

Fascist Ideology and Propaganda Mechanisms in Contemporary Russia: Information Influence and the Formation of Collaborationist Structures in Ukraine

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied not only by military operations but also by extensive information campaigns aimed at shaping political perceptions and influencing populations in both Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes the role of propaganda, historical narratives, and ideological messaging in sustaining support for military aggression and legitimizing occupation policies.

This article examines the ideological and institutional mechanisms through which Russian state propaganda contributes to the formation of collaborationist structures in occupied Ukrainian territories. Drawing on research in media studies, political communication, and conflict studies, the study analyzes the narratives disseminated through Russian state media, educational programs, and digital platforms.

Particular attention is given to the role of propaganda in shaping perceptions of identity, history, and political legitimacy. The study also explores how these narratives interact with local political actors and organizations that support Russian governance structures in occupied regions.

The research argues that propaganda campaigns function not only as tools of external influence but also as mechanisms for constructing ideological environments that facilitate the emergence of collaborationist movements within occupied territories.

Keywords

propaganda

information warfare

fascism

collaborationism
media influence
Russia–Ukraine war
political indoctrination

1. Introduction

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched by the Russian Federation in February 2022 represents one of the most significant geopolitical conflicts in contemporary Europe. In addition to conventional military operations, the conflict has been characterized by extensive information campaigns conducted through state media, digital platforms, educational institutions, and political organizations.

Scholars increasingly describe modern warfare as involving not only physical confrontation but also **information warfare**, in which competing actors attempt to influence public perceptions, shape political narratives, and legitimize territorial claims. In this context, propaganda plays a central role in mobilizing domestic support for military actions and in shaping the political attitudes of populations living in contested or occupied territories.

Research on Russian information campaigns has identified several recurring narratives designed to justify military aggression and delegitimize Ukrainian statehood. These narratives often emphasize historical claims, portray Ukraine as a failed or illegitimate state, and frame the conflict as a defensive struggle against external threats.

The spread of such narratives has been facilitated by a complex ecosystem of communication channels that includes television broadcasting, digital media platforms, social networks, and educational initiatives. Studies examining social media activity during the early stages of the 2022 invasion found large-scale dissemination of pro-Russian messaging amplified by automated accounts and coordinated networks of online actors.

Within occupied territories of Ukraine, propaganda campaigns have been accompanied by attempts to restructure political and social institutions. Pro-Russian movements and organizations have emerged that advocate integration with the Russian Federation and support occupation administrations. For example, the organization “We Are Together with Russia” has operated in occupied parts of the Zaporizhzhia region and promoted political integration with Russia.

Another important dimension of these influence campaigns involves education and cultural policy. In areas under Russian control, new school curricula and textbooks have been introduced that promote Russian historical narratives and reinterpret the conflict through the perspective of Russian state ideology.

International observers have documented broader efforts aimed at reshaping identity and political loyalty among populations living under occupation. Reports by human rights organizations indicate that Russian authorities have implemented programs designed to integrate educational systems in occupied territories into Russian state structures.

These developments raise important questions regarding the relationship between propaganda, ideology, and collaborationist political structures.

This article examines how propaganda narratives produced by the Russian state interact with local political actors and social environments in Ukraine's occupied territories. The study seeks to understand how ideological messaging contributes to the formation of collaborationist movements and how information campaigns function as part of a broader strategy of political control.

2. Literature Review: Propaganda, Authoritarian Ideology, and Information Warfare

The study of propaganda and ideological influence during armed conflict has long been an important field within political science, communication studies, and conflict research. Scholars examining modern conflicts increasingly emphasize that warfare involves not only military confrontation but also extensive information campaigns designed to influence public perception, mobilize domestic audiences, and shape political attitudes in contested territories.

One of the foundational approaches to propaganda analysis can be traced to early twentieth-century research on mass communication and political persuasion. Classic studies of propaganda emphasize the role of centralized messaging, emotional narratives, and symbolic framing in shaping public opinion during periods of political crisis.

More recent scholarship has expanded this perspective by examining how modern information technologies transform the dissemination and impact of propaganda. Researchers studying digital communication environments note that social media platforms, online video channels, and messaging applications have significantly increased the speed and reach of political messaging.

Within the context of contemporary geopolitical conflicts, scholars frequently describe these dynamics using the concept of **information warfare**. Information warfare refers to the strategic use of communication channels to influence perceptions, shape political narratives, and weaken the informational environment of opposing societies.

