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Sociocultural constants as a determinant in the ideological structuring and conceptualization of moderate conservatism in Russia

Aleksandr V. Protsenko✉, Evgeny G. Bervino

LSU named after V. Dahl, *Luhansk, Russian Federation*

✉ akstazatu@mail.ru

Abstract. The formation of conservative values in Russia has deep historical and cultural roots tied to the evolution of traditional values, cultural constants, institutional transformations, and cognitive shifts. The relevance of this study stems from the growing significance of conservative values amid globalization challenges and the resurgence of interest in national identity. The current stage of Russian societal development necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the historical and cultural prerequisites that ensure the stability and reproduction of these values. The study aims to identify the historical and cultural factors contributing to the formation and evolution of conservative values in Russia and to define their role within the sociopolitical and cultural context. The methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining historical analysis, discourse analysis, and comparative methods, which together systematize sociocultural determinants as factors of conceptual ideological formation. The study identifies key historical and cultural factors, such as the continuity of state sacralization, Orthodox traditions, the influence of patriarchal structures, and the role of state and public institutions in reinforcing traditional values. Particular attention is paid to cognitive changes driven by modernization, which, despite its destabilizing potential, has facilitated the reinterpretation and adaptation of conservative values to new realities. The milestones in the evolution of Russian conservative thought are analyzed in the context of transmitting and interpreting cultural constants. These constants are examined as determinants and successive semantic pillars of moderate conservatism, representing a contemporary Russian vector in the evolution of classical conservatism. The study emphasizes that the emerging demand for a moderately conservative political paradigm is linked to the progressive revival of Russia's sovereignty and heightened tensions with the West. Conservative values in Russia not only serve as a foundation for social stability but also act as tools for preserving cultural identity amid institutional and cognitive changes, necessitating resistance to external destructive influences in a geopolitically tense environment. The authors highlight that the materials presented may serve as a starting point for further in-depth analysis of sociocultural constants as determinants and developmental factors of moderate conservatism.

Keywords: conservative values, traditional values, cultural constants, institutional transformations, ideology, cognitive changes

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Социокультурные константы как детерминанта идеологического оформления и концептуализации умеренного консерватизма в России

А.В. Проценко ✉, Е.Г. Бервино

Луганский государственный университет имени Владимира Даля, Луганск, Россия

✉ akstazatu@mail.ru

Аннотация. Формирование консервативных ценностей в России имеет глубокие историко-культурные корни, связанные с эволюцией традиционных ценностей, культурных констант, институциональных трансформаций и когнитивных изменений. Актуальность исследования обусловлена усилением значимости консервативных ценностей в условиях глобализационных вызовов и возрождения интереса к национальной идентичности. Современный этап развития российского общества требует комплексного осмысления исторических и культурных предпосылок, обеспечивающих устойчивость и воспроизводство этих ценностей. Цель исследования — выявление историко-культурных факторов, способствующих формированию и эволюции консервативных ценностей в России, а также определение их роли в социально-политическом и культурном контексте. Методология исследования базируется на междисциплинарном подходе, включающем исторический анализ, дискурс-анализ и компаративный метод, комбинация которых позволила систематизировать социокультурные детерминанты как факторы концептуального идеологического оформления. Выявлены ключевые историко-культурные факторы, такие как преемственность сакрализации государства, православной традиции, влияние патриархальных укладов, а также роль государственных и общественных институтов в закреплении традиционных ценностей. Особое внимание уделено когнитивным изменениям, обусловленным модернизацией, которая, несмотря на ее дестабилизирующий потенциал, способствовала переосмыслению

и адаптации консервативных ценностей к новым реалиям. Проанализированы вехи эволюции воззрений российских представителей консервативного направления в контексте трансляции и интерпретации культурных констант. Константы рассмотрены в качестве детерминант и преемственных смысловых опор умеренного консерватизма как современного российского вектора эволюции классического консерватизма. Подчеркнуто, что порождение актуального запроса на умеренно консервативную политическую парадигму обусловлено в т.ч. поступательным процессом возрождения суверенитета России и сопровождается усилением напряженности в отношениях с Западом. Отмечено, что консервативные ценности в России не только служат основой социальной стабильности, но и выступают инструментом сохранения культурной идентичности в условиях институциональных и когнитивных изменений, вынужденного противодействия внешним деструктивным влияниям в условиях геополитической напряженности. Результаты исследования могут стать отправной точкой для дальнейшего глубокого анализа социокультурных констант умеренного консерватизма в качестве детерминант и факторов его развития.

