

**Who Has the Right to Predict Politics? Russian-Speaking Astrologers and the Struggle for
Legitimacy in the Discourse of Political Forecasting**

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Abstract

This paper examines how Russian-speaking astrologers construct their legitimacy within the discourse of political forecasting, a domain typically dominated by political experts and other science-affiliated figures. Drawing on an ethnographic content analysis (ECA) of YouTube videos and textual forecasts produced by 6 popular Russian-speaking astrologers, as well as audience comments, the author argues that an astrologer's symbolic capital is composed of two main elements: scientific capital, derived from the appropriation of scientific discourse, and spiritual capital - a distinctive form of capital grounded in astrological knowledge as a hermetic system linking the spiritual and the material worlds. Building on Michel Foucault's discursive theory and his concept of "subjugated knowledges," the functional approach to magic developed by Bronisław Malinowski, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, the notion of spiritual capital proposed by Bradford Verter (2003), and Randall Styers's (2004) work on the social construction of "magic," the paper demonstrates that scientific capital serves as a tool of legitimation within the dominant regime of truth, while spiritual capital that constitutes the core of the astrologer's symbolic capital, making their very presence within the discourse of political forecasting possible. To explain how an astrologer's spiritual capital is converted into the symbolic capital of an alternative political expert, the paper proposes two complementary explanations: functional and discursive. More broadly, the study contributes to understanding how what is commonly labeled as "magic" continues to exert influence in contemporary secular societies, challenging Max Weber's argument about the inevitable "disenchantment" of the world.

Keywords: astrology, magic, political forecasting, subjugated knowledges, spiritual capital, ethnographic content analysis, Malinowski, Foucault.

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1. Introduction

1.1. *Research context*

The occult occupies a paradoxically prominent place in the everyday life of Russian and Ukrainian society. An abundance of esoteric goods such as magic candles, herbs, and tarot cards; widespread advertising of the services of sorcerers and fortune tellers offering to “open a money channel” or “bring back a husband” with the help of a love spell; various shows featuring people with paranormal abilities, such as “Battle of the Psychics,” “Battle of the Strongest,” and “Psychics Investigate” - these are realities familiar to every Ukrainian and Russian, regardless of their personal attitude toward the occult. According to Lesiv (2018), who interviewed respondents in both Ukraine and Russia, it was practically impossible to find a person who had not encountered the supernatural at least once in their life. Being an esotericist in these countries, despite condemnation from more skeptical segments of society, can be prestigious, and, as Lesiv (2018) notes, media coverage significantly expands their career opportunities.

In recent years, various esoteric practitioners—including astrologers, tarot readers, and psychics—have been actively participating in the media discourse of political forecasting in both countries. Predictors of all stripes are making predictions about Russia and Ukraine, as well as the United States, Israel, Iran, and other countries that attract the most public attention at any given time. Astrologers with large followings on YouTube and other platforms are particularly popular in both countries. From time to time, the astrologers also appear on television, often on fairly reputable, state-run channels that serve as one of the main sources of information for the majority of the population, especially millennials and older generations. It may seem paradoxical, but astrologers occupy a significant niche in the discourse of political forecasting, a field dominated by conventional and institutionally legitimate political experts - political scientists, historians, sociologists, and others. In other words, those who are in some way associated with “science.” Astrology, on the other hand, is most often defined as a form of pseudoscience, a kind of flawed knowledge that, in the opinion of some, has no place in a modern, “progressive” society. For this reason, astrologers as a social group also face stigmatization and are largely marginalized. In addition, astrologers have a complex relationship with the Orthodox Church because of the “magical” nature of astrology. In this regard, it remains unclear exactly how astrologers' legitimacy is established, thereby enabling their presence in such a serious field, such as the discourse of political forecasting. This question served as the main impetus for writing this paper.

1.2. *Research goals and questions*

This paper aimed to comprehensively understand how the legitimacy of astrologers who do political astrology is established within the discourse of political forecasting. Political astrology, also known as “mundane astrology,” is the branch of astrology that deals with the destinies and

affairs of nations, governments, and societies, as opposed to the lives of individual persons (Campion, 2009). The discourse of political forecasting is understood as a set of statements through which actors construct and legitimize representations of the future of a particular political entity or situation in which that entity is involved. Another key term is legitimacy, which refers to the recognition of astrologers as a whole as rightful experts in the discourse of political forecasting. Importantly, I differentiate it from prestige, an individual characteristic of a given astrologer that describes their success and popularity in their craft; the focus of this paper is on the former. The key questions of this paper are 1) How do political astrologers construct their legitimacy in the discourse of political forecasting?; 2) What is the role of the scientific and magical in constructing this legitimacy?; and 3) Why can astrologers operate within the discourse of political forecasting more broadly? Therefore, the paper not only analyzes how astrologers construct their legitimacy within the discourse of political forecasting, but also, more broadly, contributes to our understanding of how that discourse is structured in relation to the “scientific” and the “magical.” In addition, the study also provides insight into the practical significance of astrological political forecasting, which may be of applied interest to policymakers, political experts, astrologers, and anyone interested in astrology.

To address these questions, an ethnographic content analysis of the predictions of six popular Russian-speaking astrologers was conducted, drawing on YouTube videos, third-party website publications, and comments posted under these videos. From a theoretical perspective, my work draws on three main approaches: discourse analysis by Michel Foucault, the functional approach to magic by Bronislaw Malinowski, and the concept of symbolic capital suggested by Pierre Bourdieu. Within Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, astrology is conceptualized as a form of “subjugated knowledges” - historical or local systems of knowledge that have been excluded from official discourse by what Foucault calls “dominant regimes of truth.” I also draw on the work of Styers (2004), who, applying Foucauldian analysis, demonstrated how systems of knowledge that did not fit into the epistemological worldview that emerged from the scientific revolution were labeled “magic”. From a functional perspective, it draws on Bronislaw Malinowski's approach to magic, which holds that magic serves as a coping mechanism in situations of uncertainty. In addition, it also borrows Pierre Bourdieu's concept of “symbolic capital” to conceptualize the form of authority that astrologers possess. Building on these theoretical approaches, as well as the works of Verter (2003) about “spiritual capital” and Styers (2004) about the social constructiveness of the notion “magic,” this paper argues that an astrologer's symbolic capital stems from both their scientific capital, achieved through the adoption of scientific discourse, and their spiritual capital, derived from the status of astrology as a bridge between the profane and the sacred, with each type of capital playing a distinct role in constructing legitimacy. While scientific capital allows astrologers to claim legitimacy within the dominant regime of truth, it is their spiritual capital that forms the basis of their symbolic capital. The paper further suggests and substantiates two complementary explanations for the nature of this spiritual capital, functional and discursive, thereby demonstrating that it is not merely an abstract idea, but a real social fact. From a functional perspective, astrologers' spiritual capital

arises from the advantage of astrological forecasts in reducing anxiety, given the inherent limits of expert political forecasting. From a discursive perspective, the argument rests on the idea that political forecasting is not entirely scientific and tends to valorize individuals who possess spiritual capital.

1.3. *Significance and contribution*

The relevance of this study lies primarily in the growing presence of astrologers in the media in Russia and Ukraine, which, in itself, constitutes a subject of research interest. As Lorea (2020) noted, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was increased demand for fortune-tellers and other esoteric specialists because of the inability of institutionalized experts, represented by science and religion, to satisfy society's demands fully. In her view, this trend warrants closer attention from social scientists and calls for further research in this area. Over the past five years, the region has experienced geopolitical shifts, initially driven by the pandemic and subsequently by the so-called "Special military operation". Today, the whole world is in a state of political turbulence, which also contributes to growing uncertainty and provides fertile ground for esotericism to flourish. Therefore, understanding the reasons behind the phenomenon of political astrology will enable us to better assess its potential future consequences. Secondly, this study is valuable for understanding the role of magic in the modern world more broadly, as there are relatively few anthropological works on this topic. Most research on this subject concerns so-called traditional societies, while "progressive" secular societies, in which most social researchers exist, are undeservedly neglected. I consider this a serious oversight and, for this reason, propose to look at "ourselves" from a different, unexpected angle.

