

Mapping Russian International Relations: A Topic Modelling Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the landscape of Russian International Relations (IR) scholarship, offering a quantitative analysis of thematic trends in Russian IR publications using data from the OpenAlex bibliographic database. We employed Structural Topic Modeling (STM) on 13,705 articles published between January 2000 and May 2024, ensuring methodological rigor through language standardization, text preprocessing, and exclusion of irrelevant texts. While prior research on Russian IR has mostly been descriptive, often focusing on typologies or prescriptive arguments, our study uncovers several underexplored attributes. Notably, Soviet-era legacies persist thematically rather than paradigmatically, and developmental issues such as inequality and justice are disproportionately represented. The systemic approach remains dominant, with Russian scholarship striving to integrate regional perspectives into the global context. Traditional focuses on Russian foreign policy and its great-power status persist, with a shift from identity issues to reinforcing this status. Despite strained relations with Europe, it remains a key focus in Russian works. Interestingly, topics on education and culture now surpass those on conflict and security, although this may be influenced by data characteristics or OpenAlex indexing.

KEY WORDS

Russian IR, theory of international relations, scientific school, topic modelling, topics

Postpositivism deems all knowledge to be socially overdetermined and culturally conditioned. From this perspective, national schools are gaining visibility due to the latest crisis of globalization, which has particularly affected the international scholarship¹. It has led to a rapid regionalization of science, confined within national borders. In Russia, this process is most noticeable in international relations (IR)² studies and the way the Russian IR community perceives itself. Notably, numerous Russian and Russian-born researchers have previously assessed the state of the Russian IR school, indicating a deep self-reflection. With the passage of time, it is now appropriate to reassess its development. The arguments put forward by earlier scholars require additional verification and correction, considering new trends in science and the global context. Interest in the Russian IR school became particularly intense in the 2000s and again in the mid-2010s, the latter period coinciding with the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West.

This paper analyzes the Russian school during the current period of significant breakdown in relations with Western countries. The contribution of this paper is to further conceptualize (and self-reflect on) Russian IR science. The aim of our article is *not* to explore the evolution of Russian IR or *to create* new typologies. The literature review shows these tasks have already been addressed and, we deem, quite successfully. Instead, our goal is to identify the prevailing topics in Russian academic discourse on IR. OpenAlex helps us uncover not only the trends in 21st-century Russian IR, but also its position within the global flow of academic knowledge.

Our research is valuable not only for what we have found, but also how we did it. This article presents the first quantitative study on Russian IR scholarship. Some findings align with earlier attempts to deconstruct the Russian school, but previous methodologies were largely intuitive descriptions of Russian IR, interspersed with philosophical deliberations. In contrast, topic modeling used in our study reduces subjectivity by ranking topics based on their frequency in sampled articles. This approach provides a more accurate assessment of Russian scholars' aspirations.

Our analysis is divided into five additional sections. We begin Section 2 by reviewing the current trends as regards Russian IR, highlighting the main issues previously addressed by scholars. Then, in Section 3, we recreate our methodology with a step-by-step description of primary data processing and visualization. We present our empirical analysis in Section 4 by interpreting data and grouping related topics. We conclude in Section 5 by discussing what our findings tell us about Russian IR.

What is Russian IR?

A meta-review of the existing literature on Russian IR highlights several key trends. *Primo*, researchers draw a sharp contrast between the Soviet and post-Soviet academic field. *Secundo*, much of the review literature focuses on categorizing Russian scholars. *Tertio*, many works exhibit a persistent prescriptive orientation, with authors concerned about the issues facing the Russian school and proposing various solutions. *Quarto*, there is a considerable bias towards typologizing theoretical branches to the detriment

1 See, for instance, in IR: Сушенцов, Неклюдов, Павлов 2024.

2 By international relations (IR) we mean a discipline rather than interactions among actors in the international arena.

of regional and problem-oriented directions in IR. Nevertheless, since the theoretical element is central to any discipline, it is reasonable to primarily review this component. The question of whether a cohesive school of IR exists in Russia remains a contentious one within the academic community.

During the Soviet period, the development of international relations as an independent discipline faced significant challenges due to the primacy of Marxism-Leninism. Yet, with the advent of the Cold War, Soviet foreign policy and the study of IR existed within a realist paradigm, masqueraded as leftist ideology.¹ It was not until the 1960s that timid attempts to analyze IR theory and methodology began, primarily by exposing the weaknesses of “bourgeois theories” incompatible with the Marxist vision.² The Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), which launched *World Economy and International Relations*, played a major role in this effort. In the late 1960s, several articles were published providing an overview of IR theory.³ Although the works were at the intersection of international law, economics, and history, these academic fields remained separate.⁴ Some Western developments were later incorporated into IMEMO’s applied analyses, but no monograph was released at the time.⁵ Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) also focused on developing an intellectual product and providing critical reflection on Western theory, particularly for exploring negotiations. During this period (1976–1990), the Problem Laboratory of System Analysis in International Relations at MGIMO conducted, *inter alia*, quantitative studies.

Meanwhile, institutes under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR dealing with particular regions (e.g. Africa, Latin America, etc.) advanced the comprehensive knowledge of these parts of the world. Not only did they take into account global dimensions, but also resorted to distinguishing features of regions when analyzing IR there. The Institute for US and Canadian Studies stands out in this regard, acting as a crucial think tank for applied analysis of global politics. The legacy of those organizations continues to significantly shape the substance of Russian IR today.

Theoretical generalizations of foreign policy analysis logically followed this trend of engaging with non-Marxist ideas.⁶ The first textbook on IR theory came out during this time and even saw a second edition.⁷ These milestones reflect that the Soviet IR school emerged roughly 20 years behind Western countries. Foreign scholars recognized the existence of an IR school in the USSR, who stated that Moscow possessed all necessary attributes except for a dedicated university training program in IR.⁸

After the Soviet Union’s implosion, Russia ushered in the *paradigma osvoyeniya* (“development paradigm”). Alexei D. Bogaturov identified a *pokoleniye izloma* (“fractured generation”) of middle-aged scientists who had a grasp on Marxism but consciously jettisoned it. Young Russian scholars shied away from scientific communism towards

1 Lebedeva 2004.

2 Amelicheva, Zubitska 2016.

3 Проблемы теории международных отношений 1969.