Ключевые слова: консервативные ценности, традиционные ценности, культурные константы, институциональные трансформации, идеология, когнитивные изменения

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Introduction

Russia is actively searching for its own ideological foundation that is organically consistent with its own historical and cultural background, capable of acting as an ontological foundation consolidating Russian society and an axiological incentive for the state to move to new heights of development. The actualization of moderate conservatism in Russia is also driven by global and internal factors. Foreign economic and political challenges, such as international sanctions, the conflict in Ukraine, and geopolitical tensions, reinforce sentiments aimed at protecting national interests. Internal problems such as economic inequality, corruption, and social discontent also contribute

to the growing interest in the ideas of moderate conservatism, focused on stability and maintaining order in the country. Russian conservatism, formed in the unique conditions of historical and cultural development, is a rich and distinctive phenomenon that can be considered as one of the foundations of moderate conservatism. For full understanding of this tradition, it is important to identify its main features and trace their connection with the universal principles and cultural constants of conservative thought.

The goal of the study is to analyze, comparatively chronologically describe and identify the influence of key socio-cultural constants as determinants of the evolution and conceptualization of ideas of moderate conservatism in Russia.

Materials and research methods

The subject matter of the works of foreign authors on the problem of conservatism is very diverse, it has a multidimensional character, and in general, a solid amount of literature on this problem has been accumulated. For our research, the works of those foreign authors are of the greatest interest, in which the theoretical and methodological problems of conservatism are thoroughly analyzed. This research uses an interdisciplinary approach combining methods of political philosophy, historical analysis, and sociology of ideologies. The research's source base consists of the works of the classics of conservative thought B.N. Chicherin, L.A. Tikhomirov, N.Ya. Danilevsky, I.A. Ilyin, as well as modern authors (A.G. Dugin, A.S. Panarin), which allowed us to identify the evolution of key concepts and cultural constants of Russian conservatism in its modern moderate direction. A number of modern official and policy documents, as well as scientific periodicals, were also analyzed.

The methodology is based on the following approaches:

- the discourse analysis revealed semantic structures in the texts of the ideologists of conservatism with an emphasis on vocabulary;
- analysis, synthesis, systematization of the evolution of conservative thought and identifying cultural constants that substantiate it;
- comparative approach was used to compare Russian moderate conservatism with its European counterparts (using the works of E. Burke, M. Heidegger, P. Robinson, and others as examples).

The criteria for selecting the material were the chronological framework of the XIX–XXI centuries, with an emphasis on the post-Soviet period, the focus is on the Russian context with the use of a number of comparative data with reference to German and American researchers (M. Heidegger, S. Huntington, P. Robinson).

The combination of methods made it possible to systematize the socio-cultural determinants of Russian moderate conservatism, revealing their connection with

basic statist axiological constants (sacralization of the state, Messianism of Russia, conciliarity), historical memory, religious tradition and geopolitical positioning. Further research may deepen the analysis of regional variations in conservative practices.

The results of the study

Moderate conservatism in Russia is a synthesis of traditionalist values and adaptation to the challenges of globalization. Its ideological design cannot be understood outside of the socio-cultural constants of stable elements of collective consciousness, formed under the influence of history, religion and geopolitics [1. P. 18]. These constants act as a filter that filters out foreign ideological borrowings and legitimizes the “organic” model of development.

Sociocultural constants are interpreted as a system of axiological imperatives reproduced in the context of an identity crisis [2. P. 45].

In the Russian tradition, these include the sacralization of the state (the perception of power as a guarantor of stability), conciliarity (the priority of the collective over the individual), and messianism (the idea of a “special mission” for Russia. These elements, according to A.S. Panarin, form a “protective code” of culture that resists Westernization [3. P. 74].

A key aspect and constant of Russian conservative thought is its attention to the role of the state. Here, the state is understood as a guarantor of sustainability, as a bearer of the highest moral principle. The thinker Boris Nikolaevich Chicherin in his work “The Course of State Science” noted that a strong government should be balanced by respect for the rights of citizens and ensuring their freedom within the law [4]. This harmony between order and freedom is at the heart of not only Russian, but also moderate conservatism, whose goal is to preserve social stability without suppressing individual rights.

