

Reinterpreting the alternative script? War in Ukraine, state-sponsored narratives of block building in authoritarian countries and their public perception

The project analyzes the construction of 'alternative' narratives by authoritarian governments competing against the liberal script and the way these narratives are perceived, reinterpreted and negotiated by the population of their countries. We focus at Russia and China and the narratives their regimes supply with respect to the war in Ukraine and the development of new dividing lines, blocks and alliances in the world associated with this war. In both countries, governments construct their own 'story' of the conflict and use state-owned media and other propaganda tools to communicate it to the public. In both cases, these narratives are part of the ongoing rhetoric of anti-Westernism and are associated with the discussion of the emergence of new geopolitical and geoeconomic blocks competing with each other. While accepting some aspects of these narratives, people in China and in Russia reject others or interpret them in a way different from the intention of the regime. The interdisciplinary research approach leverages both between-country variation (that between a rising power of China and a declining power of Russia) and the within-country variation (internal divisions in the Chinese and the Russian societies) to identify the differences in the construction, perception and (re)interpretation of narratives.