Research on Russian information policy has attracted particular attention in recent years. Analysts studying Russian state media and communication strategies have identified several recurring features of official messaging. These include the use of historical narratives, appeals to cultural identity, and framing international conflicts through the lens of geopolitical confrontation.

Studies of Russian political communication also emphasize the importance of centralized media structures and state influence over major broadcast networks. Such structures allow governments to coordinate messaging across multiple communication channels, including television, digital platforms, and educational institutions.

In addition to domestic audiences, propaganda campaigns often target populations in neighboring countries and territories affected by conflict. Scholars note that such campaigns may attempt to influence identity narratives, political loyalties, and perceptions of legitimacy.

Another important theme in the literature concerns the emergence of **collaborationist political structures** in territories affected by military occupation. Historically, collaborationist administrations have often relied on ideological narratives promoted by occupying powers in order to legitimize their authority.

Researchers studying occupation governance note that propaganda may play a crucial role in creating the symbolic and political environment in which collaborationist actors operate. Messaging that emphasizes shared identity, historical unity, or protection narratives can contribute to the formation of local political networks aligned with occupying authorities.

At the same time, scholars emphasize that collaborationism rarely results from propaganda alone. Local political dynamics, security conditions, economic incentives, and coercive pressures all influence the emergence of collaborationist structures.

Understanding the interaction between propaganda narratives and local political conditions therefore remains an important task for research on modern conflicts.

3. Ideological Narratives in Russian State Propaganda

Modern state propaganda often relies on a system of ideological narratives designed to interpret political events, shape public perceptions, and legitimize government policies. In the context of the war in Ukraine, Russian state communication has consistently used several recurring narrative frameworks intended to influence both domestic audiences and populations in territories affected by the conflict.

These narratives are disseminated through a broad range of channels, including television broadcasting, digital media platforms, official political speeches, educational materials, and social media networks.

3.1 Historical Narratives and the Politics of Memory

One of the most prominent elements of Russian political messaging has been the use of historical narratives that frame contemporary geopolitical conflicts through interpretations of past events.

Such narratives frequently emphasize themes of historical continuity, shared cultural heritage, and the legacy of the Soviet Union. Political discourse often portrays Russia and Ukraine as historically interconnected societies whose political separation is presented as a relatively recent development.

Scholars studying the politics of memory note that historical narratives can serve powerful mobilizing functions in times of conflict. By presenting current political struggles as extensions of historical conflicts, governments may attempt to generate emotional resonance and strengthen public support for political decisions.

In this context, historical references related to the Second World War and the defeat of Nazism have been widely used in Russian political rhetoric. These narratives frame contemporary geopolitical tensions as part of a broader historical struggle against perceived external threats.

3.2 Identity Narratives and Cultural Framing

Another important dimension of propaganda messaging involves narratives related to national identity and cultural belonging.

Russian state communication frequently emphasizes the idea of a shared cultural and linguistic space among populations historically connected to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. These narratives may portray Russia as a protector of Russian-speaking communities and as a guarantor of cultural continuity.

Within such frameworks, political developments in neighboring countries are sometimes interpreted through narratives of cultural conflict, in which geopolitical tensions are framed as struggles over identity and historical orientation.

Researchers note that identity-based narratives are particularly influential because they operate not only through political argumentation but also through symbolic representations of history, language, and cultural heritage.

3.3 Geopolitical Framing and Anti-Western Narratives

A third recurring element of Russian propaganda involves geopolitical narratives that frame international conflicts as confrontations between Russia and Western political institutions.

These narratives often describe global politics in terms of competing spheres of influence and emphasize the idea that Russia is resisting external pressure from Western states and international organizations.

Such framing can serve multiple purposes. Domestically, it may reinforce perceptions of national unity in the face of external challenges. Internationally, it may attempt to present the conflict as part of a broader geopolitical struggle rather than a bilateral dispute.

Scholars analyzing information warfare note that geopolitical narratives often function as strategic tools designed to shape international perceptions of legitimacy and responsibility in conflict situations.

3.4 Delegitimization of Ukrainian Statehood

Another notable feature of propaganda narratives concerns the portrayal of Ukrainian political institutions and national identity.

Russian political messaging has frequently questioned the legitimacy or historical foundations of Ukrainian statehood. Such narratives may portray Ukraine as politically unstable, externally influenced, or historically inseparable from Russia.