2. **Historical overview**

2.1. *The link between history and anthropology*

Frederick Maitland famously said that "By and by anthropology will have the choice between being history or being nothing" (Maitland, 2001, p.295), thus emphasizing the critical link between anthropology and historical science. In other words, any attempt to understand a cultural phenomenon will be highly biased and even erroneous if it ignores the historical factors and processes that have shaped its development. Therefore, to understand why astrology occupies the place it does in modern Russia and Ukraine, it is necessary to examine its history. Moreover, this historical overview is justified by Michel Foucault's archaeological approach, which this work relies heavily on.

2.2. *Global history of astrology*

Until relatively recently, astrology held a prominent place in the public life of many peoples worldwide. Astrology as a form of knowledge has a history dating back more than 3,000 years, with roots in Mesopotamia (Holden, 2006). The ancient inhabitants of the "Fertile Crescent"

observed the movements of the Sun, Moon, and other celestial bodies and used these observations to make predictions that informed agriculture and determined the fate of their rulers. In other words, astrology already had a clear socio-political orientation at this early stage. However, astrology did not yet have its basic attributes - the signs of the zodiac, houses, and other elements of the horoscope that are well known to modern amateur and professional astrologers. All of this appeared in ancient Greek astrology. The birth horoscope itself, previously unknown outside the Hellenistic world, also appeared here. From Ancient Greece, astrology migrated to Ancient Rome, and after its fall, to the works of Arab scholars, who not only preserved it during the catastrophic decline of education in Western Europe but also enriched it with new forecasting techniques. At the same time, astrology developed in India (where it is known as Jyotish), having been introduced there from Greece through Alexander the Great's campaigns. There, it finally took shape as a coherent system of knowledge by the 6th-10th centuries. At the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, astrology returned to Western Europe, primarily through the works of Arab scholars, such as Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi and Al-Kindi. Astrology flourished in Western Europe: both wealthy nobles and ordinary citizens turned to astrologers for advice on a wide range of issues, from the birth of children and choosing the best time to sow crops to selecting the timing of military campaigns. For example, the Italian astrologer Guido Bonatti (1210-1296) was particularly famous for his predictions for prominent rulers of the time. His name is even mentioned in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, where, according to the work, he is placed in the eighth circle of hell along with other soothsayers. In addition to personal predictions, medieval Europe also saw the emergence of public predictions for well-known political rulers, which circulated through leaflets and rumors. These predictions had a significant impact on the political landscape of the time, determining whether political rulers were legitimate or illegitimate. For example, Azzolini (2010) cites the prediction by the famous astrologer Antonio Arquato about the imminent death of Pope Innocent VIII, which clearly served the interests of the Aragonese crown.

2.3. Astrology and astronomy

For many centuries, astrology was inextricably linked to astronomy, and the two developed side by side. Until the 17th century, astrology was taught at the best universities in Europe as a full-fledged discipline, and few could doubt its legitimacy. There were objections from the church because astrology involved predicting the future. Overall, however, because astrology's "scientific" status was grounded in its mathematical and observational methodology, the church treated it with condescension. Interestingly, it was mainly individual predictions that were condemned, while predictions about countries or, say, the weather were quite welcome within Christian theology. As Willis and Curry (2020) explain, this view was formed by Thomas Aquinas, who believed that only God could know an individual's destiny. Everything changed with the advent of the scientific revolution, when new frameworks were established, and the criteria for what could be considered science were refined. Astrology did not meet these criteria. It was separated from astronomy and permanently removed from university curricula, resulting

in its gradual decline over several centuries. It was only at the end of the 19th century, as a result of the occult revival that swept across Europe, that astrology returned to the European cultural scene, but in a significantly altered form. Nevertheless, Vedic astrology in India (also known as Indian astrology or Jyotish), passed down orally from father to son, never underwent such changes and therefore remained virtually unchanged. In the 20th century, new branches of astrology emerged, such as Uranian astrology, which differs greatly from classical Western astrology. Therefore, when we talk about astrology as homogeneous, we must understand that, in reality, we are talking about different astrologies—Vedic, Western, Chinese, Avestan, Uranian, and so on—each with its own characteristics and predictive techniques (Kutalev, 2001).

2.4. *Astrology in the history of Russia and Ukraine*

When talking about the Russian-Ukrainian cultural zone, astrology has never had as strong an influence here as it has in the West or, say, in India. Nevertheless, astrology has been known in Russia since at least the 15th century. The earliest mention of astrology in Russian sources appears in the treatise *Tainaia tainych*, dated to the 15th century (Rosenthal, 1997). Historical sources also show that some Russian tsars, including Ivan the Terrible and Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, were interested in astrology and even hired European astrologers. These individuals often combined the roles of astrologers and healers, but their status at court was controversial due to the authorities' and clergy's persecution of astrology. For instance, in 1551, the Stoglav Council decided to ban star reading (*zvezdochet'i*) and astrology (Rosenthal, 1997). During the imperial period, astrology also faced periodic legal challenges but remained popular. At this time, astrological almanacs began to be published, first in the form of translations from Western texts, and then in the form of domestic almanacs in Russian. Nevertheless, professional astrology was virtually nonexistent in the Russian Empire; its place was taken by more traditional forms of divination, such as fortune-telling with cards, beans, and dream interpretation (Wigzell, 1998). Interest in astrology grew during the European occult revival. Still, it did not last long: with the Bolsheviks coming to power in 1917, all religious practices and beliefs, along with quasi-religious ones such as astrology, were officially banned. Because of the official ban on astrology, it is difficult to say much about its development during the Soviet era, though it likely continued underground. Beginning in the 1980s, with the weakening of the ideological regime, astrological forecasts appeared in newspapers and on the radio, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first astrological schools were founded, many of which still exist today (Kutalev, 2001). At the same time, Pavel Globa, a well-known popularizer of astrology, appeared on the scene. His predictions were so often featured on radio and television that his name is now familiar to most of the Russian-speaking population of the CIS. A huge number of esotericists of all stripes, apart from astrologers, flooded television screens with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the most famous of them being Allan Chumak, who allegedly “charged” water positively, and Anatoly Kashpirovsky, who could “heal” people live on air. This phenomenon, which characterizes the diversity of religious movements that emerged after the

collapse of the Soviet Union, has even been given a specific name in the academic literature: *late-Soviet spirituality* (Lesiva, 2021).

2.5. The special status of soothsayers in Russian and Ukrainian cultures

It is worth noting that people with prophetic gifts have always enjoyed special honor and respect in both Russian and Ukrainian society. Even in the tsarist and imperial eras, despite periodic persecution by the church, sorcerers played an important role in the lives of villagers and, later, of city dwellers, providing not only magical services but also predictions of the future. As Wigzell (1998) writes, even members of the aristocracy, including both men and women, but with a predominance of the latter, indulged in fortune-telling - either by consulting fortune-tellers or by trying to tell fortunes themselves with the help of so-called "fortune-telling books." In addition to sorcerers, witches, and fortune tellers, there was also a special category of citizens - the so-called holy fools, who were also treated with awe, as they were believed to possess the gift of foresight. Thus, we can see that a sort of special cult formed around people with prophetic gifts - such people were feared, but treated with respect. It is worth noting, however, that this attitude was mainly reserved for people with a natural gift of foresight - those who could see into the future through clairvoyance. Fortune tellers, i.e., those who used various tools for prediction, such as cards, did not enjoy such privilege and were often perceived as ordinary charlatans (Wigzell, 1998). It is difficult to say what the attitude toward astrologers was during this era, likely because astrologers were underrepresented in general.

