

**Racial violence in Russia; Putin's racial state and his segregationist attributes along with other factors that could potentially contribute to a racist fuelled Russia.**

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**Introduction**

This essay will aspire to give examples of the types of racial violence that occur in contemporary Russia due to the formation of the state and its underlying racist legislation (Svirina, 2007). The first section will define racism and focus in on the racial violence that occurs in Russia to provide some background information before continuing on to the main aspects. After this, three main aspects in separate sections will be critically analysed. These will be; racial violence in regards to education, racial violence in regards to the Government, its policies and its parties, and finally, racial violence committed by various gangs and and the prison sentences they receive, whilst also focusing on some case studies of racially violent political parties, such as the Skinheads. The racially violent political parties will be discussed in the gangs and prisons section because although some people label them as "political parties", others label them as "gangs", hence the reason for the slight overlap. These three sections will attribute to the main body of the essay which will be followed by a further section on what happens next in the area of racial violence and discourse in the Russian Federation, and the more widespread Russia. The first main aspect to be analysed is that of education and the racial violence which surrounds it. Examples of a historical nature will be given in this section, as well as current ones, in order to fully gage the extent of the racial violence which occurs in Russian schools and Universities, against ethnic minority students and teachers, and the lengths in which racist individuals will go to in order to proclaim their right as to what they feel is the dominant race (Leviyeva, 2005). The second aspect to be analysed is the Russian Government, its policies and its parties which are associated with racial violence and discourse. (Small violent neo-Nazi parties such as the Rusскиye movement will be critically assessed in a further section, along with a critical analysis of the Russian Skinhead movement). It will be the far right nationalist parties that will take up most of this Russian Government section, however, nationalism is not singularly a far right notion, more and more Russians across the spectrum of politics are identifying and organising around a full national identity which is sculpted with a hint of racism. More of this will be discussed in the main body of this essay. The third and final section of the main body is the analysis of racial violence and discourse of gangs and political parties, focusing in on the Skinhead movement and other various neo-Nazi parties. The punishment and prison sentences given for the crimes committed that are related to racism and racial violence will also be critically analysed. As mentioned, far right neo-Nazi groups will be discussed in more depth in this section due to the link with gangs and the penal system. These three aspects have been chosen because they link in with the formation of the state with its racial violence and discourse which is the main theme of this essay. A further section, as stated, will comprise of an analogy of what happens next in racial Russia? Will the state which is full of nationalism be able to change to an equal opportunist country? These notions will be discussed further before finally concluding with an answer to the title question of is Russia Putin's racial state, and the various other factors that could contribute to a potentially racist fuelled Russia.

## **What is race, racism and racial violence?**

Racism in itself can be defined as a “negative outlook on an individual or individuals who are of a different race”; however, the actual concept of racism is laden with heavy negativity in regards to moral and political issues, and is even said to have become a “term of political abuse” (Miles, R and Brown, M. 2003). A strong argument was further made by Goldberg (1993) that a “definition of racism needs to be grounded based on empirical observation or racism, not a priori theorising” (Miles, R and Brown, M. 2003). Race is defined as the way humans look, physical characteristics and their line of descent, where each form of the human race originates from. For example, certain specifications of the Caucasian race appeared in “racial taxonomies which were developed in natural history, anthropology and ethnology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Law, 2010). Furthermore, Carl Linnaeus, in his *Systema Naturae* (1758) attempted to classify all living things into genus, species and variety, or subspecies, and identified six varieties of *Homo sapiens*; including *europaeus* (white, ruddy and muscular), *asiaticus* (yellow, melancholic and inflexible), *afēr* (black, indulgent, phlegmatic) and *monstrous* (other deviant, disabled forms). Based in a historical context, race was defined in Marxist Leninist terms as “socio-historical backwardness not biological inferiority”, with some groups seen as “doomed to extinction” and others persecuted for having the “wrong” ethnic origins” and claims to group identity (Law, 2010). However, some sociological theorists believe that the concept of race is socially constructed, that “races” are not real because we are all human, and therefore there is one human race. Racialization is how race becomes embedded in different contexts, such as, segregation, extermination, expulsionism and forced simulation. The creation of hierarchies of peoples based on customs, social mores and traditions, for example the Ossetes were a “barbarous, predatory and miserable race of men” and the Koriaks were “suspicious, cruel, incapable of either benevolence or pity” (Layton, 2001). This process of categorising transformed the Russian state:

“...the Muscovite state had formally divided the frontier population into the Orthodox (also known as Russians) and the foreigners/infidels, whose ‘otherness’ had usually been interpreted in terms of Oriental ‘perfidy’[deception] or raw-eating beastliness.” (Slezkine 2001, p.35).