From the perspective of propaganda analysis, delegitimization narratives play an important role in shaping perceptions of conflict. By questioning the legitimacy of political institutions in opposing states, propaganda messaging may attempt to justify military actions or political intervention.

At the same time, scholars emphasize that the effectiveness of such narratives varies significantly across different audiences and social contexts.

4. Propaganda Infrastructure and Media Ecosystem

The dissemination of ideological narratives during armed conflict depends not only on the content of propaganda messages but also on the institutional and technological infrastructure through which these messages are transmitted. In contemporary information environments, propaganda campaigns are supported by complex media ecosystems that combine traditional broadcasting systems, digital platforms, and institutional communication networks.

In the case of Russia, the infrastructure supporting state messaging has evolved over several decades and includes a combination of state-controlled media organizations, digital communication platforms, and educational and cultural institutions.

4.1 State Media Organizations

Television remains one of the most influential communication channels within the Russian media environment. Major national television networks operate within a regulatory system in which the state plays a significant role in shaping editorial policy and information agendas.

These broadcast networks serve as central platforms for the dissemination of political messaging, official statements, and government narratives regarding domestic and international events. During periods of geopolitical conflict, television programming frequently incorporates political talk shows, analytical programs, and news segments that frame military and political developments within official strategic narratives.

Researchers studying media systems in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts note that centralized broadcasting structures allow governments to coordinate messaging across multiple channels simultaneously, thereby reinforcing specific interpretations of political events.

4.2 Digital Media and Social Platforms

In addition to traditional broadcasting, digital communication platforms play a crucial role in the contemporary information environment. Social networks, video-sharing platforms, and messaging applications have become important channels for the rapid dissemination of political content.

Within this digital ecosystem, messaging may spread through both official accounts and decentralized networks of bloggers, commentators, and online communities. The structure of digital platforms allows information to circulate quickly and to reach audiences across national borders.

Researchers analyzing digital propaganda campaigns have identified several mechanisms frequently used in online environments, including coordinated messaging, algorithmic amplification, and the use of automated accounts designed to increase the visibility of specific narratives.

At the same time, digital platforms also provide space for competing narratives and independent reporting, making the online information environment highly contested during periods of conflict.

4.3 Messaging Applications and Informal Communication Networks

Messaging platforms such as Telegram have become particularly influential in the information landscape associated with the war in Ukraine. Telegram channels operated by journalists, military commentators, political actors, and unofficial information sources have attracted large audiences seeking real-time updates about the conflict.

These channels often function as semi-independent information hubs where both official and unofficial narratives circulate simultaneously. Because messaging platforms allow rapid distribution of text, images, and video content, they have become key tools in modern information warfare.

At the same time, the decentralized nature of such platforms makes it difficult to fully control the flow of information, contributing to the complexity of the wartime media environment.

4.4 Educational and Cultural Institutions

Propaganda messaging may also be reinforced through educational and cultural institutions. Governments engaged in ideological communication campaigns often introduce educational programs or curricular materials designed to promote specific interpretations of history, national identity, and geopolitical developments.

Such initiatives may include revisions to history textbooks, the introduction of new civic education programs, and public cultural campaigns emphasizing national narratives.

Scholars studying political socialization note that educational institutions can play an important role in shaping long-term ideological perspectives, particularly among younger generations.

In conflict environments, the interaction between educational messaging and media narratives may contribute to the broader ideological framework through which societies interpret political events.

5. Collaborationist Structures in Occupied Territories

The emergence of collaborationist structures is a phenomenon historically associated with situations of military occupation. Throughout modern history, occupying powers have frequently relied on local political actors, administrative personnel, and social organizations to facilitate governance within occupied territories.

In contemporary conflicts, such collaborationist structures often emerge within complex political environments shaped by military control, institutional disruption, and intensive information campaigns.

The war in Ukraine provides a significant contemporary example of how occupation administrations and collaborationist political networks may develop under conditions of armed conflict.

5.1 Political and Administrative Structures Under Occupation

Following the occupation of certain Ukrainian territories, local administrative structures were established under Russian control. These administrations often involved a combination of appointed officials, local political actors willing to cooperate with occupation authorities, and newly created political organizations supporting integration with Russian governance structures.