Russian conservatism attaches exceptional importance to the collective principle expressed in the idea of conciliarity. Developed by Slavophiles, this concept emphasizes the spiritual unity and organic connection between the members of society. Sobornost is based on shared values and cultural identity, creating a model in which social ties become strong and conflicts are minimized. This principle is consistent with the concept of moderate conservatism, which sees the strengthening of social ties and respect for traditions as necessary conditions for stability.

The third key aspect of Russian conservatism is its spiritual component, deeply rooted in Orthodoxy. The thinker Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov in his work “Monarchical Statehood” emphasized the sacred importance of power [5]. In moderate conservatism, such an idea takes on a more secular character, but respect for moral and religious values as the foundation of the social order remains.

Religious figures such as Ignatius Bryanchaninov and John of Kronstadt occupy a special place in Russian conservatism. Their works show that Orthodoxy not only shaped the worldview of society, but also actively opposed the alien ideas of Enlightenment, as did Archimandrite Photius and Metropolitan Seraphim. Russian conservatism, rooted in special historical and cultural conditions, demonstrates a stable continuity that can be expressed through two central principles: organicism and a critical attitude towards the Western vector of modernization. Organicism, which perceives the development of a nation as the natural growth of a living organism, rejects abrupt discontinuities and violent reforms. At the same time, hostility to Westernization, and later globalization, underscores the desire of Russian conservative thought to develop an independent response to modern challenges.

The Traditionalist Foundations of the Social philosophy of Russian Conservatism. The ideological framework of Russian conservative thought of the 19th century was formed around the concept of society as an organically integrated hierarchical system, where structural orderliness was considered as an ontological condition for social stability. This paradigm predetermined the conviction of conservative theorists in the need to preserve a stratified model of social structure based on the principle of the “natural” division of functions between estates [6]. As emphasized in the works of the classics of the trend, such an organization reproduced a divinely sanctioned order in which the place of each individual was determined by a combination of providential design, historical tradition and the monarch’s will.

The key element of this concept was the principle of structural and functional hierarchism, interpreted as the antithesis of egalitarian projects of liberal and socialist thought. Unlike the doctrines that emphasize horizontal equality, Russian conservatism postulated the inevitability of vertical differentiation of social statuses, where the distribution of roles from the highest to the lowest strata ensured the systemic stability of the state. This denied not only the possibility, but also the destructiveness of equalizing practices, which, according to the apologists of tradition, destroy the natural mechanisms of socio-cultural continuity [7].

The diversity of positions within Russian conservatism ranges from moderate to radical views, reflecting the complexity of issues related to power, freedoms, popular representation, serfdom, the fate of the nobility, capitalism, and globalization. For example, the abolition of serfdom, despite its progressive nature, can be interpreted as a conservative measure aimed at preventing a popular uprising. The Slavophile tradition, which is deeply familiar with Western culture, is also heterogeneous: it fluctuates between isolationism and Messianic universalism, between the statism of Yuri Samarin and the decentralized “conservative anarchism” of Konstantin Aksakov. The denial of parliamentarism goes hand in hand with the demand for freedom of speech. Thus, true conservatism is not

a defense of the status quo, as can be observed in Konstantin Leontiev, but rather an opposition to bureaucratic stagnation, which even provoked criticism from Pyotr Stolypin [8. P. 503].

During the Soviet period, especially during the reign of Joseph Stalin, elements of “proto-conservatism” appeared as part of the modernization project. The question of whether this was a “Great Retreat” (In the words of Nikolai Timashev) or an adaptation of traditions for socialist construction (In the opinion of David Hoffmann) remains open [9; 10]. The rethinking of Russian history, the development of socialist realism, and the strengthening of the institution of the family served not so much to return to traditions as to instrumentalize them in the context of socialist ideology.

Late Soviet conservatism found expression in the works of Valentin Rasputin and paintings by Ilya Glazunov, as well as in environmental movements. However, after the collapse of the USSR, conservative ideas split into two main branches. Liberal conservatives such as Mikhail Remizov and Boris Mezhyuev advocate “democratic conservatism” [11]. Radical conservatives, represented by the Izborsk Club and the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism, focus on anti-globalism and Eurasian identity. In the religious sphere, the Orthodox Church has outlined its positions in the “Fundamentals of the Social Concept”, combining traditional values with social teaching¹.