There were also fortune-tellers in the Russian Empire known for their political predictions, though most were foreigners. The most famous of them was Madame Lenormand, a well-known French clairvoyant who predicted Napoleon Bonaparte's ascension to the French throne. By 1825, her name had become widely known in Russian aristocratic circles, and many members of the Russian nobility visited her boutique when in Paris. Another famous seer was Martin Zadeck, a legendary Swiss astrologer who most likely never existed and was an imaginary character used by publishing houses to promote their production. Nevertheless, German translations of his almanacs were widely popular among Russian-speaking audiences, most likely because of his predictions about the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was one of the Russian Empire's main rivals in the Black Sea region.

Among more recent soothsayers, it is worth mentioning Madame Blavatsky, who popularized spiritualism in Russia and founded her own esoteric teaching, theosophy. Theosophy believed that all religious movements originated from a single source, which Blavatsky saw as the spiritual practices of the East (Rosenthal, 1997). And, of course, it is impossible not to mention the chief Russian psychic, close to Emperor Nicholas II, Grigory Rasputin, who, according to rumors, had a direct influence on Russian politics at the time (Rosenthal, 1997). During the Soviet era, the performances of Wolf Messing and the predictions of the Bulgarian clairvoyant

Vanga were popular, and they remain so in Russia and Ukraine to this day (Neuburger & Hanzel, 2025).

2.6. *Spiritual clairvoyance in Orthodoxy*

Seers also play a significant role in Orthodox Christianity, which may also explain the historically established cult surrounding “people of power.” In Orthodoxy, however, the term *seer* is usually replaced by the concept of *prozorlivost* (spiritual clairvoyance), which, unlike the former, is spiritual rather than magical. It is believed that *prozorlivost* is a spiritual gift (grace) bestowed upon certain saints for their extreme humility and purity of heart (Horujy, 2014). The Orthodox Church recognizes many saints who possessed this gift. The saints’ prophecies themselves are extensively recorded in their hagiographies and in the accounts of their contemporaries.

Among the most renowned and influential Russian Orthodox saints known for their clairvoyance are St. Seraphim of Sarov (19th century) and Blessed Matrona of Moscow (20th century). Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833) is considered one of the most influential monks in the history of the Russian Church and a leading figure in the tradition of the Orthodox *starets* (elders or spiritual fathers). His prophecies took an allegorical form and were therefore not always understood by his contemporaries. Nevertheless, it is believed that he predicted key events of the 20th century, including the revolution, the overthrow of the monarchy, the decline, and the subsequent revival of the Orthodox faith. His prophecy of a “great upheaval” and the subsequent rebirth of Russia was actually used by Nicholas II and Alexandra Feodorovna to reinforce the belief in the “divine right of the monarchy,” for which he was apparently canonized at the initiative and with the personal involvement of Emperor Nicholas II (Cunningham, 1981).

Blessed Matrona of Moscow (1881–1952) was another well-known *prozorlivitsa* who lived during the Soviet era, yet was revered even in her lifetime. During the Stalin era, people came to her to learn the fate of their repressed relatives or to seek advice on how to avoid arrest themselves. She is believed to have predicted the Great Patriotic War. In addition, there is a popular but historically unsubstantiated myth about a 1941 meeting between Stalin and Matrona. Despite the lack of evidence, this legend is widely used today to reconcile Orthodox Christianity with the Soviet era, portraying Matrona as the leader’s secret advisor (Rock, 2007).

2.7. *The collapse of the USSR and the late-Soviet spirituality*

Another possible explanation for the current popularity of psychics in modern Russia and Ukraine is often attributed to the so-called phenomenon of *late-Soviet spirituality*. This term refers to the revival of previously banned religious practices after the collapse of the Soviet Union, characterized by the blending of magic and religion with science. Lesiva (2021) cites the following potential reasons for this phenomenon: 1) the aestheticization of religion by the Soviet regime, which resulted in the formation of its positive historical image, inevitably leading to

increased interest in it; 2) the spiritual emptiness of the communist ideal, which, unlike religion, did not offer hope or solutions to pressing problems; 3) the general weakening of the Soviet regime and its system of knowledge transmission, as a result of which the Soviet authorities failed to find an effective way to convey atheistic ideals to the young generation.

The combination of these factors created a situation where, after the fall of the ideological curtain, the Soviet people found themselves in complete religious confusion. In an attempt to fill the void that had emerged, many Soviet citizens undertook a spiritual search, which led some to religion and others to non-traditional religious movements. It is precisely because of this situation of religious diversity that various pseudoscientific and mystical ideas have gained widespread popularity, such as Lev Gumilev's *Passionarity* or Alexander Dugin's *Neo-Eurasianism*, rooted in the long-standing myth about "Russia's ascension", promoting the idea of Russia's "sacred mission" to save the world and presenting Russia as the guardian of traditional values in contrast to the "decaying" West (Rosenthal, 1997).

2.8. Political astrology in modern Russia and Ukraine

As for political divination in the modern world, i.e., predictive practices aimed at obtaining information about the political future, including political astrology, it is, to some extent, terra incognita for social researchers. Most studies on this topic treat political divination and astrology exclusively from a historical perspective, overlooking their persistence today. My attempts to find relevant research on political divination in Western countries have been unsuccessful. However, the situation is better in Russia and Ukraine, with several relevant works existing within scholarly literature (Lesiv, 2018; Neuburger & Hanzel, 2025).

In her work, Lesiv (2018) discusses how the outbreak of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2014 triggered an unprecedented surge in public support for political forecasters in both countries. The author notes that in both Russia and Ukraine, people who can see the future are actively involved in constructing the political narratives of their respective countries. For example, in Ukraine, forecasters often appear on national television, including news services such as TSN, where they give their predictions about the further development of current events, often with an extremely optimistic outlook for Ukraine's future, such as the creation of a visa-free zone with the EU or Ukraine's entry into NATO. In Russia, Vanga's predictions are widely popular and are often interpreted as foretelling Russia's greatness and bright future. Neuburger and Hanzel (2025) also draw attention to the latter and, using the concept of "post-truth", show how Vanga's predictions, in the form of numerous posts and reposts, serve as an important tool for maintaining the narrative of "Russia's ascension" and its "sacred mission." Moreover, as the authors note, Vanga's predictions serve the same purpose in Ukraine, too. It is also notable that the same predictions are sometimes invoked; because they are often allegorical, both sides can interpret them differently, to their advantage. A classic example of this is the following prediction, allegedly by Vanga: "Everything will melt like ice; only one thing will

remain untouched - the glory of Vladimir, the glory of Russia.” Since the name Vladimir is common throughout the Slavic world, it is difficult to say which Vladimir is being referred to, Vladimir Putin or Vladimir Zelensky, which leaves the prediction quite open to interpretation. In Russia, Vanga's prophecies benefit Putin's regime, as they legitimize his right to power and support the thesis that Russia's chosen political course is right. In Ukraine, where one sometimes hears a wife telling her soldier husband to hang in there a little longer because Vanga promised a quick end to the military action, they perform a similar function by motivating Ukrainian soldiers (Neuburger and Hanzel, 2025).