4 Тюлин 1997.

5 Основы теории международных отношений 2022.

6 Хрусталеv 1984.

7 Антюхина-Московченко et al. 1988.

8 Light 1988; Lysnh 1987.

Westernized dogmatism. This assimilation paradigm produced not original analyses but the translation and description of Western concepts. Bogaturov stated that IR cannot be fully developed until the non-Western world is comprehended.¹ Nikolai A. Kosolapov, in turn, noted that it is virtually impossible to get the Russian school acknowledged without obtaining “intellectual sovereignty.” In addition, he posited that international relations at large ought to move towards examining issues of global governance and development, gradually drifting away from seeking to answer the question of how to achieve peace and avert confrontation.²

In the early 1990s, there was an urgent need to rethink the study of IR history as past narratives no longer met the demands of new domestic and global political realities. According to Bogaturov, the Russian IR school developed largely from the study of historical processes, which described and explained causality, whereas theory was meant to interpret it. Thus, he singled out three schools of Russian IR: MGIMO, IMEMO, and Moscow State University (MSU), impersonated by Mark A. Khrustalev, Vladimir I. Gantman, and Pavel A. Tsygankov, respectively.³ Their contributions to the development and popularization of IR theory are significant, with the first textbook on IR theory authored by Tsygankov being particularly noteworthy.⁴ Khrustalev distinguishes IMEMO (theory) and MGIMO (applied analysis) as two primary schools.⁵ The landscape of Russian IR scholarship is also understood through the lens of Universalist and Pluralist schools of thought,⁶ both advocating for Russia’s continued engagement within the broader IR community, albeit with differing emphases. Since then, other IR schools in St. Petersburg, Tomsk, Vladivostok, and Moscow (RUDN University, Higher School of Economics, etc.) have taken shape. Their evolution and thematic content warrant a separate study. What is important in our review is the proliferation of IR schools across the country and the symbolic breaking of MGIMO and IMEMO’s monopoly on this field of knowledge.

Another approach to typologizing the Russian school is based on dividing its representatives into realist and liberal camps, with Marxists, neo-Marxists, and constructivists also represented. Most contemporary studies on IR in Russia focus on realist themes, such as bilateral ties, Russia-NATO relations, the structure of the world order, and international security. The distinction between realism and liberalism is also evident in the separation of international relations and world politics into two disciplines.⁷ Alexey D. Bogaturov and Tatiana A. Shakleina identified at least six types of realism in Russian IR.⁸ During the 1990s, realist thought experienced a significant resurgence, solidifying its position as a dominant theoretical framework. It helped both intellectual and political communities in Russia articulate nation’s interests and priorities to global stakeholders. Realism provided a valuable analytical optics for understanding the structure and polarity of the emerging world order, offering insights into the dynamics of power and influence in a post-Cold War era.⁹

1 Богату́ров 2000.

2 Косолапов 1998.

3 Богату́ров 2020.

4 Цыганков 2007.

5 Хрустале́в 2006.

6 Tsygankov A., Tsygankov P. 2014.

7 Богату́ров 2004; Мировая политика 2005.

8 Богату́ров 2003; Шаклеина 2004.

9 Shakleina, Bogaturov 2004.

Postmodernist and Marxist approaches are represented in a smaller number of applied studies. Despite the diversity of theoretical trends and civilizational views, Russian researchers share a similar perception of how the modern world has to be organized, with the nation-state and its sovereignty remaining key elements. This focus explains why Russian studies pay considerable attention to the problem of national sovereignty.¹ Additionally, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of IR as a science are examined, including metatheories.²

Liberal concepts, previously characterized by a more radical discourse, such as neglecting state sovereignty, have become less visible. Tsygankovs indicate a fundamental divide between liberals advocating for closer integration with the West and those emphasizing a more nationally-oriented approach. This dichotomy mirrors the longstanding debate between cosmopolitan and communitarian thoughts. Cosmopolitans call for a unified global community, highlighting homogenizing forces that transcend national boundaries, while communitarians emphasize the importance of national and cultural identities in fostering democratic institutions in a globalized world.³ Russian liberal IR remains heavily influenced by Western, particularly American, intellectual paradigms, with this dominance more pronounced for liberalism than any other theoretical perspective in the field.⁴

Specific features of the Russian school encompass Westernization, isolationism, and pluralism. The structuring of Russian IR reflects the search for national identity, explaining the diversity of theoretical perspectives.⁵ This pursuit of identity is characteristic of both Russian foreign policy and academic discourse.⁶ Over the past centuries, Russia has developed a rich but disparate theoretical foundation in IR. In addition, one might distinguish three main philosophical traditions in Russian IR: Westernism, *étatisme*, and *tretyerimstvo* ("Moscow, third Rome" concept). Westerners advocate for imitating Western models, *étatists* espouse the independence of statehood, and *tretyerimtsy* ("Moscow, third Rome supporters") focus on preserving original cultural values.⁷ Makarychev and Morozov suggest that the trajectory of Russian IR is portrayed by persistent tension between pro-Western transitological approaches and the prevailing relativist perspective anchored in the doctrine of multipolarity.⁸

The discipline's evolution is marked by extensive expansion of topics and studies.⁹ A strong correlation exists between IR theory and foreign policy in Russia, underscored by shared concerns regarding Russia's standing. They include aspirations for a more just and stable international system as Moscow views it, and resistance to the perceived dominance of Western powers.

Igor A. Istomin and Andrey A. Baykov note that the Russian school occupies an intermediate position between American and European traditions when it comes to epistemological underpinnings.¹⁰ Alexei V. Fenenko argues that Russia has adopted

1 Лебедева, Харкевич 2016.

2 Алексеева 2019.

3 Tsygankov P., Tsygankov A 2004.

4 Tsygankov A., Tsygankov P. 2007.

5 Нойманн 2004.

