection between images of the past and the current political agenda, the regular appeal of Russian public figures to historical stories results in citizens being highly informed about national history. In 2024 the majority of citizens, according to their self-assessment, have a basic understanding of Russian history (77%), while less than a fifth of citizens (17%) are poorly acquainted with it.

Over the past 4 years, from 2020, the proportion of Russians who assess their knowledge of Russian history as good has grown by 14 percentage points (from 11% to 25%), while the number of those poorly informed has decreased from 30% to 17%. However, at present, as before, 52-53% of Russians have a general understanding of the past (Figure 1).

It is important to understand that the growth of the subjective self-assessment of historical competence of Russians does not mean an objective increase in their awareness of the national past: the present study did not aim to examine how fully citizens are informed about the history of the country. Only the citizens' perceptions of how highly they rated their own knowledge of history were examined. And under the influence of state information policy, including under the influence of the collective demand to overcome the feeling of the 'short-termism' of the present (Hartog, 2015), when, through the subordination of the past to it, state bureaucracy around the world intensifies the discourse of the past, Russians are actively interested in the past. A serious factor in the interest in the national past is the digitalization of everyday life, numerous historical Internet resources, including digitalized archives, personal websites and genealogical chats.

In a sense, the family memory of contemporary Russians and the recollections of representatives of older generations of many contemporary Russians, according to the concept of Halbwachs (2007), serve for many contemporaries as a key element of social memory, shaping their personal perception of the past. Emotional empathy with the stories of loved ones, primarily the memory of the Great Patriotic War, connects the identity of descendants with the events of past eras, integrating them into family and consequently, personal biography. This process often gives individual existence a deeper meaning and direction (Lowenthal, 2004) and the national past is perceived as, to a large extent, the family past. The 'interweaving' of family and national histories makes the past personal, prompting reflection on what happened.

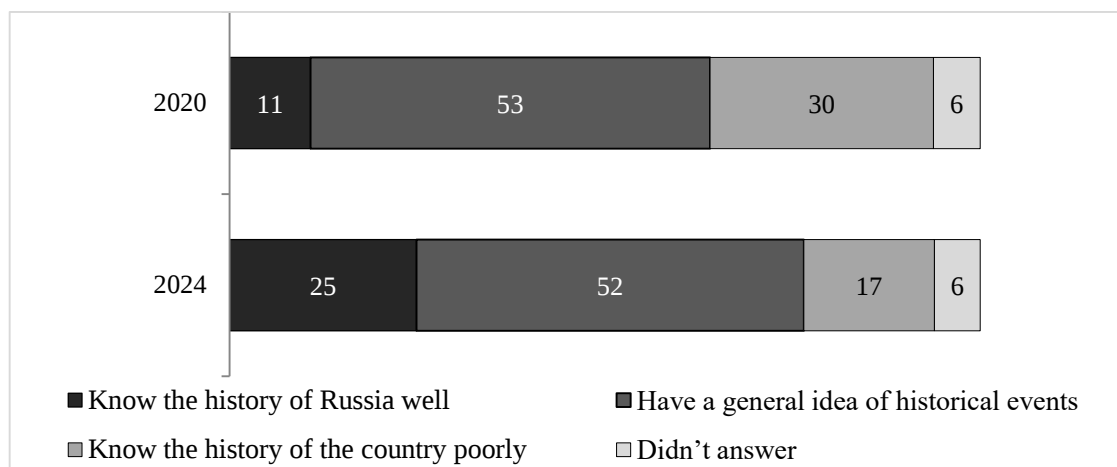


Figure 1. Dynamics of historical competence of Russians, 2020 and 2024, %

The oldest respondents are the most confident in their good knowledge of history. This is largely a direct consequence of life experience. But even among the representatives of the youth audience (18-30 years old), every fifth person knows history well and slightly more than half (53%) have a general idea (Table 1).

Table 1. Level of historical competence of Russians of different ages, 2024, % (Data are given by column)

	Age				
<i>How Russians rate their knowledge of national history</i>	18-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	Over 60 years
Know the history of Russia well	21	23	25	25	29
Have a general understanding of historical events	53	51	53	51	51
Know the history of Russia poorly	18	19	16	20	16
Didn't answer	9	6	7	4	5

The derivative of Russians' interest in their national history is their social feelings towards their country, contemporary Russia: those who rate their knowledge of Russian history as good are more likely than others to be proud of the nowadays Russia (58%), while those who have general historical information more often confess in respect (64%) and love (49%) for their country. Citizens who know the history of their Fatherland poorly are more likely than others to be indifferent to modern Russia (12%) (Table 2).