The term “racial violence” is defined as a crime or crimes committed for negative reasons against another person due to their race and racial background; “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities, and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race” (Olzak, 1990). Xenophobia is a term also used in the area of racism, racial violence and racial discourse; which is defined as “an unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or of that which is foreign or strange” (Pain, 2007).

## **The racial violence that surrounds non-Russians in the Russian education system**

“Did you ever wonder what happens to the foreign students in countries undergoing massive political and socioeconomic changes? Imagine a student from Western Africa who goes to study in the Soviet Union in 1990. The Soviet Union collapses in 1991, the student becomes a target of hate crimes and the government turns a blind eye” (Leviyeva, 2005).

As can be seen from Leviyeva’s quote, racial violence and hatred definitely does exist in Russia, but authorities apparently in no way condemn this. The first section of this essay will look at various cases of racial violence which have occurred in the Russian education system, from both a historical perspective and also a current perspective. Brief comparisons will be

made in order to see if the racial violence that surrounds the Russian education system has increased or decreased over the years, and the allegation of a blind eye being turned will also be discussed in more depth in the next section of this essay.

After World War Two, the Soviets offered education to students from various countries such as Africa, Latin America and Asia, and for decades, generations of different nationalities studied at Soviet Universities. In 1963 a huge anti-racism protest was triggered by the death of a Ghanaian medical student, Edmund Assare-Addo, whose corpse was “discovered in a stretch of wasteland along a country road leading to the Moscow outer ring highway. The unlikelihood of a student venturing into that remote spot of his own accord led Ghanaians and other African students to interpret Assare-Addo’s death as a racially-motivated hate crime” (Hessler, 2006). By the 1980s these relations began to take on a negative stance, and racially violent incidents had risen from the occasional few, to a more dramatic number (Gleason Carew, 2008). In 2003, a fire killed forty two foreign students at the Friendship University in Moscow. Aleksander Brod said “racist attitudes lie deep within the Russian psyche” and that “Nazi ideology gives rise to hatred of all non-Russians”. Similarly, racism has become highly dynamic and deeply entwined and imbedded in Russian society and culture (Goldberg, 2008) which will be difficult for non-Russians to stand up against, especially in the education system.

However, it was not just African students and those of dark skin who were targeted. The racialization of Caucasians was also seen to be increasing; they were said to have appeared to be the new target for racist violence in the Russian Federation after the millennium:

“Among the hated “blacks,” there are visitors from the Caucasus and Central Asia, indigenous RF (Russian Federation) residents with darker features, people who speak Russian with an accent and those who speak Russian much better than their offenders, citizens of the former USSR, and foreigners who arrive from afar. Essentially, this includes all of those people who ethnically differ from a certain, undefined “Slavic type” — especially those who look swarthier or “more oriental.” The Roma belong in this category.” (Kulaeva, S. Moscow Helsinki Group 2002, p.368).

More recently, in 2011 it came to attention that the university authorities were also guilty of alleged racial negativity. Dmitry Dubrovski, who was a human rights expert and professor of History at the University of St. Petersburg discovered that students who were from the North Caucasus region had to inform the University of personal information, although Russian students did not; “everyone from the North Caucasus has to fill out a couple of forms, in which they are questioned about their relatives: where they live, if they’re members of a rebel group, what property they own, what cars they drive and so on” (DW Education, 2011). Students from the North Caucasus were not the only foreign people suffering from xenophobia. According to an education article wrote in 2011 by Michael Lawton, (DW Education, 2011) it is thought that there are over one hundred and thirty thousand foreign students at Russian universities, many originating from China, Vietnam and African countries. These individuals relocate to Russia for a better education than what their own countries can offer, yet many suffer persecution and racial taunts whilst attending, some even leading to violence (Lawton, M. 2011). In 2007, foreign students in Moscow were told to stay inside for a “few days” due to increased activity of the skinheads (Harding, L. 2007). This calls for question as to why the Russian Government and local authorities allowed such freedoms for neo-Nazism, knowing the full extent of what could easily happen to those individuals of a foreign background, racial taunts and at worst, extreme racial violence resulting in loss of life.