6 Tsygankov P., Tsygankov A. 2008.

7 For more information regarding this typologization, see: Tsygankov A., Tsygankov P. 2010; Цыганков А. 2014.

8 Makarychev, Morozov 2014.

9 Лебедева 2013.

10 Истомин, Байков 2015.

a unique approach to studying IR, explaining why Russian authors are not welcomed in American journals.¹ Istomin's study shows that Russian dissertation research on IR from 2000 to 2010 generally reflects key directions of Russian foreign policy formulated in official conceptual documents. Another conspicuous feature is perceiving the world as a set of regions interacting and competing with each other, a perspective prevalent in most studies.² Currently, Russia has advanced in regional studies³ as a meta-discipline linking country studies with global theories.⁴

Among the challenges faced by Russian IR are hyper-theorization, insufficient empirical material, and the financial crisis in Russian science.⁵ The collapse of the Marxist paradigm continues to affect the general state of Russian social sciences.⁶ To confront these hurdles, several prescriptions have been written out. Marina M. Lebedeva calls for creating a unified political theory beyond pure international relations to avoid the "provincialization" of Russian science.⁷ Andrei Tsygankov suggests that moderate isolationism, pragmatic cooperation with the outside world, and deeper knowledge of cultural perceptions would tackle or, at least, mitigate the crisis in Russian IR.⁸

Researchers still disagree on whether the Russian school has fully formed. Lebedeva, Kharkevich, and Tsygankovs offer a negative answer to this question. Kuznetsov and Kozinets respond positively, emphasizing that the crisis of global IR has contributed to the formation of new national schools in the non-Western world.⁹ Thus, they place the Russian school in this category.

The presented literature review reveals that researchers are inclined to typologize Russian studies. They tend to generate predominantly prescriptive arguments or recount the evolution of Russian IR. Some works address topics; yet methodology and source selection are often not explicitly detailed, except in Istomin's article.

Methodology

Data processing and corpus refinement

The article utilizes the OpenAlex bibliographic database, the successor to the Microsoft Academic Graph (MAG). MAG was designed as an open alternative to Google Scholar and gained popularity due to its metadata provided under a permissive open license. The database includes over 250 million records of publications from 230,000 sources, organized into scientific objects such as authors, articles, organizations, publishers, and funding bodies.¹⁰

The data was extracted by the "International Relations" concept with filters for country and affiliation. Additional refinement was achieved through a full-text search for

1 Фененко 2016.

2 Истомин 2018.

3 The term "regional studies" better conveys the semantic content of Russian *zarubezhnoye regionovedeniye* than "area studies." The latter is a purely practical discipline with an apparent skew toward particular non-Western regions, which mostly exploits economic methods. See: Bates 1997.

4 Воскресенский 2020.

5 Цыганков А., Цыганков П. 2003.

6 Российская наука международных отношений ... 2005.

7 Алексеева, Лебедева 2016.

8 Tsygankov A. 2003; 2014.

9 Кузнецов, Козинец 2016.

10 OpenAlex technical documentation, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://docs.openalex.org/>.

the word “theory” and its derivatives. The results of the query are presented in Table 1. Despite the applied filters, some topics unrelated to the theory of international relations remained; this inaccuracy cannot be corrected during data extraction, as concepts are automatically formed based on the Leiden University language model.¹ The final corpus² comprises 14,177 publications from January 1, 2000, to May 11, 2024.

To analyze and thematically model the text, primary data processing is necessary due to the following inaccuracies in the corpus:

1. Not all articles in the dataset have abstracts, which excludes the possibility of thematic modeling. These publications have been removed. Given that a plethora of articles written in the 1990s contained no abstracts, we have decided to focus more on 21st century publications, removing this methodological obstacle. On top of that, the 1990s saw financial and personnel shortages, exacerbated by the creeping geopolitization of Russian IR, which greatly impinged on the theoretical understanding of world politics during this period.³ Meanwhile, the 21st century has brought about a renaissance in this discipline, which is implicitly illustrated by inexorable indexing of Russian IR papers in international databases, including OpenAlex.

2. The abstracts are written in different languages (English, Russian, or both). Using the cld3⁴ neural network, the language was automatically determined, and the Russian-language texts were translated into English via the Google Translate API.⁵ This operation standardized the texts, but reduced the accuracy of the model due to the limitations of machine translation.

3. Different forms of the same word (e.g., “look” and “looks”) are considered different objects from a computational perspective. Therefore, lemmatization⁶ was performed to standardize word forms.

4. Stop words (pronouns, particles) and high-frequency words that do not carry significant semantic weight (e.g., “author,” “analyze,” “examine,” “article,” “issue,” “attention,” “use”) were removed. Additionally, punctuation marks and service characters were excluded.

As a result of these procedures, the size of the corpus was reduced to 13,705 articles.

Topic modelling

To depict the thematic structure of corpus, this research employs the Structural Topic Model (STM). STM is a statistical model used to analyze and interpret textual data, such as documents, articles, or other forms of text content. It extends traditional models, such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation, by incorporating metadata and document-level covariances. The model not only determines the thematic structure, but also

1 OpenAlex Topics, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://docs.openalex.org/api-entities/topics>; N. J. van Eck and L. Waltman, “An Open Approach for Classifying Research Publications,” Leiden Madtricks, January 24, 2024, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://www.leiden-madtricks.nl/articles/an-open-approach-for-classifying-research-publications>.

2 The corpus is a text database.

3 Косолапов 2006, 99.

4 “Compact Language Detector v3 (CLD3),” Github, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://github.com/google/cld3>.

5 “Package ‘polyglot,’” accessed June 1, 2024, <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/polyglotr/polyglotr.pdf>.

6 Lemmatization includes methods of reducing words to the infinitive form.

explores the relationships between topics. STM is particularly useful for large text arrays and cases requiring the study of connections between topics.