Many sociologists note the connection between Russians' ideas about the country's past and their emotional attitudes toward the state. Malinova (2019) points out that state narratives of history influence the emotional attachment of citizens. Whereas Boikov (2009) convincingly demonstrates how Russians' knowledge of their national history influences their patriotic sentiments. However, researchers around the world point out that collective historical memory directly influences not only the emotional perception of history, but also the attitude of citizens toward their country as a whole (Hirst & Yamashiro, 2018).

Table 2. The feeling towards modern Russia of the respondents with different levels of historical competence, 2024, % (Data are given by column)

<i>The feeling that respondents have towards modern Russia:</i>	<i>They know the history of Russia well</i>	<i>The history of the country is poorly known</i>
Respect	62	48
Pride	58	43
Love	46	36
Resentment, shame	12	14
Disturbance	11	12
Indifference	5	12

Knowledge of national history forms an optimistic citizens' view of national prospects, an image of the country's future: those who know history well or in general terms more often look to the country's future with hope (32-33%) and optimism (27%). Respondents who rate their historical knowledge low more often experience anxiety (22% versus 19%) and fear (9% versus 5%) regarding the country's future (Table 3).

Table 3. The feeling towards the future of Russia of the respondents with different levels of historical competence, February 2024, % (Data are given by column)

<i>The feelings that respondents have towards the future of Russia:</i>	<i>They know the history of Russia well</i>	<i>The history of the country is poorly known</i>
Hope	32	28
Confidence in a good future	27	19
Anxiety	17	22
Calmness	11	14
Fear	5	9
Despair	3	3
Found it difficult to answer	5	5

The interpretation of the national past as an ongoing confrontation with an external threat, proposed in public political discourse, plays an important role in shaping the general understanding of key historical events and periods in the life of the country by citizens and serves as the foundation of public identity. Moreover, Russia's citizens are generally close to the ideas of historical determinism, the predetermination of the present state of affairs and future prospects by the events of the past. Only 1% of respondents believe that there are no events in Russian history that determined its fate and another 10% find it difficult to qualify such events. The majority of the Russia's citizens view national history as a dynamic process of interdependent events.

In the face of the need for national consolidation, Russians name among the key events in Russian history that determined its fate those that personify the mobilization confrontation of the state and society with an external threat: the Victory of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War in 1945 (75%), the incorporation of Crimea into Russia in 2014 (46%). From a quarter to a third of citizens also include other precedents of national consolidation under the influence of foreign policy circumstances among the turning points in Russian history: the incorporation of new territories 2022 (DPR, LPR) into Russia (29%), liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke in XV century (29%), the liberation of Moscow from Polish intervention by Minin and Pozharsky in 1612 (22%).

The presented sociological data are consistent with the observations of researchers that collective memory is formed by schematic narrative patterns of memory (Zerubavel, 2003) and for Russian society the traditional narrative of Russian national memory is 'the expulsion of foreign enemies' (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008).

Also at the forefront of the 'turning points' of history are those that determined the high international status of Russia, its leadership positions in various areas: the flight of Yu.A. Gagarin in Space in 1961 (44%), Olympics in Sochi in 2014 (12%).

At the same time, among the events that determined the vector of the country's national development, Russians often name those that contributed to the centralization of the state or as in 1991, destroyed it: the baptism of Rus' in 988 (42%), the formation of the USSR in 1922 (40%), the proclamation of the Russian Empire by Peter I in 1721 (36%), the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (31%), the incorporation of Siberia and the Far East to Russia in XVI-XVII centuries (22%), the gathering of lands around Moscow in XIII-XVI centuries (15%), the Union of Russia with Ukraine in 1654 (10%) (Figure 2).

Many researchers of Russian public opinion point out that historical events associated with the centralization of the state are perceived positively by many citizens, through the prism of strengthening statehood, stability and power of the country (Gudkov, 2005). Events that symbolize the fight against oppression and social injustice also remain in the mass historical memory: the abolition of serfdom in 1861 (39%), the October (38%) and February Revolutions in 1917 (11%), the Decembrist uprising in 1825 (8%) and the peasant uprising of Yemelyan Pugachev in 1773-1775 (8%). However, the last of the events highlighted are perceived in the mass consciousness as less fateful for the country than those associated with national mobilization and state centralization.

