

# Bordering the West? – Geopolitics and emotions in the New Cold War

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In media coverage about the current conflicts in Ukraine, geopolitics celebrates an astonishing resurrection as an argumentative figure for to generate plausibility of international power constellations in Europe. This renaissance of old East-West opposition under new signs is extremely relevant to current discourses and conflict constellations in international politics. With this background, the DFG-project also examines the emotional components of border demarcations in East and West at different levels of scale - from an imagined global scale and an inner-German perspective to the scale of individual feelings and affects. Our research therefore focuses on the overlapping areas between geography, feminist theory, linguistics and emotions.



## THEORY AND BACKGROUND

Geopolitics is often understood as a general description of the world (politics), a metanarrative of the past and the present (e.g.: Cold War, Domino Effect, Huntington's Clash of Civilizations). But it is also a **discursive strategy** that creates ideas about places and world in general and **makes them feel real**. Political decisions reproduce these worldviews and **determine global boundaries** and divisions of good and evil. In order to maintain an overview within a critical confrontation with major geopolitical narratives and models (Ó TUATHAIL & DALBY, 2006; REUBER & WOLKERSDORFER, 2004), the project focuses on various theoretical currents that help to gain a coherent view of discourses, practices and attitudes. The **spatial and temporal changes** can best be grasped by understanding **geopolitics as a discourse** (FOUCAULT, 1973; LACLAU & MOUFFE, 2001) in which **hegemonic narratives** (GRAMSCI et al., 2012) are considered, but also individual and overarching emotions are examined (AHMED, 2004; EKMAN, 2008; PAIN, 2009; SCHURR, 2014). A **conceptualization of boundaries**, attributions and imaginary spaces is also an important part of the project (GREGORY, 1998; PASSI, 2016; SAID, 2009). The work is based on corpora of newspapers (including letters to the editors, German- and US; 1950 - 2017), different types of official records (Bundestag, government statements; 1949-2018) and social-media posts (Twitter and Instagram; 2014 - 2018).

## THE NEW COLD WAR: REDUCTION OF PERSPECTIVES, SINGLE STORIES AND A PASSIVE WEST

Terms in the Cold War environment have clearly **shifted** in recent years. On the one hand, this results from the comparison of all spatial references that emerge in connection with the term Cold War. Since 2014, this has almost exclusively taken place in **the East**. There is virtually no conflict between 'the West' (USA, (Western) Europe etc.) and 'the East' anymore. While the Cold War between 1950 and 1990 was seen as an international conflict and confrontation between two systems and until 2014 was also negotiated in this way by the media, the (New) Cold War is now increasingly **presented as Russia's problem**, which is currently taking place primarily in Ukraine. The West is becoming the unmarked center of this conflict - but sees itself as passive and evaluates only the changes in the East (cf. Fig. 2 & 3).