A common issue in thematic modeling is choosing the number of topics. This decision can be guided by additional metrics. The `stm` package includes the function `searchK()`, which provides the following metrics to determine the optimal number of topics (the results are shown in *Figure 1*):

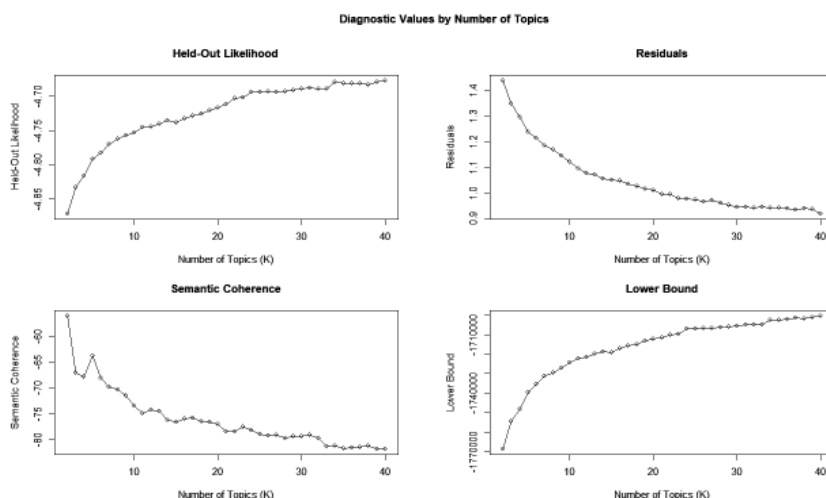
1. Semantic Coherence: In semantically coherent models, words within the same topic should co-occur within the same document.¹ This metric is based primarily on FREX (Frequency and Exclusivity), which identifies words that are both frequent in and exclusive to a topic of interest.²

2. Residual dispersion: When the model is correctly specified, the multinomial likelihood implies a residual dispersion of $\sigma^2 = 1$. If the value is greater than one, the number of topics is likely set too low.³

3. Held-out Likelihood: These functions use the document completion method to create and evaluate held-out likelihood. The idea is to hold out a fraction of the words in a set of documents, train the model and use the document-level latent variables to evaluate the probability of the held-out portion.

Figure 1.

**OPTIMAL NUMBER OF TOPICS COUNTED
BY SEARCHK() FUNCTION
ОПТИМАЛЬНОЕ КОЛИЧЕСТВО ТЕМ, РАССЧИТАННОЕ С ПОМОЩЬЮ
ФУНКЦИИ SEARCHK()**



Source: Authors' calculations based on the OpenAlex database.

¹ Mimno et al. 2011.

² Bischof, Airoldi 2012; Roberts et al. 2014.

³ Taddy 2012.

Table 1.

**SAMPLE OF OPENALEX DATASET
ПРИМЕР НАБОРА ДАННЫХ OPENALEX**

display_name	publication_date	primary_location_landing_page_url
Segregation and the Quality of Government in a Cross Section of Countries	2011-08-01	https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.101.5.1872
Decentralization and political institutions	2007-12-01	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubecon.2007.02.006
Planning and designing open government data programs: An ecosystem approach	2016-01-01	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.01.003
How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics	2010-10-01	https://doi.org/10.1017/s026021051000135x
The Joint Design of Unemployment Insurance and Employment Protection: A First Pass	2008-03-01	https://doi.org/10.1162/jeea.2008.6.1.45
Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches	2005-12-01	https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318415
Shock Therapy versus Gradualism Reconsidered: Lessons from Transition Economies after 15 Years of Reforms	2007-02-28	https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ces.8100182
Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy	2015-02-04	https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2015.1005903
Disinformation and the media: the case of Russia and Ukraine	2017-01-06	https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716686672
Eurasian Economic Union: Current state and preliminary results	2017-03-01	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ruje.2017.02.004
COVID-19 pandemic as a trigger for the acceleration of the cybernetic revolution, transition from e-government to e-state, and change in social relations	2022-02-01	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121348
Universities vs. research institutes? Overcoming the Soviet legacy of higher education and research	2022-10-10	https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-022-04527-y
Analytical aspects of anti-crisis measures of public administration	2023-01-24	https://doi.org/10.26425/2309-3633-2022-10-4-5-13
Incompatibility of political strategies as a labile external cause of a geopolitical conflict: a milestone goal of the parties	2024-01-09	https://doi.org/10.26907/2079-5912.2023.6.14-22
Trends in Western strategy: compression of the «Anaconda loops»	2024-01-09	https://doi.org/10.26907/2079-5912.2023.6.34-45
Involution and Destitution in Capitalist Russia	2000-07-01	https://doi.org/10.1177/14661380022230633
The Effective Number of Parties	2009-09-10	https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809339538
Performance incentives and economic growth: regional officials in Russia and China	2015-07-04	https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2015.1089411
Inside the post-Soviet de facto states: a comparison of attitudes in Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria	2014-09-03	https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2015.1012644
Central Asia — twenty-five years after the breakup of the USSR	2017-09-01	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ruje.2017.09.005
Imperial nostalgia or prudent geopolitics? Russia's efforts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space in geopolitical perspective	2014-04-14	https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2014.900975
Economic Cycles, Crises, and the Global Periphery	2016-01-01	https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41262-7

Source: Authors' calculations based on the OpenAlex database.

Table 2.