### **Is the Russian Government racist?**

This second section will analyse the Russian Government, its policies and some of its parties, however, the racially violent far right groups will be analysed more critically in the section of

Russian gangs and prisons. Racial slurs are adopted by politicians and citizens alike, with over half of Russian people supporting the principle of “Russia is for Russians” and similarly “Russia for ethnic Russians”. A high profile disturbing case which illustrates how serious these racial slurs are and how much they can escalate, was the murder of Khursheda Sultonova, a nine year old Tajik girl murdered in St. Petersburg in February 2004 by a group of teenagers armed with baseball bats, chains and knives whilst aggressively repeating the slogan “Russia for the Russians”. In regards to Russian politics, an online poll showed over one third of Russians admitted they would vote an ultranationalist party into power, if those kinds of parties were legal. This would suggest that those kinds of parties do exist, and are underlying in the Russian politics system. In a further online poll, Russian opposition supporters voted for a leader; Alexey Navalny came first, who is known for his anti-Caucasus sentiments, and the one which is most alarming is Maksim Martsinkevich who came third, a convicted criminal and skinhead leader who publicly vowed to kill “negroes” and “Tajik girls”. In 2008 the Levada Center documented collected evidence on the level of racial hostility across the Russian Federation towards different minority groups based on a public opinion poll (Levada Center 2008). The highest levels of racial hostility were aimed at Gypsies; forty per cent, and Chechens; thirty six per cent. Other specific racialised groups including the Chinese; they were measured at receiving sixteen per cent of racial hostility, along with Tadjiks and Azherbajjanis; which both measured at receiving fifteen per cent. Twelve per cent hostility was measured against the Jews and eleven per cent against the African population (VLE document, 2015). Other indicators of current levels of hostility include the finding that “exactly half of Russians favour some form of segregation, which is where people from different national groups live separately from each other, that forty two per cent are opposed to inter-ethnic marriages, and lastly, that a majority of fifty seven per cent felt that it was important to let foreigners know that too many of them are unwelcome and undesirable” (VLE document, 2015). Furthermore, in regards to the current Russian Government, President Vladimir Putin called for limiting “internal migration from culturally and behaviourally incompatible” regions of Russia, which in terms of reality, is modern day segregation (World policy Blog, 2015). And although Putin, in earlier years, made numerous public statements “condemning anti-Semitism, extreme nationalism and racism, the State’s official complicity, passivity and acquiescence to these types of hate crimes remain disturbing” (Leviyeva, 2005).

In regards to the various parties in the Russian government, the far right nationalists aim to seek revenge against foreigners in Russia. For example the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) whose leader is Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and the Rodina Party, which translates to “Motherland”, is lead by Dmitry Rogozin. There are also small violent neo-Nazi groups and “political nationalists” such as the Russkiye movement and the Novaya Sila party (which will be discussed in a further section). These groups promote an ethno-nationalist agenda in Russian politics. Furthermore, Russian nationalism in its extreme forms resembles fascism with ethnic Russians being the supreme embodiment of the Aryan race and is best represented in the Russian National Unity (RNU) who were formed in 1990. The RNU advocated stopping mixed marriages, boosting the fertility rate of ethnic Russians and a struggle against ‘parasitic’ peoples like the Roma and Jews (Law, I. VLE Document, 2015).

From a historical perspective, Stalin believed;

“A nation is primarily a community, a definite community of people. This community is not racial, nor is it tribal. The modern Italian nation was formed from Romans, Teutons, Etruscans, Greeks, Arabs, and so forth. The French nation was formed from Gauls, Romans, Britons, Teutons, and so on. The same must be said of the British, the Germans and others, who were formed into nations from people of diverse races and tribes. Thus, a nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people. On the other hand, it is unquestionable that the great empires of Cyrus and Alexander could not be called nations, although they came to be constituted historically and were formed out of different tribes and races.” (Stalin, 1913; cited in Šlâpentoh, V. E. 1989).

But from a current perspective, it can be seen that beliefs have changed over Stalin's ideas of a nation as a community. If his beliefs were believed and upheld by the rest of the world, then racism would most likely not be as rife as it is today, and nationalism would perhaps never have begun (Kaiser, R.J. 1994). However, nationalism can no longer be classed as a singularly far right notion. More and more Russians from across the political spectrum are identifying and organising their parties and referendums around a national identity tinged with racism (Simonsen, S.G. 2001).

### **Racist gangs and racially violent political groups; and their sentences in Russian prisons**

In this section, racially violent gangs and political groups will be discussed and critically analysed, along with the Russian prison system and the penalties awarded for committing racially violent acts. The Rusскиye movement will be discussed along with the formation of the infamous skinhead movement; the skinhead movement will be analysed at depth in order to understand their nationalist beliefs, and how they came to be. The Rusскиye movement is a coalition of various fascist and anti-migrant groups, it is said to "combine legalistic sounding rhetoric against 'migrants', a term used to refer to all ethnically foreign non-Russian groups, with undisguised and unhidden neo-Nazism (Verkhovsky, A. 2012).