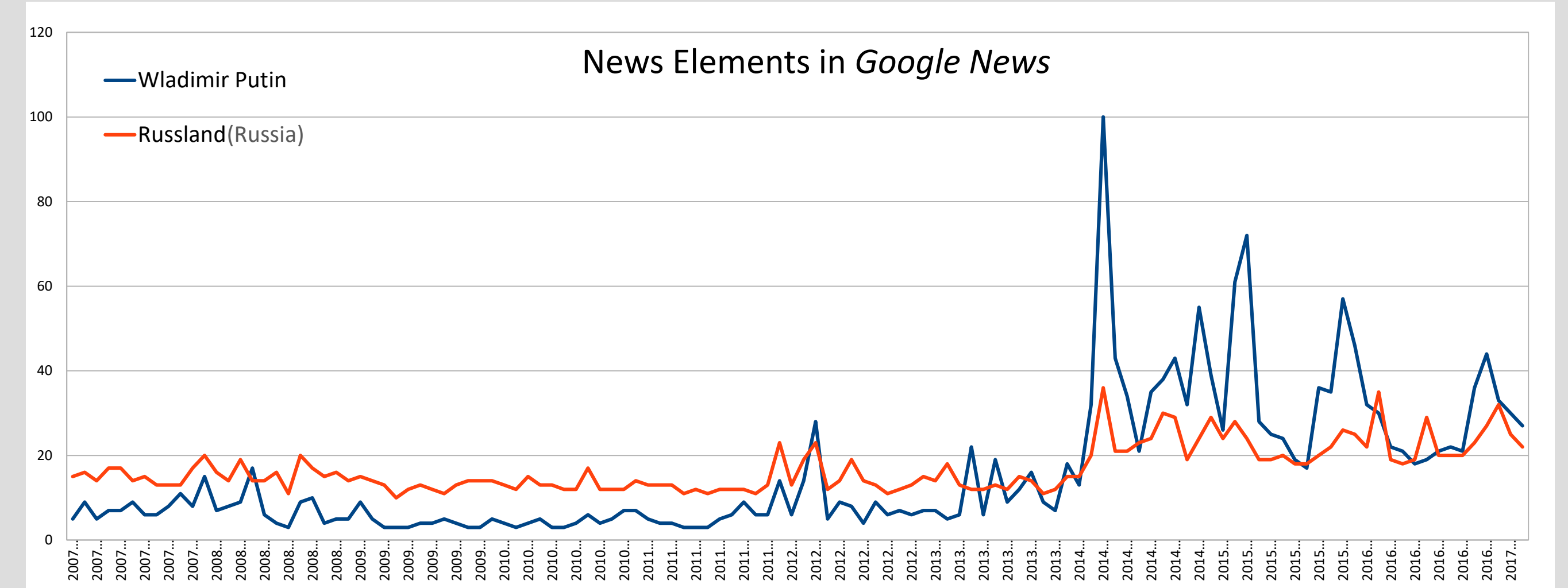


Fig. 4: Mentions of 'Russia' and 'Putin' in Google News (own visualization)



Fig. 2: "Kalter Krieg" Keywords in German News Journals (own visualization)  
 A partial corpus of all articles from the years 2014 to 2016 was compared with the total corpus (2000 to 2016) and spatial terms were worked out that were both significant and had a relatively high significance (effect strength) when comparing the corpora. The size of the words corresponds to their significance in comparison to the total corpus.

Fig. 3: "Cold War" Keywords in the New York Times 2012 vs. 2014 - Selection and method as shown in Figure 2. (own visualization)

A further narrowing concerns the perception of Russia. In media reporting, Russia is more often **narrowed down to Putin** as a person than before. The entire state action but also everything that has to do with Russia is narrowed down to **one symbolization**. This can be made visible by comparing the corresponding content on all German news sites viewed by Google News. Since 2013, "Putin" has been more frequent here than "Russia" (cf. Fig. 4). If Russia is evil because Putin is, then a complex world is dangerously condensing in the form of **single stories** (Adichie, 2009). By no means we want to ignore annexins, attacks or arms races. The project tries to **question the dichotomy itself** - and the underlying attitudes and emotions.

## SIGNIFIERS OF GEOPOLITICS

Year	Spatial References	Other Signifiers
2008	Georgien, Südossetien	McCain, Obama
2009	Indien, Israel, Kaschmir	Nationalismus
2010	China, Türkei	seltene Erden
2011	Bahrain, Libyen, Tunesien, Ägypten	arabisch
2012	Syrien, Iran	anonymous, Assad
2013	Syrien, Zypern	Gas
2014	Russland, Ukraine, Deutschland, Westen	Wirtschaft, Putin, Maidan
2015	Griechenland, Donbas	FIFA, Eisbären
2016	Türkei, Antarktis	Trump, Brexit, Flüchtlingskrise
2017	Nordkorea, China, Syrien	Trump, Xi, Seidenstraße

Fig. 5: How and where is geopolitics located? - Most important terms in articles related to geopolitics in the newspapers Die Welt, taz - die Tageszeitung und Frankfurter Rundschau (own visualization)

By means of corpus linguistic software, **geopolitical key terms** were elaborated with reference to the entire corpus from 2000 to 2017. It can be seen that both Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 are of great importance in articles with geopolitical relevance (cf. Fig. 5). However, in contrast to the Ukrainian conflict in 2014, the war in Georgia did not lead to a stronger focus on the concept of geopolitics (cf. Fig. 6). In retrospective articles from 2014 onwards the Georgia conflict is now interpreted otherwise (cf. Fig. 7).