Some researchers associate the lack of keen interest of Russians in revolutionary events and consistent reflection on national history at the beginning of the century with the perception of the revolution as an ambivalent event that caused not only the progress of national history, but also a sequence of tragic events (Miller, 2018). Russian youth is especially cautious in their assessments of revolutionary events: after all, it is not only state policy that refrains from harsh assessments of revolutionary events, depoliticizing them in popular culture (Blackburn, 2017).

Russians consider such liberal reforms as *Perestroika*, the elimination of the *Iron Curtain* with the West and democratization (17%), as well as Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s (14%) to be the least influential events. According to the long-term observations by a wide variety of sociological centers, Russian public opinion is dominated by negative associations of the 1990s with the state crisis and widespread poverty (Matskevich, 2023) and a clear minority associates that period with hopes for democratic reforms (Boele *et al.*, 2019).

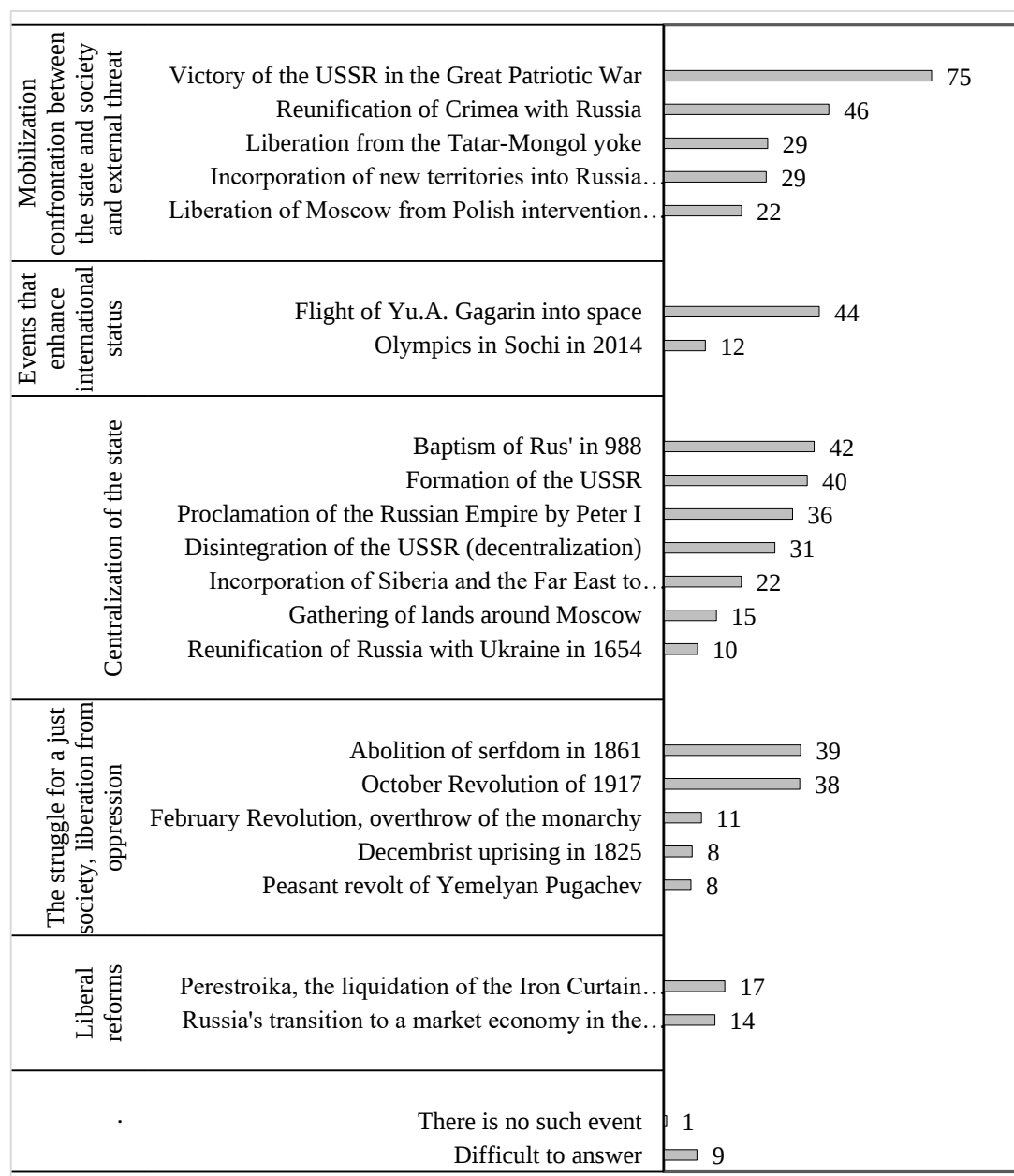


Figure 2. Russians' opinions on which events in Russian history determined its fate, February 2024, %