The skinhead movement first originated in Russia in the 1990s; however by this time they were changed beyond recognition (Grishin, 2008). In the 1970s neo-Nazis became known as "boneheads" and the skinheads formed two parties which were the Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP) and the Red and Anarchist Skinheads (RASH) who were a left-wing anti-racist, anti-fascist skinhead group (Grishin, 2008). It was the collapse of the Soviet Union that fashioned the emergence of the violent skinheads that are known today. Due to this, Russia is now a country where skinhead violence against ethnic minorities and non-Russians has become a serious issue. Arnold (2009) describes the Russian skinhead movement as:

"...overt masculinity, racist internationalism, and violence. The masculinity of the groups refers to the fact both that skinheads are mostly male and profess traditional masculine ideals like strength and defense of their communities. Their racism refers to beliefs in the innate (genetic) superiority of the white race and the consequent identification of all other races as the enemy" (Arnold, R. 2009).

Furthermore, according to Tarasov, Russia contains between sixty thousand and sixty five thousand skinheads who are violently active in at least eighty five different cities (Shnirelman; cited in Worger, P. 2012). These skinheads commit horrendous acts of violence daily against members of ethnic minorities, foreigners and human rights activists (Varger, M. 2008) most usually violent rioting and the infliction of stab wounds up on their victims, sometimes up to sixty stab wounds per victim. Richard Arnold discusses three specific acts of racial violence all from the year 2006 to illustrate some of their activities and what they are prepared to do. First, in January 2006 a young man by the name of Alexander Koptsev burst into a synagogue in central Moscow armed with a knife and aggressively proclaimed to "kill all the Jews" and then proceeded to violently attack eight Jewish people before being "disarmed and brought to the ground by the Rabbi" (Kozhevnikova and Verkhovsky; Cited in Arnold, R. 2009). Investigators reportedly found neo-Nazi literature at Koptsev's home after the attack. Later in 2006, twelve people were killed and a total of sixty six affected when neo-Nazis planted a bomb at the Cherkizovo market in Moscow where mainly traders of Asian descent worked. Two young individuals were arrested and they allegedly blamed "nationalist motivations and propaganda" for their actions (Parfitt; Cited in Arnold, R. 2009). Furthermore, in September 2006, young local individuals in the northern town of Kondopoga (Kozhevnikova; Cited in Arnold, R. 2009) attacked Caucasian-owned businesses following a brawl in what is now "widely being called a pogrom." (United Council of Former Soviet Jewry (UCSJ); Cited in

Arnold, R. 2009). Pogroms concentrate on the property of an ethnic minority and attack many targets; usually with the non-Russian defending their property is where the racially violent attributes begin (Brooks, W. 1995).

Neo-Nazi political parties and groups, some of which were discussed earlier in the racist Government section, are “organizations that practice military training, organize rock concerts, participate in nationalist marches, distribute literature defaming other races, and commit violence against those who are racially different” (Lee, M.A. 2013). Only the most far right extremist neo-Nazis carry out the most lethal attacks against members of ethnic minorities and non-Russians, they are able to do this due to their “planning, sophistication, and access to modern technology” (Law, I. 2010). For example, on the twelfth of August, 2008, a video was leaked online with the apparent execution of two non-Russian men. The three minute clip, posted by a LiveJournal.com user who identified themselves as "antigipsyone," shows a Dagestani (from the North Caucasus) and a Tajik (from Central Asia) kneeling on the ground with their arms and legs tied together. The swastika symbol was displayed in the background. The audio of the video recorded the hostages to have said "...we were arrested by Russian national socialists". After this statement, both men were executed; one by beheading and the other was shot in the head. It was later confirmed that the execution was staged; however, the video still brought extreme attention to the neo-Nazi threat in Russia (Grishin, A. 2008). The National Socialists of Rus and Dmitrii Demushkins' Slavic Union are further examples of racially violent far right neo-Nazi groups (Laruelle, M. 2004).