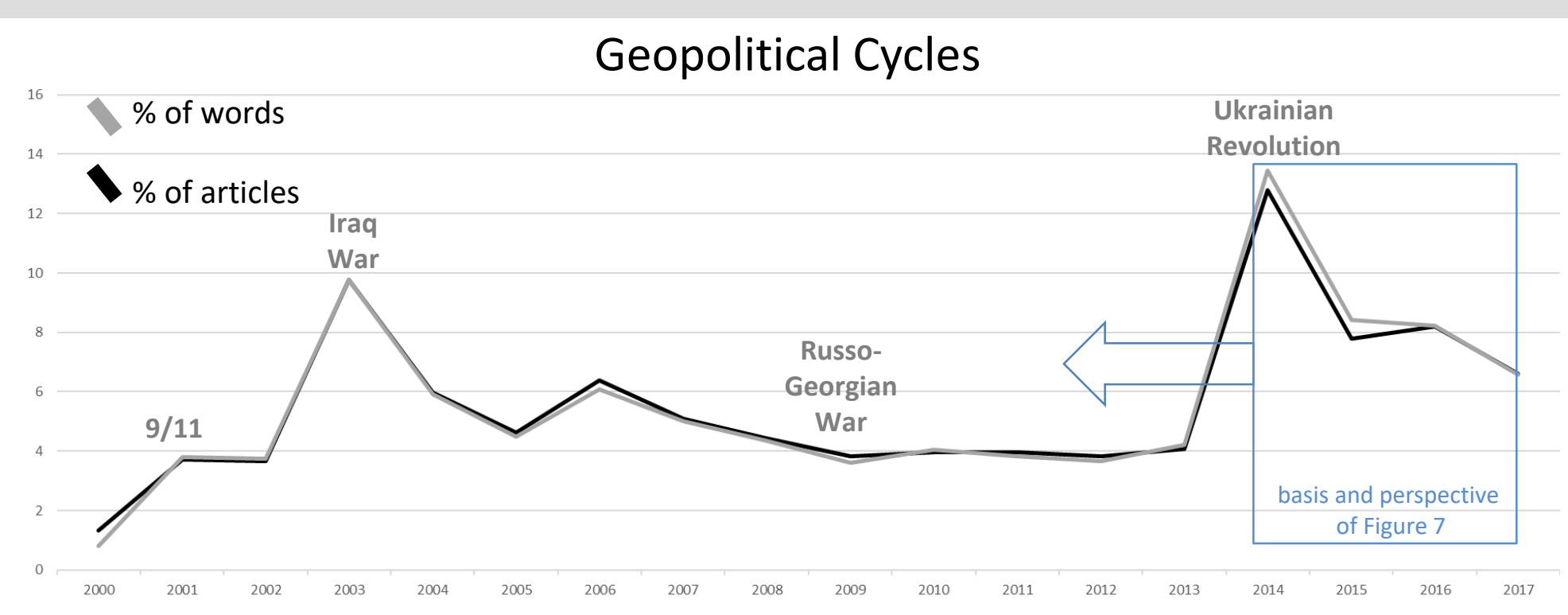


Fig. 6: Relative distribution of articles related to geopolitics and the term "geopolitics" from 2000 to 2017 in the newspapers Die Welt, taz - die Tageszeitung und Frankfurter Rundschau (own visualization)