In many cases, these administrative structures sought to present themselves as legitimate representatives of local populations. Public communication efforts frequently emphasized narratives related to stability, reconstruction, and political alignment with Russian institutions.

From a governance perspective, collaborationist administrations serve several practical functions. They facilitate the management of local services, maintain administrative continuity, and provide channels for communication between occupying authorities and local communities.

However, their legitimacy is frequently contested both domestically and internationally, particularly when they operate under conditions of military occupation.

5.2 Political Movements Supporting Occupation Authorities

Alongside formal administrative structures, various political movements and organizations have emerged in occupied territories that publicly support closer integration with Russia.

These organizations often participate in political campaigns, public events, and information activities designed to promote narratives consistent with Russian state messaging. Public demonstrations, political forums, and media campaigns may be organized to portray support for occupation administrations among local populations.

Researchers studying collaborationism note that such movements may attract participants for a variety of reasons, including ideological alignment, political opportunity, economic incentives, or security considerations.

The presence of organized political groups aligned with occupying authorities can play an important role in shaping the political landscape of occupied regions.

5.3 Information Campaigns and Legitimization Narratives

Information campaigns frequently accompany the formation of collaborationist structures. Propaganda messaging may portray local administrations and political organizations as legitimate representatives of the population or as participants in broader political transformations.

Media coverage, public communication campaigns, and symbolic political events are often used to reinforce narratives of legitimacy. Such narratives may emphasize themes such as historical unity, political stability, economic reconstruction, or protection of local communities.

Within this communication environment, propaganda messaging may contribute to shaping public perceptions of the conflict and of the political actors involved.

However, scholars emphasize that propaganda alone does not determine the emergence of collaborationist structures. Local political dynamics, security conditions, and social factors also play important roles in shaping the political behavior of individuals living under occupation.

5.4 Social and Political Dynamics of Collaboration

The phenomenon of collaboration during wartime is complex and cannot be explained solely through ideological influence. Historical research on occupied societies indicates that collaboration may arise through a combination of motivations, including political beliefs, personal security concerns, economic incentives, and pragmatic adaptation to changing political realities.

In some cases, individuals may cooperate with occupying authorities in order to maintain basic administrative functions or public services. In other cases, collaboration may reflect deeper political or ideological alignment with the occupying power.

Understanding these dynamics requires careful analysis of both structural conditions and individual decision-making processes within occupied societies.

The interaction between propaganda narratives, political opportunity structures, and local social conditions therefore represents an important area for further research.

6. Mechanisms of Political Indoctrination

In situations of prolonged armed conflict, propaganda campaigns often extend beyond immediate political messaging and may become part of broader processes of political socialization. Governments engaged in ideological communication frequently employ multiple institutional channels—media systems, educational institutions, and cultural policy—to reinforce particular narratives about history, identity, and political legitimacy.

Within occupied territories, such mechanisms can contribute to the construction of new political environments in which collaborationist institutions operate.

6.1 Education Systems and Historical Narratives

Educational institutions represent one of the most influential mechanisms of long-term political socialization. School curricula, textbooks, and classroom instruction can shape perceptions of national history, political identity, and international relations.

In conflict situations, occupying authorities may attempt to introduce revised educational programs designed to align local schooling systems with the ideological narratives promoted by

the occupying state. These programs may include changes to history curricula, civic education courses, and the symbolic representation of national identity within educational materials.

Scholars studying political indoctrination note that educational messaging can play a particularly significant role in shaping the perspectives of younger generations who are exposed to new institutional narratives over extended periods of time.

6.2 Media Narratives and Symbolic Messaging

Mass media continues to serve as a powerful instrument of political messaging during wartime. Television broadcasts, online news platforms, and social media channels disseminate narratives that frame political events and define the symbolic meaning of the conflict.

Propaganda messaging often relies on emotionally resonant themes such as historical memory, cultural identity, and national struggle. Repetition of such narratives across multiple media channels can contribute to the normalization of particular interpretations of political events.

Researchers studying propaganda systems emphasize that the effectiveness of such messaging often depends on the consistency and repetition of narratives across different communication platforms.

6.3 Cultural Policy and Symbolic Integration

Cultural policy can also play an important role in shaping political identities within contested territories. Public commemorations, cultural festivals, monuments, and symbolic events may be used to reinforce political narratives promoted by governing authorities.

In some cases, symbolic practices are designed to emphasize cultural continuity with the occupying state or to reinterpret historical events in ways that align with official ideological frameworks.