In 2010, a court sentenced nine skinheads to prison time for racially violent attacks resulting in murder. These attacks were filmed and put on the internet. The group of skinheads called themselves the “white wolves” (Liss, A. 2010), because they were in their late teens the highest prison sentence allowed by Russian law is twenty three years. Prosecutors remain reluctant to attribute racial motivation to killings of ethnic minorities; instead, they often put them down to simple "hooliganism" (Eke, S. 2007). Campaigners say this is because the authorities have traditionally turned a blind eye to racist killings, and used nationalism as a political weapon. In 2007, neo-Nazis tried to attack homosexuals during a gay pride march in Moscow; the police allegedly stood by and let it happen (SOVA; cited in Eke, S. 2007). This is known as “predatory policing”; it occurs where police officers mainly use their authority to “advance their own material interests rather than to fight crime or protect the interests of elites. These practices have the potential to seriously compromise the public’s trust in the police and other legal institutions, such as courts” (Gerber, T. P. and Mendelson, S. E. 2008). An example of this practice possible being used was a prison sentence given due to “hooliganism” and not a “racially aggravated attack”, it was the murder of nine year old Tajik girl Khursheda Sultonova in 2004. Her seven attackers knifed her to death (BBC News, 2006). The court sentenced the teenagers to prison time from eighteen months to five and a half years, defence lawyers appealed but the jury rejected prosecution claims that the murder was ethnically motivated (BBC News, 2006).

It can be seen from the cases discussed that the problem of nationalist-racist violence in contemporary Russia is gradually increasing, but is prison sentencing due to “racially motivated crimes” increasing? It did increase in 2007. President Vladimir Putin once again publicly condemned all “negative, racially motivated acts” (The Moscow Times, 2001). This movement is regarded as a key figure in combatting racist injustice and inequality because following Putin’s statement, an increased surge occurred in the sentencing and conviction of criminalised individuals who committed racially violent crimes in Moscow; it was an increase of nearly fifty per cent from 2007 to 2008 (SOVA, 2009).

### **What happens next in terms of racial violence in Russia?**

Russia has seen a surge of racially-motivated attacks in recent years. In 2009 alone, neo-Nazis are believed to have killed more than 70 people (Liss, A. 2010). They admit that the police are now cracking down on skinhead gangs, but even so, last year alone, dozens were killed, and hundreds injured simply for not looking Slavic, and for speaking with a foreign accent. The high level of violence against ethnic minorities in Russia is said to be “over-determined” by a combination of “post-Soviet social and economic social changes, the brutalizing consequences of a long counter-insurgency campaign, and government passivity (and sometimes complicity) in the face of racist violence and hate speech” (Arnold, R. 2015). Thus, Russia’s systematic racial violence is analytically closer to “outright ethnic conflict than to a form of criminal deviance that could aptly be termed as ‘hate crime’” (Arnold, R. 2015). The question to be asked and at least thought about is will the racial violence that surrounds Russia continue, or will it be eradicated? Is there a way to stop such movements like the skinheads, when Universities are telling their foreign students to stay indoors at certain times? Unfortunately there is no answer to be given in this moment, the world can only wait and see what the future holds for the problem of racial violence in Russia.

### **Conclusion: is Russia Putin’s racial state? And is Russia a country fuelled by Racism?**

This essay has finally reached the last concluding section. The main characteristics of race, and racial violence have been defined and the three main aspects of the essay have been critically discussed, those being, racial violence surrounding the Russian education system, racial violence and discourse in relation to the Russian government, its policies and some of its parties; and the last aspect which was the critical analysis of racial crimes committed by political parties sometimes known as gangs or movements, and the sentencing in which they receive for their racially motivated crimes, which brought to light the fact that many Russian courts do not pass sentence for racial crimes, only “hooliganism”. Various examples of racially motivated crime have been critically discussed, such as the brutal murder of nine year old Tajik girl Khursheda Sulstonova in 2004, whose attackers were jailed for hooliganism, not racially motivated murder (BBC News, 2006). A brief section on what will happen next in Russia was also discussed, with the concluding point that nobody knows if the racial violence that surrounds Russia will stop. It may increase if the state becomes even more nationalised (McCarthy, D., & Puffer, S. 2002) or it may decrease when a new President comes into power. However, now that racial violence in Russia has recently become a subject of interest to scholars and analysts of Russian politics (Arnold, R. 2015), as mentioned earlier in the essay, a further question to think about is that of Putin’s racial state, with his modern day segregationist thinking and underlying negative racial beliefs, it could be asked whether he is the right man for Russia. A country that is said to have racism in their “psyche” with Government policies tinged with racial attributes, but yet in earlier years was also known as a non-racist state under communism; “Moscow was imagined as the capital of a multinational brotherhood of peoples and was used as the stage from which to project the image of the Soviet Union as the country which had discovered the cure for racism” (Roman, M.L. 2002). Which gives an even greater importance to the question of is Russia a country fuelled by racism, and in particular racial violence? The world will have to wait and see what the future holds for Russia and the racial violence and discourse that has already ultimately left its mark.

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