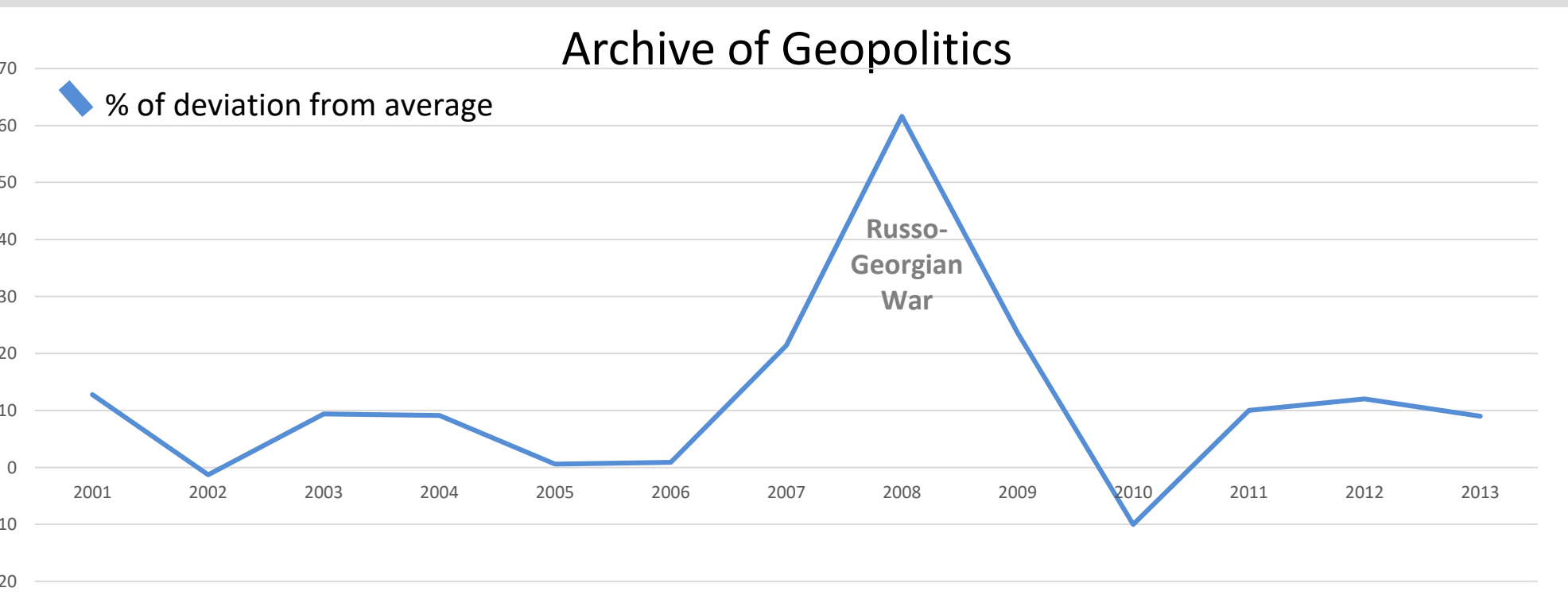


Fig. 7: Geopolitical years in the newspapers Die Welt, taz - die Tageszeitung und Frankfurter Rundschau seen from 2014-2017; deviation from average (own visualization)

## EMOTIONS

The study of discourse is also a valuable strategy that can shed light on such matters as **the role of emotion** in shaping both individual attitudes and political bordering of the West.

Surprisingly often large (German) media were confronted with comments and readers' letters concerning Russian reporting, which considered this reporting as too **negative** (cf. SZ 19.02.2015, Handelsblatt 14.08.2017). Not less emotionally, 'Putin understanders' (*Putinversther*) were criticised and their 'understanding' was already interpreted as negative. The pressure to position oneself 'correctly' in relation to Russia is extraordinarily high compared to other policy areas. This can also be seen in an **emotional mapping of central concepts** in the context of the 'Cold War' on Twitter (cf. Fig. 9), where the proportion of **emotional tweets about Russia and Putin** is very high. The associated emotions **shifted from fear** (cf. Fig. 8) 30 years ago to **disgust** in the present. The interpretation of tweets is generally very difficult: they are short and they cannot be studied with established methods of corpus linguistics. At the same time, online comments and **social-media-posts are often racist and sexist** (GARDINER et al., 2016) and male authors are extremely over-represented (70% - 85% in our corpus). This makes transferability more difficult.