Most of these movements are united in the rejection of individualism, contractualism and Enlightenment rationalism, which are a real repulsion, and in the promotion of the organic concept of the State of society. While some advocate freezing Russia’s development, arguing that any too rapid progress will lead to a decline like the West, most 19th-century conservatives agree that progress is necessary, but it must follow a natural rhythm, take into account Russian specifics, and rely primarily on the Church and the Tsar. We will understand that, despite the various options outlined by the authors, conservatives have a common goal — to protect and strengthen the autocratic system that is best able to protect Russia from revolutionary upheavals and the harmful influence of the West.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn occupies a position in the study as one of the central figures of conservative thought in the second half of the twentieth century. His criticism of communism and Western democracy was embodied in a philosophical manifesto, which became the intellectual basis for understanding the path of Russia after the collapse of the USSR. This manifesto rejected one-sided ideologies and proposed a conservative reinterpretation of Russian identity [12]. In the post-Soviet era, conservatism in Russia split into two main lines: the left, represented by neo-Eurasians and National Bolsheviks, and the right, led by Alexander Prokhanov,

¹ Fundamentals of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church. *Official website of the Russian Orthodox Church*. URL: <https://www.patriarchia.ru/article/105101> (accessed: 02.12.2025) (In Russ.).

which opposed Boris Yeltsin's reforms. This period ended with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin, which opened a new chapter in the history of Russian conservatism.

Vladimir Putin himself described his approach as “pragmatic conservatism”, reflecting a balance between preserving national traditions and the need to adapt to global challenges². Conservatism is an important element of Russia's political and intellectual landscape. Indeed, given the accelerating pace of globalization and modernization, it is possible that the current conservative reaction will not weaken, but will intensify over time. The main paradox and challenge for modern moderate conservatism is the attempt to combine tradition with technocratic modernization [13. P. 14]. Also, several critics of the modern development of Russian conservatism, such as A.V. Pavlov, point to the eclecticism of ideology, where Soviet symbols are juxtaposed with monarchist rhetoric [14. P. 89].

For a balanced and objective scientific assessment of modern moderate conservatism, special attention should be paid to its criticism. Thus, Alexander Pavlov in his work “Great Hopes of young Russian Conservatives” offers an original view of the processes of formation of ideological movements through the prism of social and contextual analysis, contrasting it with the classical approach of the history of ideas developed by P. Robinson. Pavlov's research is devoted to the formation in the early 2000s of a group of intellectuals called the “young conservatives”. Their meaningful dialogue with the intellectual tradition refers to the analogy with German conservatism of the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, Pavlov does not examine their contribution to the Russian intellectual tradition deeply enough, limiting himself to the conclusion about the political failure of the movement. He questions their claims to continuity with the Russian conservative canon, stating that he has not seen evidence of their recognition as part of this tradition. Pavlov argues with representatives of the movement, who claim that their activities have helped reduce the stigmatization of the concepts of “Russian” and “nationalism”. He is skeptical that this cannot be directly linked to youth conservatism. However, this position remains without sufficient evidence and appears to be more subjective than reasoned.

Special attention is paid to the social interrelationship of the generation of young conservatives who sought to distance themselves from both Alexander Dugin's Eurasianism and the traditional canon of the old conservatives (Leontiev, Sokolov, Fadeev), who, in the opinion of the youth, lacked an emphasis on nationalism. However, Pavlov considers the importance of their ideas not only in terms of content, but also in terms of material and technological conditions, such

² Vladimir Putin's interview with Channel One and the Associated Press. *Official Internet representation of the President of Russia*. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19143> (accessed: 02.12.2025) (In Russ.).

as the use of blogs and social networks, which made youth conservatism the first movement consciously built on digital platforms [15].

In contrast to Pavlov, who tends to disqualify youth conservatism as a full-fledged intellectual trend, P. Robinson sees in modern Russian conservatism continuity with the classical tradition [16]. These two extreme positions encourage us to look for a more balanced approach that allows us to consider political ideas both as a repertoire of meanings and as a product of social structures.

Alexander Dugin, presenting his reflections on the semantic symmetry of the cultural constants of German moderate conservatism with Russian and their relationship with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, interprets the “German conservative revolution” as an attempt to go beyond traditional liberalism, dogmatic communism and outdated forms of conservatism [17. P. 10]. Heidegger, in this context, is close to this intellectual trend. This is especially evident in his famous statement from the Introduction to Metaphysics (1935): “Russia and America, from a metaphysical point of view, represent the same thing: the sinister madness of unbridled technology and the rootless organization of a normalized person” [18. P. 49]. This judgment highlights the radical critique of modernity inherent in both German conservatism and Heidegger’s philosophy.