These studies show that the predictions of Vanga and contemporary fortune-tellers are of great ideological significance in both countries. However, it should be noted that political astrology is not given special attention in these works. Moreover, it remains unclear how exactly fortune-tellers construct their legitimacy in political forecasting, given that political scientists—people affiliated with science—play a leading role in it. To bring some clarity to this question, I believe that we must first understand the extent to which astrological and political forecasting satisfy or fail to satisfy the criteria of science - in other words, the extent to which they fit within the framework of science and magic. In my opinion, this aspect is of great importance for understanding how these scientific and astrological discourses interact. As my literature review below shows, the boundaries between science and magic remain blurred in both astrology and political forecasting, which may help explain why these discourses intersect.

3. The boundaries of magic and science in astrology and political science

3.1. Is astrology magic or science?

The term “magic” is quite broad in itself and can encompass a wide variety of things, depending on the definition chosen. None of these definitions is exhaustive, however, since exceptions to the rule can always be found. According to one definition, magic should be understood as “activities and rituals that are believed to influence the world by harnessing and controlling supernatural forces” (Stein et al., 2024, p. 156). However, if we accept this definition, shouldn't we then regard Christian prayers or Islamic du'a as magic? Official religion would not accept such an interpretation. According to Sir James Frazer's definition, magic is in fact “a bastard sister of science,” since it attempts to imitate science while relying on premises that are known to be false (Frazer, 1890). In Frazer's view, magic occupied the first stage in the evolution of human knowledge, followed by religion and, finally, science. In the course of cultural evolution, magic and religion were supposed to give way to scientific knowledge; however, as is well known, these three categories often coexist in many societies, and the evolutionary approach itself is rarely used in contemporary social and cultural anthropology. A narrower definition of magic, applicable to the Abrahamic religions, might be something that is neither religion nor science (Ryan, 1999). Nevertheless, this approach is of limited applicability to pagan religions, where magical rituals constitute a significant part of the believer's practice. Styers (2004) notes

that “magic” is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of practices that do not fit within the modern framework of rationality, including witchcraft, divination, palmistry, alchemy, occult sciences, and even superstition. If we adopt this approach, should we classify folk medicine as magic? In any case, regardless of the approach chosen, astrology would fall under the definition of magic. The definition of magic I employ in this work is based on the synthesis of several approaches and can be briefly summarized as something beyond the accepted norms of rationality, that cannot be strictly assigned to either science or religion, and that has a sacred element. To be more precise, astrology belongs to the observational type of divination (Boyer, 2020). Stein et al. (2024) note that anthropologists often treat divination and magic as a single category because of the functional resemblance: both manipulate the supernatural to achieve desired outcomes, with divination yielding knowledge of the future. Although approaches propose distinguishing divination from magic (Curry, 2016), they are not widely accepted; therefore, for this study, I treat these concepts as equivalent.

However, as noted earlier, astrology has not always held that status. In addition, there are other reasons, apart from historical ones, that cast doubt on the “magical” status of astrology. This question has been quite fully explored in the book *Astrology, Science, and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Willis & Curry, 2020), so this section will refer mainly to it. The first reason is connected to the history of astrology. As noted earlier, astrology has been inextricably linked to astronomy for millennia. Until the scientific revolution, largely influenced by the ideas of protestantism, which desacralized the natural world, they were taught and studied together. Therefore, many famous scientists, such as Johannes Kepler and Isaac Newton, were both astronomers and astrologers. Another reason is the attempts of both astrologers and scientists to justify astrology scientifically. For example, in the 20th century, French psychologists Michel and Françoise Gauquelin presented statistical data on the “Mars effect,” according to which people born when Mars was above the horizon tend to pursue military careers and sports. These findings sparked considerable interest in the scientific community, as evidenced by numerous publications over the decades following the Gauquelins' work. To this day, they remain controversial, as the scientific community has been unable to provide a justifiable refutation. In addition, astrologers often present astrology as a misunderstood branch of science rather than as magic, owing to its ancient origins and close resemblance to scientific methodology (Willis & Curry, 2020).

This, however, does not mean that astrology is scientific, as it has many problems that prevent it from being recognized as a science. The main problems with astrology are the lack of evidence for the mechanism by which celestial bodies influence people on Earth and the poor replicability of results, since different astrologers may interpret the same indicators differently. Another problem is the lack of a unified methodology, as modern astrology is divided into many schools and directions. Thus, astrology is certainly not a science by modern criteria, but it is not entirely irrational either. However, the very idea that irrationality is a prerequisite for magic is also somewhat arbitrary. As Styers (2004) notes, the dichotomy between irrationality-magic and

rationality-science was deliberately constructed to clearly distinguish the past, traditional and backward, from modernity. In reality, as seen in the example of astrology, the situation is much more complicated, and those systems of knowledge excluded from scientific discourse because of their apparent irrationality actually have quite rational foundations.

3.2. *Is political forecasting scientific?*

What about expert political forecasting? Despite the generally accepted scientific status of political science, political forecasting can hardly be called scientific. This may seem surprising at first glance, given the active role that political scientists and other political experts play in shaping the discourse on the future in Russia and Ukraine. Nevertheless, the statistics speak for themselves: the average expert is “roughly as accurate as a dart-throwing chimpanzee” (Tetlock, 2005). Tetlock (2005) reached this conclusion based on an analysis of the accuracy of 284 political experts, which showed that their accuracy was not statistically higher than chance. In his later work, Tetlock (Tetlock & Gardner, 2016) identified the main drawbacks of expert forecasting, including: the lack of systematic consideration of forecast accuracy, which is one of the main conditions of scientific thinking; the vague language of political forecasts (e.g., using words like “maybe,” “could happen”), which makes them practically irrefutable and therefore unscientific; experts' fixation on a single big idea, which often leads them to ignore facts that do not fit into their worldview. All these factors significantly affect both the pragmatic accuracy of political forecasts and their scientific validity.

As an example of this fixation on a “big idea”—when applied to the Russian-Ukrainian context—one might cite the well-known Russian political scientist and researcher of nationalism, Ekaterina Shulman. In her lectures and on the “Status” program, Shulman frequently cited Steven Pinker’s thesis from his well-known book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Pinker, 2012) - namely, that the global level of violence on Earth is gradually declining and that full-scale wars in the modern world are a form of archaism. She used this same argument as a counterargument regarding the possibility of open military conflict between Russia and Ukraine when assessing the potential movements of Russian troops along the border with Ukraine. However, looking back at the unfolding of these events from the perspective of 2026, it becomes clear just how wrong she was. Even though Shulman’s theoretical approaches proved untenable in the context of the situation in Ukraine—which should have led her to rethink her worldview—she continues to use them in her rhetoric, albeit more cautiously.

3.3. *The significance of political forecasting within political science and beyond*

However, as Dowding and Miller (2019) warn, we should clearly distinguish between pragmatic and scientific predictions. Pragmatic predictions are predictions about the type of future event, such as the victory of one candidate in an election or the fall of the dollar in a given month. These are usually the predictions we have in mind when we talk about political predictions in

general. Scientific predictions, on the contrary, are explanatory in nature and most often explain the relationship between several variables, for example, how a change in variable X affects variable Y. Such predictions need not concern the future, but they are important to political science because they enable political scientists to test political theories.

The expertise of a political scientist and the accuracy of their worldview are often assessed by how well their predictions hold up. However, as the authors note, there is often confusion as to which predictions should be considered the measure of a political scientist's accuracy - pragmatic predictions or scientific predictions. Pragmatic predictions, i.e., descriptive predictions about specific future events, are often used as such a measure. However, as Dowding and Miller (2019) argue, even highly accurate pragmatic predictions with a weak theoretical basis are of little value to political science because they do not offer a transferable model. On the other hand, theoretical models with proven predictive power, as evidenced by accurate scientific forecasts, but weak pragmatic accuracy, are much more beneficial for political science. Thus, they argue that concluding that a political scientist's expertise is based solely on pragmatic predictions is wrong.