**SRESULTS OF STM
РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ STM**

Topic 1 Top Words:	Highest Prob: concept, content, understand, term, theoretical, basis, reveal FREX: concept, content, understand, term, theoretical, basis, reveal Lift: content, concept, understand, term, theoretical, reveal, basis Score: content, concept, understand, theoretical, term, reveal, basis
Topic 2 Top Words:	Highest Prob: russian, federation, devote, note, good, regard, discuss FREX: federation, russian, devote, note, discuss, regard, current Lift: federation, russian, devote, note, regard, discuss, current Score: federation, russian, russia, devote, regard, discuss, note
Topic 3 Top Words:	Highest Prob: historical, history, science, modern, note, much, different FREX: historical, science, history, modern, note, different, much Lift: science, historical, history, modern, note, different, place Score: science, history, historical, modern, note, century, place
Topic 4 Top Words:	Highest Prob: political, party, result, can, lead, change, reason FREX: party, political, result, lead, reason, change, can Lift: party, political, reason, lead, give, however, change Score: party, political, country, result, change, lead, can
Topic 5 Top Words:	Highest Prob: law, comparative, international, modern, conclusion, order, subject FREX: law, comparative, subject, conclusion, order, point, give Lift: law, comparative, subject, point, order, give, conclusion Score: law, comparative, international, subject, modern, order, conclusion
Topic 6 Top Words:	Highest Prob: education, high, institution, level, develop, development, experience FREX: education, high, institution, level, develop, experience, change Lift: education, high, institution, level, experience, need, develop Score: education, high, institution, level, system, field, development
Topic 7 Top Words:	Highest Prob: war, great, world, first, reason, show, new FREX: war, great, world, first, reason, show, numb Lift: war, great, reason, world, first, show, numb Score: war, great, world, first, reason, show, numb
Topic 8 Top Words:	Highest Prob: state, regional, current, level, context, problem, base FREX: regional, state, current, level, context, problem, reason Lift: regional, state, current, level, context, reason, condition Score: regional, state, current, level, context, mechanism, problem
Topic 9 Top Words:	Highest Prob: right, implementation, good, way, particular, regard, problem FREX: right, implementation, way, particular, regard, relate, good Lift: right, implementation, particular, way, regard, relate, create Score: right, implementation, way, particular, good, regard, mean
Topic 10 Top Words:	Highest Prob: european, union, country, good, new, far, conclude FREX: european, union, country, far, good, conclude, experience Lift: union, european, country, far, conclude, experience, good Score: union, european, country, good, new, far, experience
Topic 11 Top Words:	Highest Prob: cultural, people, culture, phenomenon, modern, context, form FREX: cultural, culture, people, phenomenon, context, modern, different Lift: culture, cultural, people, phenomenon, context, example, modern Score: culture, cultural, people, phenomenon, modern, form, context
Topic 12 Top Words:	Highest Prob: national, security, strategy, field, goal, need, aim FREX: national, security, strategy, field, goal, aim, need Lift: security, national, strategy, goal, field, need, aim Score: security, national, strategy, field, goal, need, approach
Topic 13 Top Words:	Highest Prob: work, reveal, carry, devote, make, result, good FREX: work, carry, reveal, devote, note, result, make Lift: carry, work, reveal, devote, note, create, aspect Score: carry, work, reveal, devote, result, make, study
Topic 14 Top Words:	Highest Prob: s, view, role, focus, good, make, understand FREX: s, view, focus, role, point, aim, understand Lift: s, view, focus, role, point, note, understand Score: s, view, focus, role, understand, make, first
Topic 15 Top Words:	Highest Prob: russia, relation, cooperation, country, two, sphere, current FREX: russia, cooperation, relation, country, two, sphere, current

- Lift: cooperation, russia, relation, two, sphere, country, current
Score: cooperation, russia, relation, country, two, sphere, field
- Topic 16 Top Words:
Highest Prob: system, information, function, mean, type, new, condition
FREX: information, system, function, mean, type, condition, new
Lift: information, system, function, mean, type, create, condition
Score: information, system, function, type, mean, new, condition
- Topic 17 Top Words:
Highest Prob: interest, conflict, situation, different, regard, reason, problem
FREX: conflict, interest, situation, different, regard, reason, however
Lift: conflict, interest, situation, regard, different, reason, however
Score: conflict, interest, situation, different, regard, however, reason
- Topic 18 Top Words:
Highest Prob: power, model, can, structure, make, two, one
FREX: power, model, can, structure, two, one, make
Lift: power, model, can, structure, two, different, create
Score: power, model, can, structure, two, make, one
- Topic 19 Top Words:
Highest Prob: legal, regulation, relation, nature, method, subject, basis
FREX: legal, regulation, nature, subject, method, mechanism, relation
Lift: legal, regulation, nature, mechanism, phenomenon, subject, mean
Score: legal, regulation, method, relation, mechanism, subject, nature
- Topic 20 Top Words:
Highest Prob: approach, practice, principle, case, propose, subject, establish
FREX: principle, practice, case, approach, propose, subject, establish
Lift: principle, case, practice, propose, approach, subject, establish
Score: principle, case, practice, approach, propose, subject, establish
- Topic 21 Top Words:
Highest Prob: influence, factor, socio, process, determine, change, context
FREX: factor, influence, socio, determine, process, context, change
Lift: socio, factor, influence, process, impact, determine, context
Score: socio, factor, influence, process, determine, change, political
- Topic 22 Top Words:
Highest Prob: military, force, special, general, role, condition, increase
FREX: military, force, special, general, role, condition, increase
Lift: military, force, special, general, role, condition, pay
Score: military, force, special, general, role, increase, condition
- Topic 23 Top Words:
Highest Prob: soviet, period, year, show, create, role, numb
FREX: soviet, period, year, show, create, numb, role
Lift: soviet, period, year, create, show, numb, reason
Score: soviet, period, year, show, create, numb, first
- Topic 24 Top Words:
Highest Prob: value, idea, modern, understand, mean, base, nature
FREX: value, idea, modern, mean, understand, nature, base
Lift: value, idea, modern, understand, mean, nature, basis
Score: value, idea, modern, understand, mean, nature, base
- Topic 25 Top Words:
Highest Prob: process, government, will, lead, make, impact, role
FREX: government, process, will, lead, impact, make, however
Lift: government, will, process, lead, impact, make, however
Score: government, will, process, lead, impact, increase, make
- Topic 26 Top Words:
Highest Prob: policy, foreign, country, goal, relation, main, focus
FREX: foreign, policy, goal, country, focus, main, relation
Lift: foreign, policy, goal, focus, country, key, regard
Score: foreign, policy, country, relation, goal, main, focus
- Topic 27 Top Words:
Highest Prob: much, time, one, century, first, become, new
FREX: time, century, much, begin, become, first, one
Lift: begin, century, time, many, since, year, become
Score: begin, century, time, much, first, year, become
- Topic 28 Top Words:
Highest Prob: region, potential, area, development, far, level, increase
FREX: region, potential, area, far, level, development, increase
Lift: region, potential, area, far, level, increase, aim
Score: region, potential, area, level, development, far, increase
- Topic 29 Top Words:
Highest Prob: economic, country, development, economy, develop, increase, good
FREX: economic, country, economy, development, increase, develop, impact
Lift: economy, economic, country, development, increase, impact, develop
Score: economy, economic, country, development, increase, develop, impact
- Topic 30 Top Words:
Highest Prob: support, create, far, term, much, good, among
FREX: support, create, far, term, among, much, goal
Lift: support, create, far, term, among, goal, view
Score: support, create, term, far, much, among, year
- Topic 31 Top Words:
Highest Prob: study, research, scientific, method, field, theoretical, problem
FREX: research, scientific, study, field, method, theoretical, comparative

