

Favorable/Unfavorable Opinion of Russia Based on Distance

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Background

Soft power, through public diplomacy (PD), has been an established part of Russia's foreign policy, (Saari 2014). According to Nye (2004), soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced," (p. x). Russia uses PD in different ways depending on whether the country is a former Soviet state or not. The annexation of Crimea could be viewed as part of a "Russian world" strategy emphasized the closeness of Russia and a common past through their PD efforts (Felyukina 2016). PD was limited for many years after the end of the Soviet Union, and then was brought back as humanitarian cooperation and became more sophisticated to compete with Western PD strategies (Saari 2014).

Despite Russia's efforts to cultivate a positive image, the image of Russia in the West has grown worse because Russia's PD and its actual policies do not match, as Saari (2014) cited from Avgerinos (2009). Prior to the Russian annexation of Crimea, Saari (2014) assessed that there was a lot of soft power potential in Ukraine, and that Russia needed to focus more on attraction and persuasion of post-Soviet states, much like it's Western PD

strategy.

According to Felyukina (2016), soft power can be analyzed empirically by analyzing whether soft power is present in a relationship between two states rather than just looking at soft power as a characteristic of one actor. In order to study this relationship, I will examine approval ratings. These will give an indication of Russian soft power and whether the US feels attracted to Russian policy, and vice versa. A country can cultivate soft power using public diplomacy. My paper will explore the influence of the Crimean invasion on states that are in the post-Soviet realm as opposed to those outside of it to examine Russia's public diplomacy efforts, and whether they are increasing Russia's soft power. The case of Crimea blends both soft and hard power, because it was an invasion but the Russian government also attempted to control the narrative from the public diplomacy standpoint.

This is important because Russia's relationship with the US is becoming increasingly complex given the last election, but this also affects other countries which may end up leaning more towards the US or Russia. To examine this, I analyzed approval ratings in 2013 and 2015. For countries that did not have data for those years, I imputed the closest available year before 2013 or after 2015, respectively.

Hypothesis

When Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, approval ratings of Russia declined based on geographic proximity to Russia.

Research Question

How did Russia's annexation of Crimea affect approval ratings of Russia in other countries?

References

Valentina Feklyunina. (2016) Soft power and identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian world(s)'. *European Journal of International Relations* 22:4, pages 773-796.
Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: *Public Affairs*
Sinikukka Saari (2014) Russia's Post-Orange Revolution Strategies to Increase its Influence in Former Soviet Republics: Public Diplomacy po russkii, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66:1, 50-66, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2013.864109

Data and Methods

I used Pew Research Center data from the Global Indicators Database, which includes the Global Attitudes Survey. Specifically, I used responses to the question: Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Russia. The options for very and somewhat are combined in this data. These surveys are conducted either via telephone or face to face interviews, which are done through computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) or pen and paper interviews (PAPI). The surveys are based on national samples, unless otherwise noted. Most of the countries in the Survey did not take it every year, and some had only taken it 2013 or before or 2015 and after, so I was not able to analyze the change country by country.

For the distance between Moscow and a country's capital, I used data from the University of Essex, except for the Palestinian Territory's capital, which I calculated by inputting the distance from Ramallah to Moscow on Google Maps.

I used correlation and regression to determine the strength of the relationship between distance to Moscow from the country's capital and favorable/unfavorable percentages was stronger after the invasion of Crimea. Because the invasion happened in 2014, I analyzed 2013 and 2015 (or the closest data available). The years available for this data were 207, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2017. I did not include any ratings from 2014 because it was not clear what was happening in Crimea at that time.