Political forecasts are also important outside political science. For example, they play a major role in the development of public policy, helping governments with long-term planning on critical issues such as military spending and national security (Dowding & Miller, 2019). In addition, they have a manipulative function, as they are, in a broad sense, metaphors for shaping the image of the future (Solopova & Chudinov, 2019). Through political forecasting, the state or other interested parties create a positive or a negative image of the future, thereby encouraging society to support a particular political course or politician for that future to come (or not to come). From this point of view, its function coincides with that of political predictions made by seers, which also blurs the boundaries between magic and science, since functionally they are no different.

3.4. *Summary and gap*

To sum up, several conclusions can be drawn regarding political astrology and political forecasters in general. Firstly, the phenomenon of political astrology is not fundamentally new; neither is astrology itself. Astrology has a history of about 3000 years, and it has been used in political forecasting since its very inception. Although it has only recently become widely used in the Russian-Ukrainian cultural space, a couple of centuries ago, the predictions of famous astrologers were widely known throughout Europe. The fundamental difference between the astrologers of the past and the present lies only in the different forms of modern information delivery - via the Internet and digital technologies, which makes astrology more accessible to a wider audience (Pandey et al., 2025).

Secondly, modern Russia and Ukraine share a unique cultural context that, more than any other, fosters the flourishing of esoteric movements and ideas. On the one hand, this is linked to the historically significant role played by sorcerers and those with the ability to predict the future.

Russia and Ukraine had popular fortune-tellers whose predictions were in high demand because of their accuracy and drama, which played into the hands of the nationalist-minded segment of society. They also had spiritual leaders with paranormal abilities who managed to gather large numbers of followers, including members of the royal family. Grigory Rasputin, a confidant of Nicholas II, is often cited as one of the culprits in the political crisis that led to the Bolshevik Revolution. The popularity of fortune-tellers may be linked to the tradition of dual faith, which was much more widespread in Russia than in Western Europe due to the absence of a widespread Inquisition there (Rock, 1999). The sorcerer played an important role in traditional Russian society; for example, he was always invited to weddings, as it was believed that he could protect the newlyweds from the evil machinations of his fellow sorcerers (Ryan, 1999). In other words, the popularity of esotericists can be attributed to the strong influence of pre-Christian beliefs, in which the magus served as an important social mediator between spirits and ordinary people. Overlaying this archaic layer is Orthodox Christianity, which recognized the existence of saints endowed with the gift of spiritual clairvoyance. As it circulated within the culture, the image of clairvoyants could reinforce and elevate the status of people possessing the gift of foresight, even if they had no direct connection to Christianity. Moreover, we should not overlook that contemporary Russia and Ukraine have substantial Christian communities. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent boom in esoteric movements and ideas created a favorable environment for the flourishing of esotericism and various national myths, which contemporary Russian and Ukrainian politicians frequently invoke. One such important idea is Neo-Eurasianism - the belief in a special Russian civilization, and its role in the fight with the “decaying” West. To support these ideas, people often cite the prophecies of the Bulgarian clairvoyant Vanga, which, however, are not entirely clear-cut and can therefore be interpreted by each side in a way that suits their own agenda. For this reason, I believe that we can speak of continuity between the cultural past of “old” Russia, “new” Russia, and Ukraine, which historically was under the great cultural influence of its older neighbor and shares a common origin with it.

Thirdly, it has been shown that the boundaries between science and magic are blurred in both astrology and expert political forecasting. Despite the common perception of astrology as a “pseudoscience,” it has not always held this status, as it developed in parallel with astronomy and was based on thousands of years of observations of how the stars influence human life. Moreover, attempts are still being made to scientifically prove or disprove astrology, which indicates that even in the modern world, the status of astrology does not clearly fit into the division of knowledge into “scientific” and “magical.” In addition, it has been shown that political forecasting does not fully meet the criteria of scientificity, due to its subjectivity and low pragmatic accuracy. Thus, the only factor that makes political scientists' predictions legitimate is their own experience and expertise. The logic behind accurate predictions, however, is not based solely on scientific methodology, which also diminishes the importance of science in the discourse of political forecasting and as an element of a forecaster's symbolic capital. As I will

demonstrate further, this factor is a key explanation for why astrologers can operate within the discourse of political forecasting despite their highly marginal status.

As for research on political astrology in the modern world, there is practically none. Studies on the role of modern prophets in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian military crisis that began in 2014 (Lesiv, 2018) and on the phenomenon of Vanga's predictions (Neuburger & Hanzel, 2025) sufficiently reveal the functional role of political predictions in maintaining national narratives. However, these works pay no specific attention to political astrology. This work should fill this gap, among others. However, the most significant omission in contemporary scientific literature on political forecasters is the lack of understanding of how these people construct their legitimacy in a discourse dominated by “people of science” - political scientists, historians, and other political experts. In my opinion, one of the most productive approaches to addressing this gap is to examine political astrology through the prism of its relationship to science and magic.

4. Theoretical framework

Theoretically, my work mainly draws on Michel Foucault's discourse analysis, Bronislaw Malinowski's functional approach to magic, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. The central idea of Michel Foucault's approach is that all knowledge is neither objective nor inherently true, but entirely dependent on the dominant “regime of truth.” It, in turn, determines what the truth is, who has the right to speak it, and which methods are recognized as legitimate for its production (Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1980). The dominant regime of truth, that is, the set of discourses that are considered true, is not static and universally accepted, but is always formed by a specific society in a specific historical period (Foucault, 1980). This aspect aligns well with the discussion of the boundaries between science and magic, as it shows that both are socially constructed concepts. A similar approach is used, for example, in Styers (2004), who shows that the division into “science,” “religion,” and “magic” is conditioned by a historical process in which dominant institutions of power formed and consolidated ideas about scientific and religious rationality. Magic, within this paradigm, served only as a “foil”, a categorical contrast to science and religion, since it did not fit within the accepted boundaries of rationality (Styers, 2004).

Within the framework of discourse analysis, I conceptualize astrology in this work as a form of “subjugated knowledges” - historical or local systems of knowledge that have been marginalized and displaced from the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1980). Foucault uses this term to refer to forms of knowledge that have been disqualified as insufficiently scientific, naive, or irrational, despite their historical and cultural significance. Astrology, in my opinion, can be one such example. It is based on centuries of observations of celestial bodies and has long existed as a legitimate form of knowledge about reality. For this reason, in this study, I consider astrology “subjugated knowledge,” which has lost legitimacy within modern scientific discourse but

continues to retain epistemological authority in discursive spaces where it has historically held a dominant position.

Moreover, I draw on Bronislaw Malinowski's functional approach to magic, which holds that magic serves as a coping mechanism in situations of uncertainty and risk (Malinowski, 1948). However, unlike Malinowski, I do not reduce magic to a coping mechanism, but I use his approach to explain why astrological forecasts remain popular despite the institutional dominance of scientific knowledge. Political forecasting is inherently a field characterized by high uncertainty, which political science has not yet addressed effectively, as evidenced by the low pragmatic accuracy of political experts and their vagueness (Tetlock, 2005). On the contrary, astrological predictions are more concrete and sometimes more accurate than the expert political forecasts, which is why they may be more effective in reducing anxiety.

In addition, to conceptualize the legitimacy that astrologers possess in the discourse of political forecasting, I will use the concept of “symbolic capital” introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Symbolic capital refers to any form of capital (economic, social, cultural) that is perceived and recognized as legitimate within a given social context. In this paper, I argue that the symbolic capital of astrologers stems from both their scientific capital, which I understand as the adoption of scientific discourse, and their spiritual capital, rooted in the hermetic status of astrology itself. Moreover, as Bourdieu argues, symbolic capital exists only through processes of social recognition, since “symbolic capital exists only insofar as it is recognized” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21). Thus, in my work, I emphasize that constructing legitimacy is a two-way process that depends on both the astrologers who actively construct it and the audience who recognize it as valid for predicting the future.

