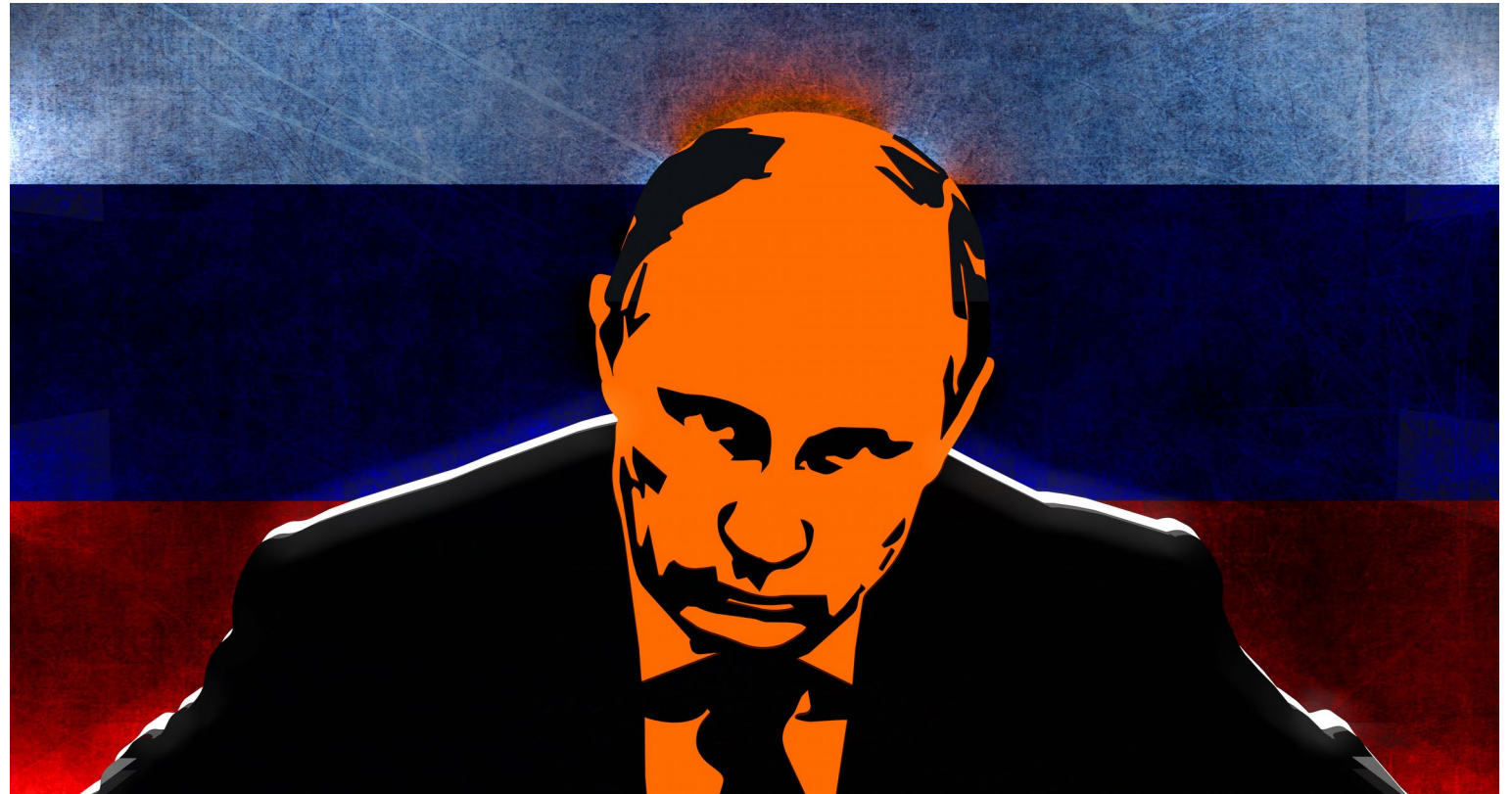# Vladimir Putin:
Cognitive and Motivational Changes, and Personal Threat Profile

May 16, 2023

Background

NSI has been analyzing Putin's speeches since 2013.

Immediately following the invasion, an additional analysis was conducted of Putin's speeches leading up to the onset of military action.

The taxonomy used was based not only on specific topics, but also emotive and culturally nuanced themes.