	Lift: scientific, research, theoretical, field, study, method, comparative Score: scientific, research, study, method, theoretical, field, comparative
Topic 32 Top Words:	Highest Prob: activity, form, organization, special, pay, structure, various FREX: activity, organization, form, pay, special, structure, various Lift: organization, activity, form, pay, special, structure, various Score: organization, activity, form, special, pay, structure, type
Topic 33 Top Words:	Highest Prob: material, source, document, fact, base, good, study FREX: source, document, material, fact, base, basis, good Lift: document, source, material, fact, base, relate, basis Score: document, material, source, fact, base, study, good
Topic 34 Top Words:	Highest Prob: within, framework, interaction, exist, mechanism, context, good FREX: framework, within, interaction, exist, mechanism, context, specific Lift: framework, within, interaction, exist, mechanism, context, point Score: framework, within, interaction, mechanism, exist, context, specific
Topic 35 Top Words:	Highest Prob: development, main, consider, formation, present, feature, stage FREX: formation, stage, feature, main, development, present, consider Lift: stage, formation, feature, describe, trend, main, present Score: stage, development, formation, feature, main, present, consider
Topic 36 Top Words:	Highest Prob: public, part, sphere, good, way, relation, general FREX: public, part, sphere, way, relate, general, relation Lift: public, part, sphere, way, relate, function, conclude Score: public, part, sphere, relation, way, function, general
Topic 37 Top Words:	Highest Prob: result, study, method, base, group, numb, datum FREX: result, group, datum, method, numb, identify, level Lift: datum, group, result, numb, identify, level, show Score: datum, result, method, group, study, identify, level
Topic 38 Top Words:	Highest Prob: social, society, life, sphere, new, modern, change FREX: social, society, life, sphere, new, change, modern Lift: social, society, life, sphere, modern, phenomenon, new Score: social, society, life, sphere, modern, new, change
Topic 39 Top Words:	Highest Prob: international, world, global, order, new, role, context FREX: international, global, world, order, new, key, context Lift: global, international, world, order, new, key, context Score: global, international, world, order, new, relation, country
Topic 40 Top Words:	Highest Prob: take, place, account, need, experience, make, develop FREX: take, account, place, need, experience, develop, make Lift: account, take, place, need, experience, due, possible Score: account, take, place, need, experience, develop, make

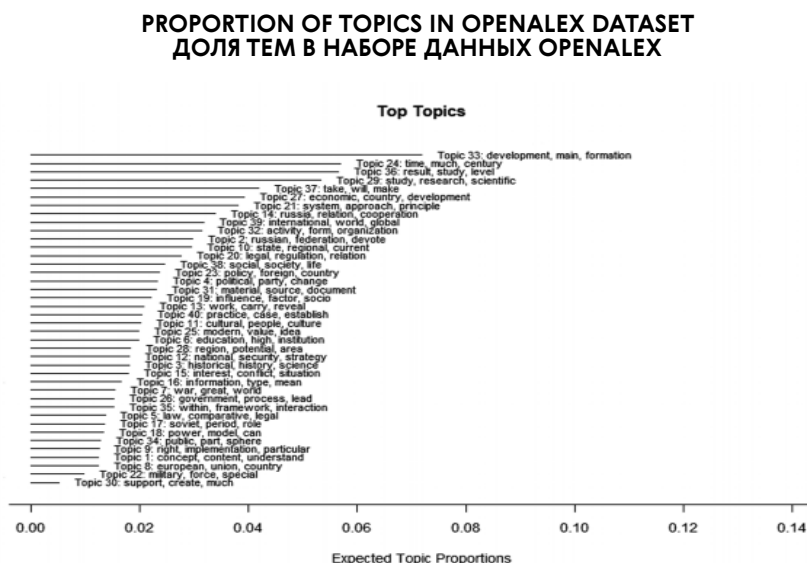
Source: Authors' calculations based on the OpenAlex database.

Some topics may partially overlap with other branches of political science (e.g., 36 and 38), such as political institutions and public administration. This overlap underscores the interdisciplinary nature of IR as an academic field, demonstrated by the incorporation of international law, world economics, and history into IR research. Such integration highlights the intricate interconnections within all spheres of the political domain especially when it comes to global governance, international regimes and public diplomacy.

We then interpreted the topics based on the derived keywords. Previous attempts to summarize Russian IR trends were crucial for understanding our topic modeling output. The inference process followed this algorithm:

1. We excluded topics that had general scientific or structural meanings but did not carry a substantial meaning.
2. We interpreted each topic based on trends identified in the meta-review.
3. We grouped related topics by their general semantic proximity.
4. We identified the frequency of the studied topics (Figure 2).
5. We compared our results with the dominant perceptions of Russian IR.

Figure 2.



Source: Authors' calculations based on the OpenAlex database.

Results and Interpretation

The above-mentioned topics can be categorized into several distinct blocks based on the content presented. Insofar as a single research paper may encompass a complex array of interdisciplinary themes, it is natural to group them together. Yet, certain topics (4, 13, 20, 30, 31, 33, 37, 40) were omitted at this stage due to a lack of identifiable content. After describing and interpreting the remaining 32 topics, we assessed their relative significance for Russian IR.