Scientific capital is a concept proposed by Bourdieu to describe the symbolic capital scientists possess within science. He also differentiates it into pure scientific capital, which stems from the recognition of a scientist's contribution to science, and institutional scientific capital, acquired through positions of power within scientific institutions (Bourdieu, 1975). However, the concept of scientific capital used in this paper differs from Bourdieu's and encompasses all forms of intellectual, personal, and cultural capital, as well as strategies and practices recognized as legitimate and consistent with accepted norms of rationality within the dominant scientific regime of truth. Thus, the scientific capital I propose is not limited to the field of science, but extends far beyond it, and relates more to what is understood as science in a specific historical period than to the actual distribution of power within the institutionalized scientific community.

As for the concept of spiritual capital, it does not appear in Bourdieu's original works but is a distinct concept that has emerged independently and is used across four fields: management, economics, sociology, and theology (Palmer & Wang, 2013). It is quite controversial and carries different meanings across these disciplines. The concept of spiritual capital used in this paper is close to that used by Verter (2003). It is a logical continuation of Bourdieu's concept of religious

capital, which, unlike the latter, is not limited to the institutional hierarchy of a single religion and instead implies a more widespread commodity woven into the complex mechanisms of a competitive symbolic economy (Verter, 2003).

5. Research design

5.1. *Methodological approach*

Since modern astrologers make predictions primarily through digital media, including social networks, personal websites, and television, the chosen research method had to be suitable for working with digital content while also providing sufficient information for in-depth analysis of the cultural material under study. Taking these nuances into account, I chose Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) as the main research method for this work.

Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is a qualitative research method that combines elements of ethnography with content analysis to explore the deeper meanings and contextual dimensions of texts. The method is particularly widely used in the study of media, such as television news and films (Altheide, 1987). Like quantitative and qualitative content analysis, ECA systematically documents numerical and narrative elements in a text. However, it goes beyond simple categorization by seeking to uncover the underlying meanings, patterns, and messages embedded in the material. As David L. Altheide notes, “its distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection, and analysis” (Altheide, 1987, p. 68). The main advantage of ECA is that, rather than relying solely on predetermined variables and rigid analytical categories, it allows analytical categories to emerge through iterative engagement with the data. This approach emphasizes reflexivity and iterative analysis, requiring the researcher to repeatedly return to the data, refine conceptual categories, and develop new hypotheses. Possible interpretations are then continuously tested against the empirical data until a coherent and theoretically meaningful interpretation is achieved. Participatory observation also plays an important role in this method, as it provides a better understanding of the end consumer's perspective on media content.

As part of this method, I analyzed 12 YouTube videos featuring political predictions by six Russian-speaking astrologers for 2020-2026, as well as 3 forecasts published in text format on the astrologers' personal websites. In addition to the video content published by astrologers, I also analyzed the comments left by people under these videos. Since legitimacy is constructed not only through claims of authority but also through recognition granted by audiences who perceive and validate that authority, it was important for me to understand the audience's attitude toward astrologers, to whom this content is intended. Moreover, analyzing comments enabled me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the audience interprets and engages with political forecasts. The use of secondary data exclusively in this study is fully justified, as it fully addresses the study's research questions. Another reason is that the community under study, astrologers and their viewers, exists only in the digital space. Moreover, this community appears

to be quite heterogeneous, so interviewing people would have given me only a limited insight into their attitudes toward political astrology. Analyzing comments, on the other hand, can provide a broader view, as they more fully reflect the diversity of opinions within the field.

5.2. Sample and data collection

My sample included the following six popular Russian-speaking astrologers: Tatyana Kalinina (Belarus), Konstantin Daragan (Russia), Svetlana Dragan (Russia), Pavel Andreev (Russia), Vlad Ross (Ukraine), and Irina Abdraimova (Kazakhstan). When making my preliminary selection of astrologers, I first used a keyword search and then selected astrologers based on the number of views and subscribers to their channels. On average, 2-3 videos covering the period 2020-2026 were analyzed for each astrologer. Thematically, the videos primarily cover major geopolitical events in Russia and Ukraine, as well as global events. Some of the videos were taken from an earlier period, and some from a more recent one, to ensure sufficient temporal coverage and to obtain a more detailed picture of each astrologer. The videos themselves vary greatly in length, ranging from 10 minutes to a couple of hours. They also vary in format: some videos are produced as podcasts, others as streams, and still others are recordings of television programs. Furthermore, some of these videos were published on the astrologers' own channels, while others were published on third-party sources. The user comments under each video were also analyzed. Because the number of comments under some videos exceeded 1000, I covered only the 300 most popular. In addition to the videos and comments, written predictions on some astrologers' personal websites were analyzed, as some astrologers prefer a textual format to video.

5.3. Data analysis

Instead of merely stating the content titles, the narrative, or the number of views, which would be appropriate if I had done quantitative or qualitative content analysis, I approached each video holistically to understand what might be the real motivations of both sides for filming and watching them. For that, a separate observation sheet with predetermined categories (see *Appendix I*) was created for each video and webpage. Each video and webpage was analyzed according to this sheet. At the end of the sheet, I wrote down my reflexive notes, such as repetitive or unexpected patterns, or further questions for discussion, which helped me not only to do analysis while making observations, but also to guide my research in a way that made the most sense for me, considering the growing pool of data. This reflexivity is the main advantage of my approach, as it does not constrain me to strict categorical boundaries, thereby allowing me to probe the research material as deeply as possible. Additionally, I conducted qualitative and quantitative surveys of the digital content, for example, to understand the content the astrologer generally publishes and the number of views their videos receive. However, information retrieved using such methods was treated only as additional to the ethnographic content analysis that I performed. The entire process, including observation, transcription, and coding, was performed manually by me.

5.4. *Limitations of the study*

The study has the following methodological limitations. First, because it does not use primary data, I cannot fully assess the personal motives of astrologers and their audience, as these are not necessarily expressed explicitly. Second, it is difficult for me to assess the actual scale of astrological political forecasting, as there is virtually no numerical data in my work. To answer this question, it would be necessary to conduct a large-sample survey, which falls outside the methodological scope of this study. Third, I admit that comments may not reflect the actual division of opinions on astrology, since certain categories of people may be overrepresented, while others may not be represented at all. In addition, negative comments may be deleted by content rights holders, which can also lead to inaccurate conclusions. Fourth, the method I have chosen is quite subjective, which is, however, true of most anthropological research. To minimize the influence of personal factors, all information was collected and analyzed systematically, with attention to even minor details that arose during the study.