More often than others, the liberal transformations: *Perestroika* and the liquidation of the *Iron Curtain* with the West and Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s as reference points in Russian history are noted by residents of small towns (23% and 19%), less often by residents of capitals (11% and 9%). The collapse of the USSR as a turning point in history is perceived primarily by residents of the villages (38%). Among the settlers of the district centers (42%) and of the villages (41%) the idea that one of the most important events of Russia's national past is the October Revolution of 1917 is more common.

Among residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the popular opinion is that the turning point in Russian history, the key point of the past, is the incorporation of Crimea into Russia (52%) and the baptism of Rus' (45%).

Residents of regional capitals, among the key events in Russian history, name those that contributed to national mobilization under the influence of foreign policy circumstances: liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke (32%), the liberation of Moscow from Polish intervention by Minin and Pozharsky (24%), as well as the centralization of the state: the baptism of Rus' (45%), the proclamation of the Russian Empire (45%), the incorporation of Siberia and the Far East to Russia (28%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Opinions about which events in Russian history can be considered to have determined its fate, among residents of various types of settlements, 2024, % (Data are given by column)

	All respondents	Megacities	Regional centers	District centers	Villages
Mobilization confrontation of society and the state against an external threat					
Victory of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War	75	69	78	76	76
Reunification of Crimea with Russia	46	52	46	47	45
Liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke	29	30	32	30	23
Incorporation of new territories into Russia (DPR, LPR, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions)	29	30	27	30	29
Liberation of Moscow from Polish intervention by Minin and Pozharsky in 1612	22	20	24	20	21
Events that enhance international status					
Flight of Yuri Gagarin into Space	44	34	51	41	47
Olympics in Sochi in 2014	12	10	13	12	11
Centralization of the state					
Baptism of Rus' in 988	42	45	45	41	41
Formation of the USSR	40	26	41	46	40
Proclamation of the Russian Empire by Peter I	36	38	45	30	33
The collapse of the USSR (decentralization)	31	31	26	35	38
Incorporation of Siberia and the Far East to Russia	22	18	28	21	19
Gathering lands around Moscow	15	15	17	13	16
The reunification of Russia with Ukraine in 1654	10	8	10	9	10
The struggle for a just society, liberation from oppression					
The abolition of serfdom in 1861	39	33	44	40	37
October Revolution of 1917	38	25	40	42	41
February Revolution, overthrow of the monarchy	11	11	13	8	12
The Decembrist Uprising of 1825	8	5	9	7	11
The Peasant Revolt of Yemelyan Pugachev	8	5	9	7	8
Liberal reforms					
Perestroika, the elimination of the Iron Curtain with the West, democratization	17	11	15	23	16
Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s	14	9	11	19	16
There is no such event	1	1	1	1	1
Found it difficult to answer	9	12	10	10	9

Respondents who assess their financial situation as satisfactory most often speak about the key influence on the vector of Russia's state development of events aimed at centralizing the country: the baptism of Russia (44%) and the formation of the USSR

(42%). Those who are poorly financially provided more often than others state that the key events of the national past are the abolition of serfdom in 1861 (40%), the collapse of the USSR (34%), liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke (32%) and the incorporation of Siberia and the Far East into Russia (26%). Among well-off citizens, the idea is widespread that the key influence on strengthening the national statehood is events that enhance the international status: Yuri Gagarin's flight into space (45%) and the Olympic Games in Sochi (14%).

An analysis of the four-year dynamics of Russians' opinions on key events in national history allows us to record serious ideological shifts in society's understanding of the fundamental circumstances of our country's history*. The main vector of such changes is the strengthening of mass ideas about the fundamental significance of events that mark the mobilizational confrontation of the state and society with an external threat.

Thus, on the one hand, under the influence of the dominant discourse 2022, mass ideas of citizens about the key role in national history of the USSR's Victory in the Great Patriotic War have been strengthened. As in 2020 in 2024 a majority of Russians call the victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War a key symbol of national history, placing it in first place in the rank of basic foundations of the national chronotope.