However, it raises the question: *Can changes in Putin's language also be used to gain insight into his mindset, or threat state, that reflected these changes?*

Photo 245789690 © Dmytro Larin | Dreamstime.com

To address this issue, discourse codes were mapped to the Oxford Brain Institute's *Personal Threat Profile (PTP),* an assessment used for hundreds of leaders worldwide:

- Measures what can trigger a "threat state" in leaders across 47 items within three categories:
    - *Protection*
    - *Participation*
    - *Prediction*
- The assessment also measures what is *not* important.
- When in a threat state, leaders are vulnerable to making sub-optimal decisions.

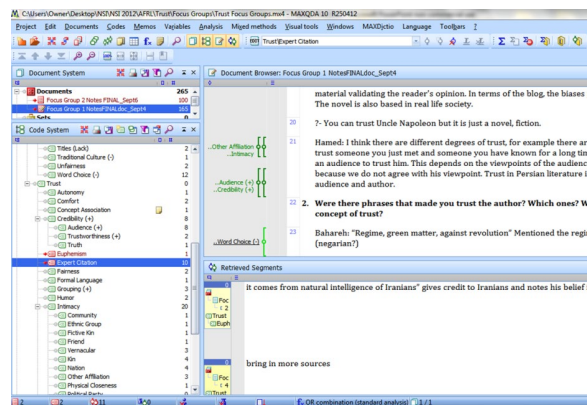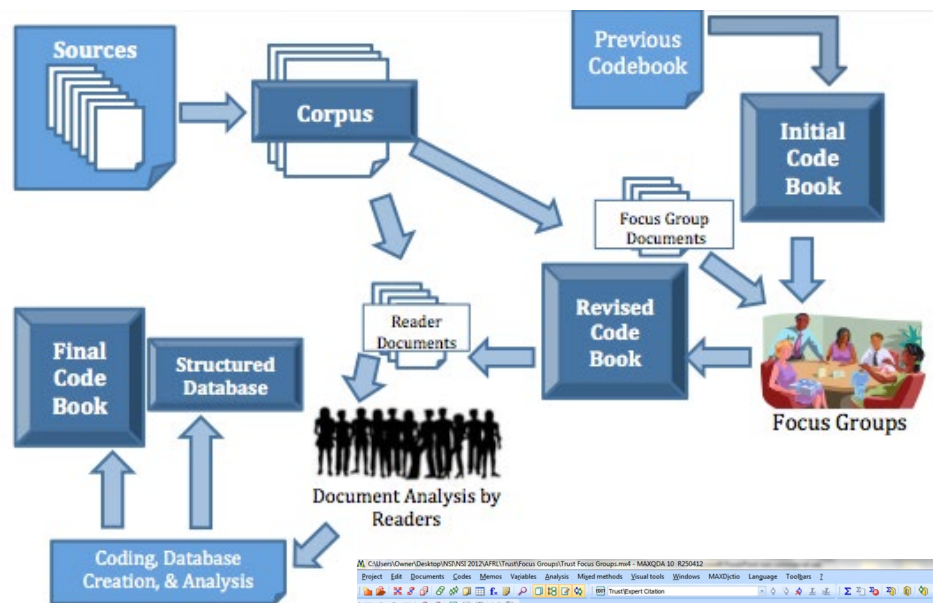# NSI Quantitative Discourse Analysis (QDA) Approach

- What people say reveals their worldview, values, objectives, sentiments and decision calculus, often unintentionally
- In some cases, people change their language use in advance of important actions, providing I&W
- Rules-based, useful for insights and training AI/ML

- Methodology
  - Cultural immersion/background research
  - Corpus collection
  - Codebook development
  - Focus groups/ethnographic research when appropriate
  - Coding
  - Quantitative Analysis

- Scales to
  - Leadership
  - States
  - Non-state organizations
  - Populations

- NSI Discourse Analysis Features
  - Sensitive to cultural nuances
  - Cross-cultural applicability
  - 10 years of application
  - Systematic & rigorous
  - Quantitative

- Applications
  - In- vs. Outgroups in Arabic news media
  - Taliban narratives
  - Iranian nuclear program
  - India – Pakistan conflict and negotiations
  - Israeli – Palestinian Security Agreements
  - I&W of Assad Regime actions
  - ISIS information operations
  - Middle East Conflict Networks
  - Eurasian Conflict Networks
  - I&W of Russian Gray Zone Activities
  - I&W North Korean nuclear testing
  - Negotiations with Kim Jong-un