5.5. *Ethical considerations*

The principles of ethical integrity were observed at every stage of this study, from data collection and storage to analysis and interpretation. All data for the study were obtained from open-access sources, and restricted-access sources were not included to avoid violating copyright. To avoid violating YouTube's internal rules, videos and comments were transcribed manually, as the platform's policy prohibits the use of third-party software. All collected information was stored on a password-protected laptop in a separate folder accessible only to me, thereby minimizing the risk of information leakage. For simplicity, comments were collected and stored as screenshots and may therefore contain user names; however, when interpreting them directly in the work, they were referred to anonymously to protect user confidentiality. There are two rationales behind this decision. First, because I do not have a consent form, I cannot disclose users' personal data without their permission, as this would violate the principle of ethical integrity. Second, it is necessary to protect users from potential legal issues, as some comments express political positions that are unsafe to express in the current political climate. Third, the subject of astrology itself can be quite sensitive for some people because it is associated with certain stereotypes and is not approved by the official church.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1. *An astrologer's scientific capital*

6.1.1. *The role of scientific capital*

As my analysis has shown, an astrologer's legitimacy is of a hybrid nature, shaped both by their scientific capital, arising from an astrologer's affiliation with political science and science in general, and their spiritual capital due to the "magical" status of astrology itself. In my view,

however, the latter plays a decisive role. The first is achieved through the significant incorporation of political analysis into astrologers' predictions, the use of quasi-scientific terminology and methodology, as well as self-representation, which constitutes their scientific capital, allowing astrologers to legitimize themselves within the discourse of political forecasting - a field dominated by institutionally accepted experts with ties to science, such as political scientists, historians, sociologists, and other political experts. The second stems from the perceived function of magic in reducing uncertainty where scientific capabilities are limited, as well as the historically and culturally conditioned role of the "spiritual capital" in predicting the future. I consider this factor the most important, since it is precisely the magical status of astrology that distinguishes it from political science and other disciplines that belong to scientific epistemology.

6.1.2. *Scientific self-representation*

"Hello, everyone! My name is Tatyana Kalinina. You're watching the channel of the Ashvini School of Astrology, and today we'll be discussing the horoscope for March. We'll talk about what's happening in the heavens and how it might affect our lives." (Tatyana Kalinina)

These are the opening words of the March 2021 forecast for Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine by Tatyana Kalinina, a renowned Belarusian and Russian political astrologer and founder of her own school of predictive Vedic astrology, Alpha (formerly known as Ashvini). The total duration of the video is 10 minutes and 58 seconds. Nevertheless, it is the second-most popular video on her channel, with 117,000 followers, having garnered 239,000 views at the time of this study. Tatyana Kalinina—an attractive middle-aged woman with dyed blonde hair, wearing a dark gray-blue blouse with a microphone clipped to her collar—is recording a solo video from her office, comfortably seated in an office chair. In the foreground, we can see Tatiana's upper body, and in the background, a bookshelf filled with numerous books on astrology. To the left of Tatiana, text periodically appears in a dark blue box, listing the month's major astrological events in the sky along with all the necessary dates and, at times, a brief interpretation. In the upper left corner is Tatiana's Instagram username, and in the upper right corner is the logo of the Ashvini School of Astrology.



Picture 1. Tatyana Kalinina is making a broadcast. The astrologer is in her office, dressed casually, and we can see some books on the bookshelves behind her. (retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3wOyR279ms>)

The first thing you notice when watching the video is the astrologer's appearance and manner of presentation. Tatyana Kalinina does not look like some kind of weirdo; on the contrary, her appearance gives the impression of a perfectly normal person by conventional standards. When recording her forecasts, she prefers casual attire. She uses offices as a backdrop, featuring star charts and bookshelves filled with volumes, thereby emphasizing, through her appearance, that she is a well-read expert in her field. There are no magical items in her videos—such as talismans, candles, and the like—that one typically sees among people who call themselves witches and sorcerers; instead, there is often a laptop or other electronic device that astrologer uses to read natal charts (horoscopes) - astrological charts that show the positions of the planets in the sky at a specific moment in time, whether it be a person's birthday or the date of a country's declaration of independence.

Speech also plays a significant role in shaping an astrologer's self-representation. Tatyana Kalinina's speech is quite clear and well-articulated, and therefore easy for listeners to understand. She begins her forecast with broader astrological trends, for example:

“March 5 marks the first major event of the month. Mercury will be in conjunction with Jupiter in the sign of Capricorn. Capricorn is a place where Jupiter is weakened. When Mercury and Jupiter align, they promise changes in the economy, markets, stock markets, exchanges, stocks, bonds, and exchange rates. Therefore, I expect this event to trigger a market turnaround, dramatic changes on the stock exchange, and, presumably, a decline in the Russian ruble.” (Tatyana Kalinina)

Her speech is fairly accessible because it avoids complex concepts from esotericism or political science; nevertheless, it is sufficiently nuanced to explain political events in the selected countries. The occasional use of astrological terms clarifies the epistemological basis of her predictions, emphasizing that they were made using astrology, while the inclusion of dates helps organize the information. She also mentions the auspicious trine between Rahu and Saturn beginning on March 20, 2021 - an aspect that promises innovations in the economy and the field of engineering; the conjunction of Venus and the Sun in Pisces, heralding a surge of creative energy; as well as the inauspicious conjunction of Mars and Rahu in Taurus in the Rahini nakshatra, indicating some political unrest in the region, as well as in India, since, according to Kalinina, this particular nakshatra is associated with that country.

Here, I consider it necessary to provide a brief introduction to astrology. Aspects are specific angles between planets through which energy flows from one planet to another. In astrology, the term “planets” refers to all planets in the solar system up to and including Pluto (Indian astrology does not use Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, as they were discovered relatively recently), as well as the Sun, the Moon, and the lunar nodes (Rahu and Ketu) - the points where the Moon’s orbit intersects the ecliptic. Each planet falls into a specific sign, which gives it additional meanings and context. Nakshatras are 27 additional constellations used exclusively in Vedic astrology. In addition, astrology also uses other constellations (such as Orion or the Big Dipper) and their stars as auxiliary indicators, usually when a planet’s degree coincides with a star’s degree in longitude. After discussing these broader trends, Kalinina moves on to more specific forecasts for Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. She ends her video with the typical blogger’s request to subscribe to the channel, like the video, and click the bell icon, as well as a promise to continue covering the political situation in the region. At the end of the video, we also see a short advertisement for the Ashvini School of Astrology, with the words “Learn how to predict events!” written in large letters.

Other astrologers may present themselves more formally and use more technical language. A prime example of this is Konstantin Daragan, a well-known Russian astrologer of Ukrainian descent who, like Tatiana Kalinina, runs his own school of astrology. Unlike Kalinina, however, Konstantin specializes in Western astrology. The following dialogue is taken from an interview with Vladimir Dimov, the creator of the YouTube channel “Dimov’s Podcast,” which has 219,000 subscribers. The video itself has garnered 607,000 views and was released in January 2026. The video consists of a lengthy conversation, lasting 50 and a half minutes, in which the channel’s host asks the most pressing questions regarding the global future and Russia in the year 2026, as well as looking a little further ahead.

“Vladimir Dimov: I watched all your interviews while preparing for our meeting. Could you please tell me when the “CBO” (Special military operation) will end? Is this a matter of a few years, or will it last for decades?”

Konstantin Daragan: *A conflict with the West lasting decades—well, a little less than a decade—is a certainty. Since there is a conflict with the West taking place on Ukrainian territory, the fighting will naturally not stop after 2026. Well, the political aspects of the agreements that will be implemented will take place in 2026. In other words, from mid-fall 2025 through March 2026, we should see substantive negotiations; political reforms should be implemented in Ukraine in 2026, and it is along these lines that the situation will continue to develop, not like the Minsk Agreements, but with some tangible results. Nevertheless, expecting that the fighting will stop in 2026, 2028, or 2032–33, we have more crises ahead, and they are easily predictable.* “

As we can see, Konstantin Daragan’s speech is characterized by an abundance of complex, abstract words and a highly structured manner of presenting information, more appropriate for an academic setting than for everyday conversation. He himself is dressed more formally than Tatyana Kalinina - in a shirt and a suit. But what is more interesting is that Konstantin Daragan openly positions himself through his association with the scientific community. For example, during the interview, Konstantin Daragan repeatedly states that he holds a Ph.D. in cultural studies and the title of associate professor at one of Moscow’s universities; his interlocutors often make the same claims. For example, the following information about him was provided right at the beginning of the interview.