Not surprisingly, emotions are often referred to as being only negative (SCHWARZ-FRIESEL, 2013) or even not researchable (NIEMEIER & DIRVEN, 1997). By focusing on them we want to emphasize their complexity and argue that **understanding emotions** is crucial to understand the particular discourse and politics in general.

Following Ahmed we do not ask what emotions are, but **what they do** (AHMED, 2004). As a simplification we apply basic emotions (EKMAN, 2008) while **mapping the emotional genealogy** of (new) Cold War attitudes.

A change in Putin's photographic representation can also be observed. For example, since 2015 Putin has almost never been portrayed smilingly in the New York Times (cf. Figs. 9 & 10).

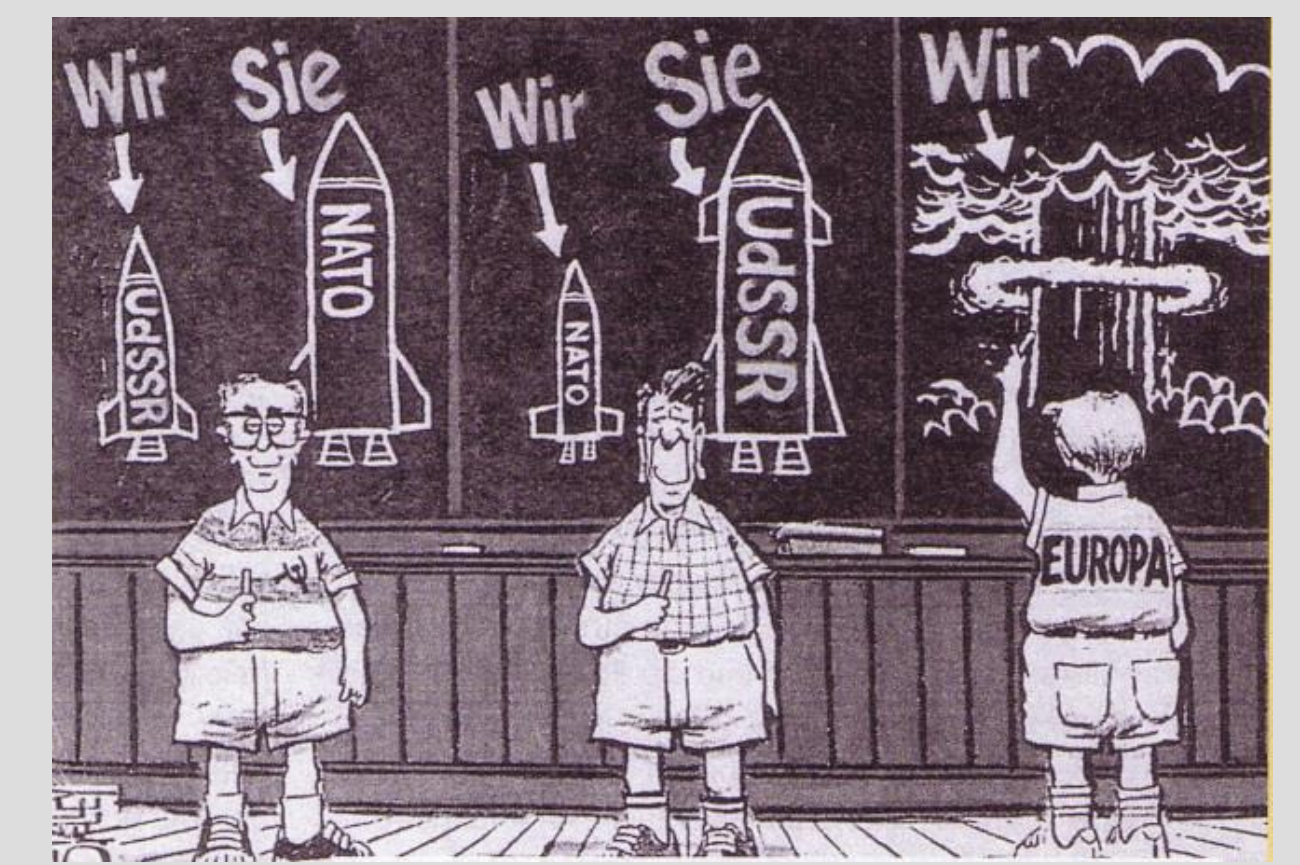


Fig. 8: The Cold War as a caricature - Europe loses, no matter who wins. Fear of the totality of the conflict. (without year/author (1980s))

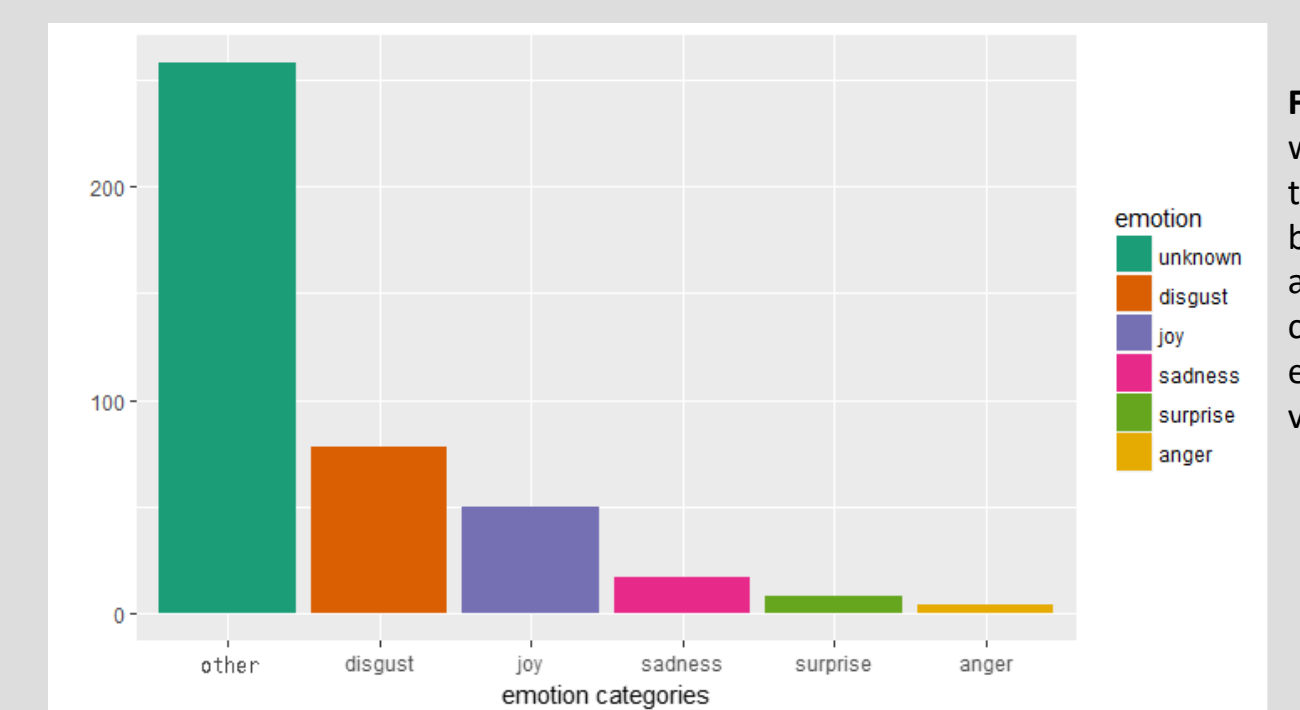


Fig. 9: Tweets with Putin in the USA between June and July 2017, categorized in emotions (own visualization)



Fig. 10: H. W. Bush, Wladimir Putin and George W. Bush (NYT 2007)



Fig. 11: Barack Obama and Wladimir Putin (NYT 2013)

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