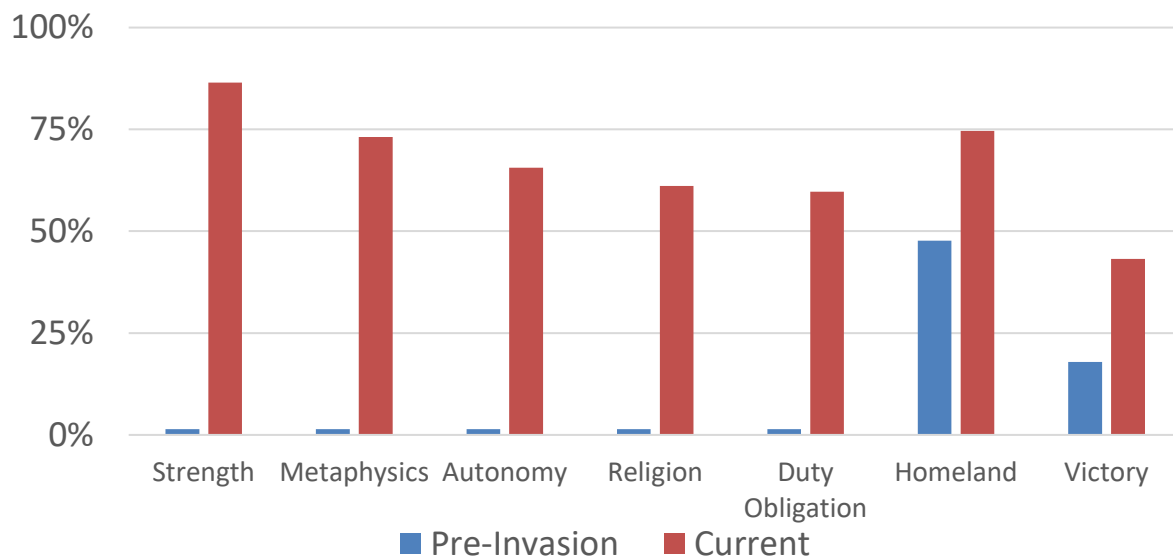# Critical Changes in Percentile Ranks: NSI QDA Codes

Notable Increases:
- Strength, Victory, Duty
- Homeland & Autonomy
- Metaphysics (sacredness, destiny, etc.) & Religion
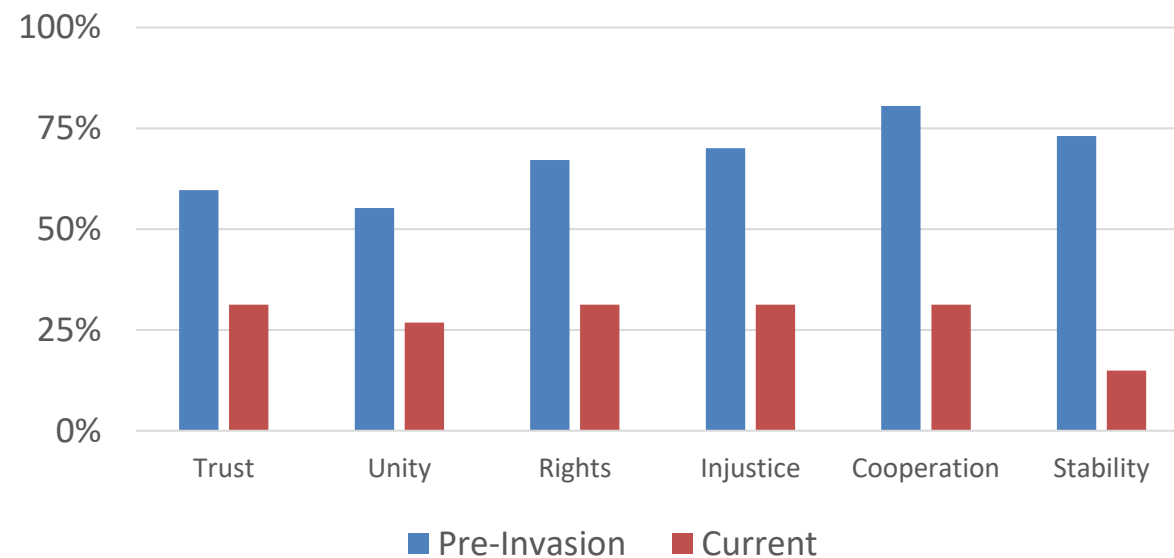 - Appeal to Russian Orthodox Church?, His popular base?, His true beliefs?