A comparison of these works reveals the multifaceted and even contradictory nature of Russian conservatism. The Russian conservative canon was built more precariously than the strictly theoretical socio-political doctrine. It developed on the borders of various social spaces — intellectual, political, and even religious. This feature encourages us to continue the contextual study of the Russian conservative idea, which considers it not just as a scientific discourse, but also as a party discourse involved in the configuration of actors.

Nevertheless, as the analysis of the works of key authors of Russian conservatism proves, its basic constant is that it is by definition non-radical and there are not one, but several variants of conservatism, which were built differently in relation to the West, and in particular to the philosophy of Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In this retrospect, we should pay attention to the dispute that has run through the entire history of Russia, namely about the attitude towards Europe, between imitation and setting one’s own path, which can also be identified as a special constant of Russian conservatism.

In this regard, the peculiarity of moderate conservatism in our interpretation is based on the definition developed by Samuel Huntington [2], according to which this ideology is a belief system aimed at protecting the existing social order, preserving institutions and minimizing the risks of destructive changes. The central element of this approach is respect for historically established traditions. Against the background of these ideas, the author examines the development of conservative thought in Russia, starting with the turn of Stalinism towards

preserving the traditional foundations of Great Russia as opposed to revolutionary internationalism and ending with the modern stage, when conservatism was institutionalized within the framework of state ideology.

The modern stage of conservative thought in Russia is characterized by the integration of elements of radical conservatism of the 19th century (the ideas of N. Danilevsky, I. Ilyin and N. Berdyaev) into political practice. This conservatism was used both as a tool for legitimizing power on the one hand, and as a socioculturally substantial formation of opposition to Western liberal values on the other. It became the response to the challenges of globalization by offering an alternative development model focused on preserving national identity and strengthening social order. In contrast to the nationalist and reactionary bias of conservative thought on the eve of the fall of the monarchy, modern state conservatism seeks to avoid those mistakes that, according to the authors, accelerated the collapse of tsarist Russia.

Conclusion

The Russian conservatism inherits the Russian tradition of the idea of evolutionary development, and moderate conservatism is identified as a special trend in the evolution of Russian conservatism. This is reflected in the desire for a harmonious synthesis of tradition and innovation, which excludes radical revolutionary approaches that destroy the social fabric. The fundamental pillars and socio-cultural core of this ideological trend should be the cultural constants underlying the understanding of the traditional values of Russia as a state and civilization. The second important aspect is the priority of stability. At the same time, moderate conservatism differs from authoritarianism in that it recognizes the importance of civil liberties and the involvement of society in government, which echoes the traditions of Russian thinkers such as B.N. Chicherin, who sought a balance between strong state power and individual rights, which is also a characteristic scientific research and philosophical “handwriting” of Russian thinkers.

The emphasis of moderate conservatism on spiritual and cultural aspects, which should not, on the one hand, contradict social progress, and on the other, should not unilaterally imperatively adapt to its current trends, makes it flexible in the context of secularization. It offers support to secular, but rooted in historical tradition, moral values, which allows adapting the Russian spiritual tradition to modern conditions. Collectivism, another key element of Russian conservatism, is reinterpreted within the framework of a moderate approach as a desire to strengthen social solidarity through the support of institutions that ensure the integration of society, such as religious organizations, educational institutions and civil associations.

Thus, moderate conservatism not only retains its connection with the Russian tradition, but also rethinks it in the light of global challenges. He demonstrates respect for the historical heritage, strives for smooth changes and harmony between freedom and order. Enriched by the ideas of Western thinkers such as Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville, Russian conservatism in its moderate form offers a sustainable model capable of responding to the challenges of modernity. The results presented in the article can become a starting point for further in-depth analysis of the philosophical foundations of conservatism and its significance in the context of modern globalization.

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Information about the authors:

Aleksandr V. Protsenko — Candidate of Political Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of Public Administration, LSU named after V. Dahl, 20A Molodezhny Quarter, Lugansk, 291034, Russian Federation (Researcher ID: ABF-3270-2020) (SPIN-code: 3558-1736) (e-mail: akstazatu@mail.ru).

Evgeny G. Bervino — Postgraduate student of the Department of Public Administration, LSU named after V. Dahl, 20A Molodezhny Quarter, Lugansk, 291034, Russian Federation (Researcher ID: MSV-6739-2025) (SPIN-code: 1424-9429) (e-mail: bervino86@mail.ru).