The first topic explores the theoretical aspects of the IR sphere ("concept," "theoretical"). Although most IR articles and monographs aim to deliver practical results and recommendations, they are grounded in conceptual foundations. Unsurprisingly, Russia holds a central place in the academic literature on this matter. The emergence of the Russian Federation coincided with global changes at the end of the 20th century (Topic 2: "russian," "federation"). Studying national foreign policy forms the basis of any national IR school. Some scholars may prioritize exploring foreign policy and national security strategy over other issues (Topic 12: "national," "strategy," "goal," "aim"). This observation may also relate to the consensus in the Russian academic environment on prioritizing the role of states in world politics. By the same token, bilateral relations remain a highly relevant issue (Topic 15: "russia," "relation," "cooperation," "two"). For a long time, Russian academia focused primarily on Moscow's interaction with other global stakeholders. While international relations are replete with conflicts and crises, cooperation continues to captivate Russian IR theorists.

During the Soviet period, political science was viewed as a product of the capitalist world. Consequently, political processes in the international arena were mostly interpreted from a historical perspective (Topic 3: "historical," "history," "modern"). This historical interpretation persists among some Russian scholars, often with timeframes

not extending beyond the 21st century. It can be attributed to the robust historical school in the country and university curriculums that present IR as a historical narrative rather than comprehensive political knowledge. Additionally, scholars examine the Cold War and the Soviet Union's role in establishing and maintaining the post-war world order (Topic 23: "soviet," "period," "role"). To date, the processes triggered by the bipolar confrontation between Moscow and Washington have dictated world politics. Most issues raised by leading theorists during the second half of the 20th century remain unresolved (Topic 27: "time," "century," "new"). Thus, the new millennium compels Russian scholars to integrate the Soviet legacy into international findings and acknowledge the challenges of the new era.

The international legal dimension of political engagement was slightly affected by ideological overtones, which is why Soviet approaches in this realm were actively employed well after the USSR's dissolution. Practical experience and theoretical studies conducted at the crossroads of law and politics inspire Russian IR theorists (Topic 5: "law," "comparative," "international," "order"). Both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation advocated for their rights in the international field (Topic 9: "right," "implementation," "problem"). The Russian IR school takes stock of the legal background in world politics (Topic 19: "legal," "regulation," "relation," "nature"). In the same vein, the English school relied heavily on legal assumptions put forward by modern-era jurists and philosophers. Amidst escalating sanctions and legal standoffs between Russia and the West, this topic is likely to attract ever-increasing attention from domestic scholars. A multidisciplinary approach is called for in this type of research, promising valuable insights. The importance of a legal framework holds not only for bilateral relations, but also for the workings of international organizations.

Studies addressing war-related issues enjoy a special place in IR, with the Russian school being no exception. The major problem theorists grapple with concerns the means for achieving peace. Consequently, the scope of world wars, local and regional conflicts, internationalization, and intervention arise anew, including the protracted global confrontation between Russia and the West (Topic 7: "war," "great," "world," "reason"). Nuclear capabilities have also become an inherent feature of war studies. The evolution of armed forces, both conventional and unconventional, commands special attention. Theorists have yet to determine which qualitative traits will prevail in the 21st century (Topic 22: "military," "force," "role," "condition"). The global upsurge of armed struggles reveals the banality of war and its inexorable transformation due to ongoing technological development. Russian experts are also interested in the genesis of armed conflicts and related matters (Topic 17: "interest," "conflict," "situation," "reason," "problem").

Alongside the existential dichotomy between war and peace, world order is equally significant among theorists. The Russian school attends to this aspect with greater interest, given Moscow's role as one of the two centers of power during the Cold War (Topic 39: "international," "world," "global," "order"). Russia's standing in the post-bipolar world is central to its scholars (Topic 14: "role," "point"). Since the 1990s, numerous publications have analyzed the liberal world order under the United States and its potential demise, as well as the transformation from a unipolar to a multipolar world. System structure and the conditions governing actors in this field are typically deemed to be derived units of analysis (Topic 16: "system," "condition"). The Russian

school endorses the systemic approach to examine how the system functions (Topic 32: "form," "organization," "structure"). Power, with its distribution impacts directly to structure, is a major component within this paradigm (Topic 18: "power," "model," "structure"). The same holds true for the concept of influence which mirrors some properties of power (Topic 21: "influence," "factor," "process"). What is more, studies on world order and system are often undergirded by neorealist assumptions.

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) is a specific offshoot of the Russian IR school, aimed at analyzing and projecting the country's foreign policy (Topic 26: "policy," "foreign," "goal," "relation"). Russian scholars zero in on detecting the implications of a given FP action and analyzing foreign policy goals. Decision-making in this area is partly explored by tracing bureaucratic practices and interest groups (Topic 25: "process," "government," "impact"). This is further supported by examining other state institutions regarding their influence on foreign policy. This cluster of topics overlaps with Topic 12 insofar as foreign policy processes shape strategies and doctrines. Among other things, FPA also conceptualizes various means of interaction with other actors (Topic 34: "interaction," "mechanism"), transcending the boundaries of international relations and world politics. At the end of the day, despite the insularity of foreign policy decision-making, it determines, by and large, foreign policy outcomes (Topic 36: "public," "sphere," "relation," "general").

The axiological dimension of IR, dealing with normative-value aspects of international politics and its ideological pillars, is also noteworthy (Topic 24: "value," "idea," "base," "nature"). The cultural aspect of world politics belongs to this trend. In this case, Russian scholars examine how actions should be conducted in the international realm (Topic 11: "culture," "modern," "context"). Strategic or diplomatic culture is studied from this standpoint. With a few reservations, soft power can be included in this cluster. Higher education as a conduit of culture strengthens institutions and disseminates norms (Topic 6: "education," "high," "institution," "development"). These topics reflect the evolution of modern society, albeit from an IR perspective (Topic 38: "society," "modern," "change").