Notable Decreases:
- Unity, cooperation, stability
- Trust
- Rights & injustice
  - Less need to justify action

Increases in Percentile Rank

Decreases in Percentile Rank

Application to Putin DIALECT

- NSI QDA corpus contains 333 coded themes and rhetorical devices
- 56 codes were similar to PTP concepts
  - Examples: fear, fairness, ability, happiness, friendship, honor, protect, self-interest, surprise, trust, truth, victimization
- These 56 codes were mapped to 34 of the 46 PTP elements
- Frequencies, normed to document length, of QDA codes and corresponding PTP elements were generated for comparison

PTP Element	NSI Discourse Analysis Codes	
The need to feel physically safe	Fear	Protect
The need to feel emotionally safe in our relationships	Trust	
The need to feel financially secure		
The need to balance short and long term gain		
The need to know where we stand		
The need to be treated fairly	Fairness	Victimization
The need to be treated as equal partners in our relationships	Fairness	Equality
(No) Difficulty bouncing back from adversity	Overcoming	
The need to be and feel healthy – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually		
The need to be trusted	Trust	
The need to be able to trust others.	Betrayal	Trust
Prefer associating with people with similar interests	Identity	Enemy
The need to belong and be accepted	Patriotism	Identity
The need to differentiate ourselves from the group	Independence	
The need to be able to express different opinions	Disunity	Freedom
The need to play and work on teams	Loyalty	Friendship
The need to have a sense of self-respect and self-esteem	Honor	Servitude
The need to compare yourself to others		

Putin's Most and Least Critical Threat Dimensions

Putin's ***current high threat triggers*** focus on issues of identity, power and prestige, control, and adaptability

When jeopardized, these items have the potential to put Putin into a cognitive "threat state."

Putin's ***current low threat triggers,*** that are likely to not matter to him as much, are characterized by:

- Lack of concern about stability
- Lack of concern about emotional security
- Low importance of trust or authenticity
- Tolerance of surprises and risk

Less Important	Most Critical Triggers
The Need for Stability	Prefer Associating with Like Minded Others
The Need to be Trusted	**The Need for Power and Influence**
Emotional Safety	Patriotism/Identity
The Need to Trust Others	**The Need for Status and Prestige**
Dislike Surprises	The Need for High Degree of Control
The Need to Minimize Risk	**Need to Have Self Respect/ Self Esteem**

Items in **bold** do not match findings from pre-invasion speeches

Changes in Threat Profile Over Time: What's Critically Important

2013-2017
The Need to be Treated as an Equal Partner
Fair Treatment
The Need for Authenticity
The Need to be Valued, Respected and Approved of by Others
The Need to Have Commitment
The Need to Make Things Happen

Pre-Invasion
Physical Safety
Fair Treatment
Prefer Associating with Like Minded Others
Patriotism/Identity
Need for High Degree of Control
Need to Be Right

Current
Prefer Associating with Like Minded Others
The Need for Power and Influence
Patriotism/Identity
The Need for Status and Prestige
The Need for High Degree of Control
Need to Have Self Respect/ Self Esteem

Changes in Threat Profile Over Time: What's Not Important

Pre-Invasion
Emotional Safety
Trust
Need for Things to Stay the Same
Dislike Surprises
Difficulty Dealing with Adversity
Need for Be Different vs Others
Adaptability

Pre-Invasion
Emotional Safety
Overcoming Adversity
Trust
Need Approval of Others
Dislike Surprises
Certainty About Future
Need for Authenticity
Need to Minimize Risk

Current
The Need for Stability
The Need to be Trusted
Emotional Safety
The Need to Trust Others
Dislike Surprises
The Need to Minimize Risk

Key Inferences

- Putin is in a heightened threat state versus a year ago

- Matters of strength, nationalism, and religiosity are stronger than previously measured levels

- His needs for power & influence, status & prestige, and self-esteem are higher than ever; his need for stability is lower
  - Could indicate a propensity for elevated risk-taking

- What does the religiosity mean? Is he appealing to political supporters or has he adopted a more religious worldview?
  - Sacred values are those for which people will make sacrifices. What is Putin willing to sacrifice?