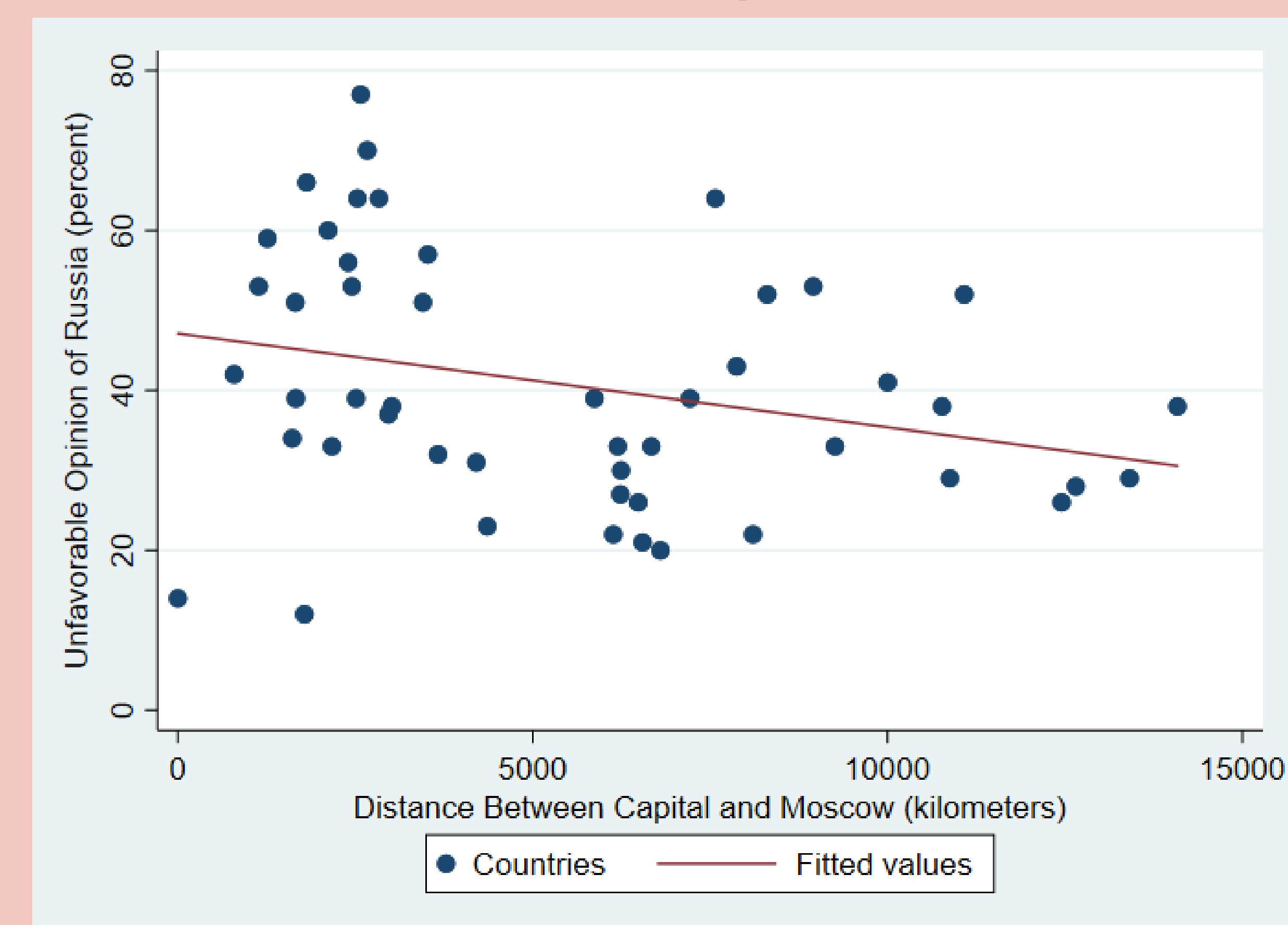
Results

Regression

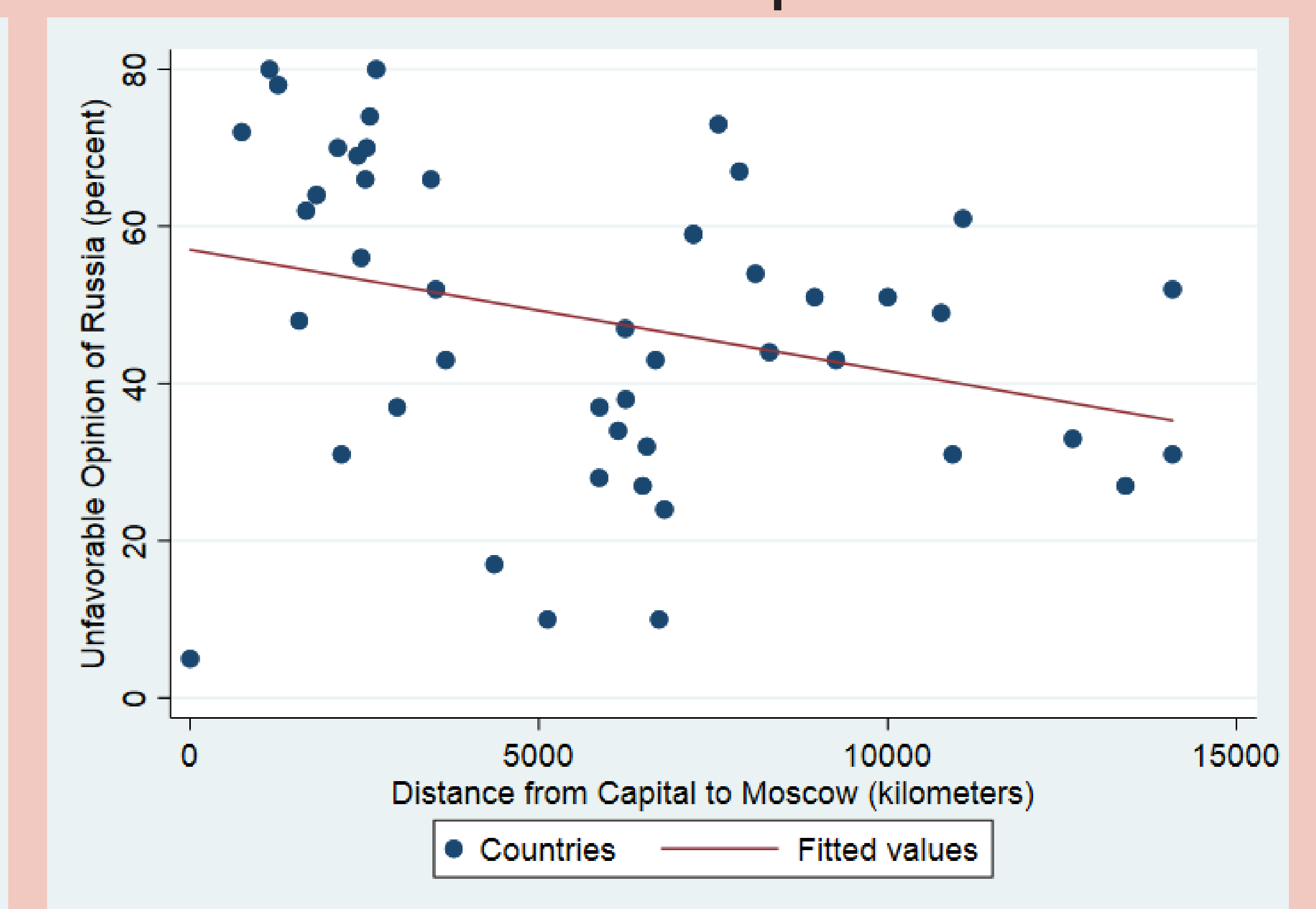
dependent variable	Year	coefficient	standard error	p-value	R squared
favorable	2013	-0.0007776	0.0005313	0.15	0.0463
unfavorable	2013	-0.0011745	0.0005799	0.049	0.0803
favorable	2015	-0.0002333	0.0005993	0.699	0.0033
unfavorable	2015	-0.0015415	0.0007409	0.043	0.0878

This analysis included 49 countries for 2013 and imputed data from before 2013 and included 48 countries for 2015 and any imputed data from after 2015.

2013 Unfavorable Opinion of Russia



2015 Unfavorable Opinion of Russia



Discussion

The results for the unfavorable ratings were significant, because they were under $p < .05$, even though the R squared values were low. There is a weak to moderate correlation between distance and unfavorable opinion. As distance increases unfavorable opinion decreases. This could be because after the Russian invasion of Crimea, countries that were furthest away had the least to fear - while countries like Poland might have felt that they were next. While approval ratings may be a good indicator of soft power, because of the holes in the data it is difficult to see concrete evidence of whether distance from Moscow affects approval ratings. The results for favorable ratings and distance were not significant because the p value was greater than .05.

With better data, future research could group countries based on distance in order to analyze the effects of different groups (Balkan states, Central Asia, Western Europe, etc.) Then they could compare the absolute value of change

in favorable/unfavorable opinion of Russia. I do not think that these results are enough to say that the Russian public diplomacy efforts after Crimea were successful. Researchers must consider how to properly measure soft power as the relationship between two countries, as suggested by Felyukina (2016).

Future projects could also factor in the creation of Russia Today and focus on countries where Russia Today has a presence, what the ratings or online traffic for that country looks like, and the favorable/unfavorable poll numbers.

A potential confounding variable, since some of the data was imputed, is that data from 2009 could be affected more by the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which involved Russia invading South Ossetia. Data from 2017 could have been affected by the allegations of Russian collusion with the Trump campaign.