Economic development in countries and regions is another dominant trend in the Russian school. Researchers resort to political economy analysis to appropriately assess situations (Topic 28: "region," "potential," "area," "development," "increase"). In particular, they emphasize disparities in development between rich and poor countries and explore ways to bridge this gap (Topic 35: "development," "main," "formation," "stage"). International political economy is often employed when studying Latin America and Africa (Topic 29: "economic," "country," "development," "economy," "develop," "increase"). In addition, development studies frequently draw on neo-Marxist theories, including those on modernization and the world-system. Recently, it has become popular to approach development through analytical dichotomies such as the Global North and the Global South, or the West and the Rest. Some studies adopt a postcolonial perspective, attributing the dire situation in the Third World to colonial backgrounds and attempts by former colonial powers to maintain control, *inter alia*, by means of economic leverage.

Regional studies constitute a key element of the Russian IR school, stemming from the obvious need to train specialists for future work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and analytical centers associated with it (Topic 8: "state," "regional," "level"). However,

of all regions, supranational organizations and countries, European states in particular and the European Union in general dominate the field (Topic 10: "european," "union," "country"). The neighborhood effect may be the reason behind it. For more than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow aimed to bolster relations with Europe. However, relations deteriorated significantly in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. Nevertheless, the demand for research on the EU and its member states' policies remains high, given the EU's geographical proximity to Russia's densely populated regions.

Having unraveled the meaning of all the topics, we now evaluate their frequency in sampled academic papers, which does not necessarily correspond to the topic's number in Table 2. This analysis reveals a distinct thematic landscape within Russian academic discourse on international relations. The most frequently referenced topics are those driven by value-based considerations, particularly in the context of external and world politics, as well as foreign policy issues. These topics are outpaced by Russia's foreign policy and associated themes, indicating a strong focus on national interests and regional dynamics.

World order maintains its traditional prominence in Russian academic discourse, with legal aspects of international interaction closely trailing behind. This suggests a strong emphasis on legal and normative frameworks governing global affairs. Culture and higher education, while present, occupy a less prominent segment within the sample, possibly to their narrower scope and potential lack of direct relevance to the dominant focus on geopolitics and national interests.

Historically conditioned topics, though important for providing contextual understanding, are not as widely represented. This suggests a preference for analyzing contemporary issues and their immediate implications. Similarly, war and peace theory, despite its foundational importance, receives relatively limited attention within the sample. The presence of European Studies as a thematic area is noteworthy, signifying its significance within the field. Finally, the limited attention paid to directly theoretical issues of international relations concerning the development of new concepts highlights a potential gap in the field.

Discussion

The analysis reveals several anomalies that were scarcely addressed in earlier works. The legacy of the Soviet era, particularly Marxism-Leninism, persists in thematic rather than paradigmatic forms. Developmental issues, in various iterations, are disproportionately represented, highlighting the dynamic nature of Russian studies, which focus on change rather than the static condition of international relations. A notable emphasis on inequality and justice, whether in bilateral relations, shaping the world order, or resource distribution, is prevalent across many works, spanning different branches of IR (Topics 33, 27).

The systemic approach continues to dominate Russian IR, partially overlapping with country or regional specificity in the works of Russian scholars. Even classical research designs focusing on bilateral relations or regional dynamics strive to fit into the global context of world politics (Topics 21, 10). This reflects an ongoing effort to integrate local knowledge into the broader framework and laws of world politics (Topic 20).

Traditional attention to Russian foreign policy and Russia's role within the international system remains closely linked to the country's increasing great-power status. While earlier researchers and policymakers primarily focused on identity issues during the first decade of the Russian Federation, the emphasis has since shifted towards strengthening and maintaining this status (Topic 2).

Despite tempestuous relations with European states and Brussels, Europe enjoys a prominent place in Russian works. While the topic's frequency is not as robust as in global-issue topics, Europe and its related entities are the only ones that figure in topic modeling. Other regions and actors have not received the same treatment.

Interestingly, topics related to education and culture have overtaken those of conflict, strategy, and national security (Topics 11, 6, 12). This paradox may be attributed to Russia's commitment to enhancing cooperation, initially with the West and, after 2014, primarily with the rest of the world. Yet, it is worth adding an important caveat that this may also be explained by the features of the data or the way OpenAlex indexes items.

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Тематическое моделирование российских международно-политических исследований

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается состояние российской науки в области международных отношений (МО). Настоящее исследование представляет собой количественный анализ тематических тенденций в российских публикациях по МО с опорой на библиографическую базу данных *OpenAlex*. Авторы применили структурное тематическое моделирование к корпусу из 13 705 статей в период с 1 января 2000 по май 2024 года. Методологическая точность была обеспечена при помощи стандартизации языка, предварительной обработки текста и исключения из корпуса нерелевантных текстов. В литературе по российскому школу МО акцент, как правило, сделан на типологизации ее представителей, прескриптивных рекомендациях и описании ее развития. Вместе с тем авторы выявили ряд особенностей, которые практически не рассматривались в предыдущих исследованиях. Наследие советской эпохи сохраняется скорее в тематической, нежели парадигмальной, плоскости. Широко представлены проблемы развития: замечен акцент на изучении неравенства и справедливости в различных их проявлениях. Системный подход остается доминирующим, частично перекликаясь с региональными исследованиями. Даже в классических описательных работах, посвященных двусторонним отношениям или региональной динамике, предпринимается попытка вписать полученные выводы в глобальный контекст мировой политики. Традиционное внимание к российской внешней политике и роли Москвы в международной системе связано с ее статусом великой державы. Если в начале XXI в. российских ученых волновали скорее вопросы идентичности, то впоследствии внимание было направлено скорее на способы укрепления этого статуса. Европа, в отличие от других регионов, по-прежнему занимает важнейшее место в российских исследованиях. Примечательно, что темы образования и культуры чаще встречаются в работах по МО, чем темы конфликтов, стратегии и национальной безопасности. Впрочем, на эту тенденцию также могут влиять особенности анализируемых данных или индексация *OpenAlex*.

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