On the other hand, after the start of the SMO, the public's confidence in the key influence on national history of the incorporation of Crimea into Russia in 2014 has sharply increased. Today, many perceive the SMO that began in 2022 as a continuation of the 'Crimean' incorporation in 2014. Hence the strengthened confidence of citizens that the events of the 'Crimean Spring' in 2014 became a turning point in the development of the entire national history and the perception of the SMO as the beginning of a 'new era' of confrontation with the West, the incorporation of Crimea. If in 2020, Russians placed the incorporation of Crimea in the tenth place in the list of key events, then in 2024, they brought this event to the second place among the most important events in Russian history.

The high position of Yuri Gagarin's flight into space has remained unchanged in the symbolic register of key events in Russian history over the past four years: both in 2020 and in 2024, Russians placed it in third place, as well as the formation of the USSR, which is in fifth place in the rank of key historical events. In both cases, the nostalgia for the Soviet period that persists among part of society makes itself felt: if Russians perceive Yuri Gagarin's flight into space in 1961 as a symbol of the country's scientific and technical greatness, then the formation of the USSR in 1922 reflects the demand of part of society for a geopolitically strong state, especially against the backdrop of the conflict with the West.

Over the past four years, the importance of liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke for national history has noticeably decreased in public opinion and in the rank of key

*In this case, the respondents' answers to the question about which events in Russian history can be considered to have determined the fate of the country and currently serve as the most striking symbols of its national past and present are ranked in order of their popularity in 2020 and 2024. A mechanical percentage comparison of sociological data reflecting Russians' ideas about the 'reference points' of national history, obtained at two survey points, is incorrect in this case, since in 2024 additional answer options were added to the questionnaire: the Olympics 2014 in Sochi and the incorporation of new territories (DPR, LPR) into Russia after 2022, supported by 12% and 29% of respondents, respectively. In addition, when answering the question in 2020, respondents could choose no more than five answer options, while in 2024 they could choose whatever they considered necessary. A comparison of the dynamics of the ranks of events in national history named by respondents as key, especially in more than a third of cases, gives a complete picture of the change in the attitudes of mass consciousness.

events in national history, it has moved from the fourth place in 2020 to the tenth in 2024. Such historically distant events, including under the influence of the focus on the events of the 20th-21st centuries that dominates in the official discourse, are perceived as if not peripheral, then not of primary importance for the country. Also, since 2020, the popularity of Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s as a symbol of the national past and present has decreased: under the influence of the growing critical rethinking of the 1990s, this event has moved from twelfth to fourteenth place.

The October Revolution of 1917 and the abolition of serfdom in 1861 remain virtually unmarked in the list of the most significant events in Russian history. The situation is similar with the collapse of the USSR and the proclamation of the Russian Empire by Peter I, which, against the backdrop of the emergence of new symbols of national history, have moved in the minds of Russians to eighth or ninth place in the rank of key events in Russian history.

In 2024, two additional judgments were added to the options proposed in 2020 for answering the question of which events in Russian history could be considered to have determined its fate: the incorporation of new territories into Russia after 2022 and the Olympics 2014 in Sochi, which took the eleventh and the seventeenth places in the ranking among the list of the important national events (Table 5).

Table 5. Dynamics of the ranks of events in Russian history that Russians consider to have determined the fate of the country, 2020-2024

2020, %	An event symbolizing the national 'arrow of time'	Rank	An event symbolizing the national 'arrow of time'	2024, %
60	Victory of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War	1	Victory of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War	75
33	Baptism of Rus' in 988	2	Reunification of Crimea with Russia	46
26	Flight of Yuri Gagarin into Space	3	Flight of Yuri Gagarin into Space	44
25	Liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke	4	Baptism of Rus' in 988	42
24	Formation of the USSR	5	Formation of the USSR	40
24	October Revolution of 1917	6	The abolition of serfdom in 1861	39
22	The abolition of serfdom in 1861	7	October Revolution of 1917	38
22	The collapse of the USSR	8	Proclamation of the Russian Empire by Peter I	36
22	Proclamation of the Russian Empire by Peter I	9	The collapse of the USSR	31
20	Reunification of Crimea with Russia	10-11	Liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke	29
11	Incorporation of Siberia and the Far East to Russia	10-11	Incorporation of new territories into Russia (DPR, LPR, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions)	29
11	Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s	12-13	Liberation of Moscow from Polish intervention by Minin and Pozharsky in 1612	22
8	Liberation of Moscow from Polish intervention by Minin and Pozharsky in 1612	13-12	Incorporation of Siberia and the Far East to Russia	22
8	Perestroika, the elimination of the Iron Curtain with the West, democratization	14	Perestroika, the elimination of the Iron Curtain with the West, democratization	17