Such symbolic policies may contribute to the construction of new collective identities that support the political legitimacy of occupation administrations.

6.4 Digital Environments and Narrative Reinforcement

Digital communication platforms represent another important dimension of contemporary political influence. Social networks, messaging applications, and online video platforms allow political narratives to circulate rapidly and reach large audiences.

Within these digital environments, propaganda narratives may be reinforced through coordinated messaging campaigns, algorithmic amplification, and networked communities that share and reproduce ideological content.

At the same time, digital platforms also create spaces where competing narratives and alternative interpretations of events can emerge. As a result, the online information environment during armed conflict often becomes highly contested.

Understanding the interaction between traditional propaganda mechanisms and digital communication systems is therefore essential for analyzing ideological influence in modern conflicts.

7. Discussion

The analysis presented in the previous sections highlights the complex interaction between propaganda systems, political institutions, and social dynamics within territories affected by armed conflict. In contemporary warfare, propaganda campaigns are rarely limited to short-term political messaging. Instead, they often form part of broader strategies aimed at shaping perceptions of legitimacy, identity, and political authority.

The Russian information environment surrounding the war in Ukraine illustrates how state communication strategies may combine ideological narratives, media infrastructure, and institutional influence in order to construct a coherent interpretive framework for the conflict.

Within this framework, propaganda messaging performs several interconnected functions.

First, it provides ideological justification for political and military actions. Narratives emphasizing historical continuity, geopolitical confrontation, and cultural identity can be used to frame the conflict within broader historical or civilizational perspectives.

Second, propaganda messaging contributes to the construction of political legitimacy for new institutional arrangements established in occupied territories. Collaborationist administrations and political organizations often rely on narratives that present their activities as part of a broader process of political transformation or stabilization.

Third, propaganda campaigns may influence the social environment in which individuals make political choices. By shaping perceptions of identity, threat, and political belonging, information campaigns can affect how local populations interpret the presence of occupying authorities and the legitimacy of collaborationist structures.

However, the emergence of collaborationist institutions cannot be explained solely through propaganda influence. Historical research on occupation regimes demonstrates that collaboration often results from a combination of ideological persuasion, political opportunity structures, economic incentives, and coercive pressures.

In many cases, individuals operating within collaborationist institutions navigate complex political and social conditions. Their motivations may include pragmatic adaptation to new power structures, attempts to maintain local administrative functions, or personal political alignment with the occupying power.

Understanding the role of propaganda within this broader context therefore requires a multidimensional analytical perspective.

From an institutional standpoint, propaganda functions as part of a larger ecosystem of political influence that includes administrative structures, media systems, education policies, and cultural narratives. These mechanisms collectively shape the informational and symbolic environment in which political actors operate.

The war in Ukraine provides a particularly significant case study because it combines several factors characteristic of contemporary conflicts: large-scale military operations, intensive information warfare, digital communication environments, and the establishment of occupation administrations within contested territories.

Examining these dynamics contributes to a broader understanding of how propaganda systems interact with political institutions and social structures in modern conflicts.

8. Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between propaganda, ideological narratives, and the formation of collaborationist structures in the context of the war in Ukraine. The analysis demonstrates that modern conflicts increasingly involve complex information environments in which political messaging, media infrastructure, and institutional arrangements interact in shaping political perceptions.

Russian state propaganda surrounding the war has relied on a set of recurring narratives related to history, identity, and geopolitical confrontation. These narratives have been disseminated through a diverse communication infrastructure that includes state media organizations, digital platforms, messaging applications, and educational initiatives.

Within occupied territories, these narratives have interacted with local political dynamics and institutional transformations associated with occupation governance. Collaborationist administrations and political movements have emerged that operate within this broader ideological and informational environment.

The study suggests that propaganda campaigns can contribute to shaping the symbolic and political conditions in which collaborationist structures develop. At the same time, the emergence of such structures is influenced by a wide range of factors including security conditions, economic pressures, local political networks, and individual motivations.

Understanding these processes requires an interdisciplinary analytical approach that combines insights from political science, media studies, and conflict research.

Future research may further examine how propaganda systems evolve during prolonged conflicts and how digital communication environments transform the relationship between information warfare and political mobilization.

Such research is essential for developing a deeper understanding of the institutional dynamics that shape modern conflicts and the role of information influence in contested political environments.

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