7	Gathering lands around Moscow	15	Gathering lands around Moscow	15
5	February Revolution, overthrow of the monarchy	16	Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s	14
4	The reunification of Russia with Ukraine in 1654	17	Olympics in Sochi in 2014	12
3	The Decembrist Uprising of 1825	18	February Revolution, overthrow of the monarchy	11
3	The Peasant Revolt of Yemelyan Pugachev	19	The reunification of Russia with Ukraine in 1654	10
		20-21	The Decembrist Uprising of 1825	8
		21-20	The Peasant Revolt of Yemelyan Pugachev	8
1	There is no such event		There is no such event	1
9	Found it difficult to answer		Found it difficult to answer	9

Thus, the perception of history by the citizens of the nowadays Russian has undergone significant changes from the 2020, becoming a key factor in national identity and response to external challenges. Against the backdrop of growing interest in history in Russian society, the trend of growing historical competence of Russians has strengthened: the share of citizens who assess their knowledge as good has grown from 11% to 25% from 2020 to 2024, while the share of those poorly informed has decreased from 30% to 17%. Older respondents (29%) are most confident in their knowledge, but even among young people aged 18-30, every fifth person (21%) considers their preparation to be solid.

The citizens' depth of historical knowledge directly correlates with their patriotic feelings and views on the future. Those who know history well are more likely to feel pride (58%) and respect (62%) for modern Russia and also look to the future with hope (32%) and optimism (27%). On the contrary, citizens with a low level of knowledge are more often indifferent to the country (12%) or feel fear (9%) and anxiety (22%) regarding its prospects.

The hierarchy of key events that determined the fate of Russia is dominated by themes of mobilization, sovereignty and countering external threats. The undisputed leader of the historical events, that citizens consider the most important for the state, is the Victory in the Great Patriotic War in 1945 (75% in 2024), symbolizing nationwide consolidation. Second place went to the incorporation of Crimea in 2014 (46%), which in the public consciousness merged with the Special Military Operation in 2022. Third place is steadily held by Gagarin's flight into space in 1961 (44%), that is perceived as a symbol of technological triumph. The baptism of Rus' (42%), the formation of the USSR (40%) and the abolition of serfdom (39%) also remain significant. At the same time, the liberal reforms of the 1990s *Perestroika* and transition to the market are perceived (by 17% and 14% respectively) as the least influential, which reflects the change in vector of the Russia's development from global integration to a course towards historical sovereignty.

Regional differences highlight the political and ideological context of the perception of history. Residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg emphasize the incorporation of Crimea (52%) and the baptism of Rus' (45%). The settlements of the villages note the importance of the collapse of the USSR (38%) and the Decembrist Uprising of 1825 (11%). Regional capitals emphasize the events of state centralization (the baptism of Rus' - 45%, the proclamation of the Russian Empire by Peter I (45%), the abolition of serfdom

in 1861 (44%), the incorporation of Siberia - 28%). Small towns more often note liberal reforms (23%) and the transition to a market economy (19%).

Thus, after 2022, the importance of historical memory topics has once again increased in Russian public opinion. The authorities' appeal to images of the past (especially the Victory in the Great Patriotic War) to mobilize society led to a strengthening of the narrative about 'fateful battles with external threats', an increase in the symbolic value of recent events (the incorporation of the new territories after 2022 took the 11th place) and conversely, a decrease in the significance of the liberal transformations of the 1990s.

Today, historical memory in Russia serves as the basis of national identity and a tool for consolidation in the face of external challenges. The dominant narrative emphasizes events of mobilization, centralization of the state and countering threats, minimizing the role of liberal reforms. This trend has intensified after 2022 and reflects Russian society's search for the autarkic development ideas.

8. Key findings:

Collective historical memory in modern Russia serves as a basis for the consolidation of society in the context of foreign policy confrontation. The dominant narrative emphasizes the continuity of the struggle for sovereignty, centralization of the state and civilizational independence, minimizing the role of periods of globalization and liberal reforms. This trend, which has intensified after 2022, reflects the demand for "self-reliance" as an imperative of national development.

The start of the historical events in 2022 strengthened the narrative of mobilization against external threats (and the importance in the mass historical consciousness of Great Patriotic War, historical events since 2014), reducing the importance of liberal reforms.

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