Picture 2. Konstantin Daragan is presented as a PhD in philosophy and an associate professor of cultural studies. (retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5jqsyeSZxA>)

If we go to Konstantin Daragan's personal website, we also see this emphasis on scientificity and rationality:

“I am a consistent proponent of modern classical astrology, i.e., 'common sense astrology', which is based on a good balance between historical methods, astronomical

logic, personal experience, and the astrologer's mandatory competence in related fields - in my case, a college degree in aerospace, a degree in philosophy, and a degree in cultural studies.” (Konstantin Daragan)

Daragan thus emphasizes that his method is based on rational thinking rather than magical techniques or psychicism. Moreover, if we look at the comments under the interview with Konstantin Daragan, we can notice that many people also note the intellectual abilities of the astrologer:

“I always admire Konstantin Daragan's intelligence and breadth of thought, a rare intellectual, always a pleasure to listen to, and I really enjoy it.”

“I think, why do I like Daragan and Tseskaridze? Probably it's all about the highest professionalism, talent, and a sharp mind!”

Thus, simply through their appearance and speech, astrologers attempt to project an image of a knowledgeable, rational person. Rationality is essential in modern discourse, which holds that logic must be present in all knowledge. Some astrologers, like Konstantin Daragan, go further and add academic regalia to their image, thereby affirming their status within public discourse. By adopting the rules of modern discourse, astrologers assert their right to speak about the future on equal footing with other experts.

6.1.3. *The use of scientific terminology*

Astrologers also use a great deal of scientific terminology in their speech, which in turn influences how their predictions are perceived epistemologically. To begin with, the term astrologers use for their predictions is “forecast” (прогноз in Russian). There can be 3 reasons for that. First, the word “forecast” implies that an astrologer is entitled to make mistakes, which partially absolves them of responsibility for predictions that do not come true. For example, one of the commentators under Tatyana Kalinina's forecast, in defense of the astrologer, writes that she makes forecasts, not predictions, and therefore has the right to make mistakes:

“People criticizing Tatyana Kalinina. If you don't understand the word “forecast,” Google it. Tatyana analyzes development dynamics as any analyst would, assessing facts and circumstances. Tatyana does this using her own tools...”

Second, political scientists and scholars use the same term in a broader sense, as a more scientific alternative to a prediction, since a “forecast” (прогноз) implies that it is based on rational grounds, unlike a “prediction” (предсказание), which can have any epistemological basis. By referring to their predictions as forecasts, astrologers emphasize that they were made using a specific methodology and logical reasoning, which generally lends them a more “scientific” (in the sense of rational) status from the perspective of the general public. Third, it is also important

to emphasize that astrologers do not present fate as something static and unchangeable; on the contrary, many astrologers emphasize that fate is in the hands of man, and this also justifies the use of the term “forecast”. For example, Konstantin Daragan, in an interview with Vladimir Dimov, says that:

"Of course we can change, and a lot of it at that...The stars nudge, but they don't lead. We don't just have choices - we have an obligation to make choices." (Konstantin Daragan)

In addition to a more scientific framing of predictions, astrologers often use probabilistic constructions to demonstrate, once again, that their forecasts are subject to error. For example, Tatyana Kalinina often uses words such as “hypothesis,” “I expect,” and “presumably” in her predictions. For instance, this can be seen in the previous example:

*"Therefore, **I expect** this event to trigger a market turnaround, dramatic changes on the stock exchange, and, **presumably**, a decline in the Russian ruble."* (Tatyana Kalinina)

Some astrologers go further and express probabilities as percentages, as Pavel Andreev does in his YouTube program “Politics of Space,” with 253,000 subscribers, where he and invited political experts review current political events and assess their potential dynamics. For example, in a November 2025 issue featuring military and political experts such as Alexander Artamonov and Dmitry Rohde, which has garnered over 250,000 views, predicting the future for Trump, he says that:

"There's about a 60-70 percent chance of being shot, 55-65 percent chance of being poisoned. That's the range I'd take. There are other supporting, mitigating circumstances, so the most likely configuration is 'the secret service reported that...prevented something'." (Pavel Andreev)

Thanks to such generally more scientific rhetoric, astrologers’ predictions come to resemble those of political scientists more closely, thereby increasing astrologers' legitimacy in the discourse of political forecasting. Nevertheless, this does not mean that their language is entirely devoid of magical terms; on the contrary, such terms are quite prevalent. They are particularly common in the speech of astrologers who position themselves from a more esoteric perspective, such as Svetlana Dragan and Irina Abdraimova. For example, Irina Abdraimova, on her channel with 80 thousand subscribers, in the global forecast for April 2022, speaks of “*cosmic energies under which the earth falls*” and that:

*"The earth as **a higher intelligence** is in a period of transformation. We are all on the move, and we, as **young souls**, must go through this period."* (Irina Abdraimova)

Nevertheless, they are also present in the speech of those astrologers who position themselves more “rationally”. For example, Tatyana Kalinina, in her January 13, 2026 stream on the possible overthrow of the Ali Khamenei regime in Iran, says that:

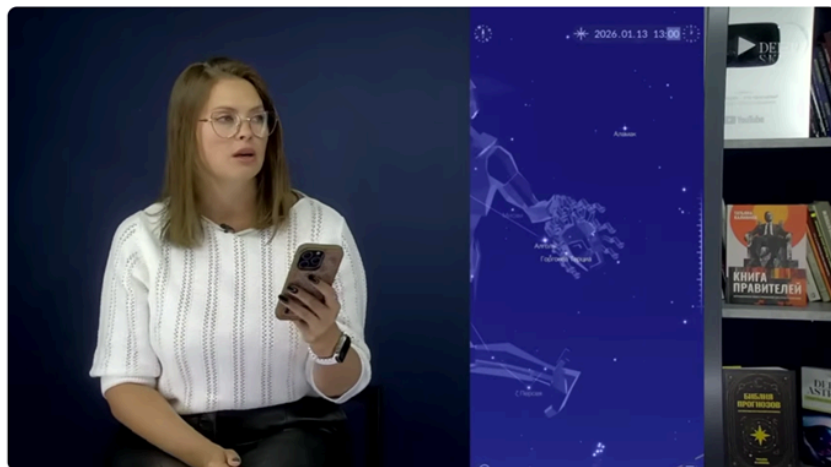
*“There's some philosophical gap here between the kind of inquiry that the **fate** of the country and its **karma** makes and the way some cling to power”* (Tatyana Kalinina)

What is important is that magical and scientific vocabulary in their speech do not exclude but rather complement one another, conferring different forms of legitimacy on the astrologer. Scientific vocabulary confers scientific legitimacy on the astrologer, allowing them to operate within a discourse in which scientific knowledge plays a dominant role. At the same time, magical vocabulary confers magical legitimacy, which also holds symbolic significance in the discourse of political forecasting, as will be shown later.

6.1.4. *Quasi-scientific methodology*

The more scientific positioning of astrologers' predictions is evident not only in the language they use but also in their methodology, which is characterized by its explanatory and reflexive nature. For example, many astrologers do not simply issue a forecast, but also explain exactly how a country's or a person's horoscope indicates such a scenario. In doing so, they often display the astrological chart itself for clarity and explain the meaning of various horoscope indicators in accessible terms. Tatyana Kalinina makes particular use of this approach. For example, in her January forecast regarding the fall of the regime in Iran that has garnered over 18,000 views, Tatiana Kalinina notes that the ruler of the 10th house, which is responsible for authority, is positioned near the “ominous star” Alcyone and also touches the part of the constellation Perseus where he holds the severed head of Medusa, the Gorgon. Thus, the astrologer notes that the horoscope literally shows that Iran will be left without a head, that is, without a ruler. To illustrate, she uses a special mobile that lets you view a map of the starry sky.

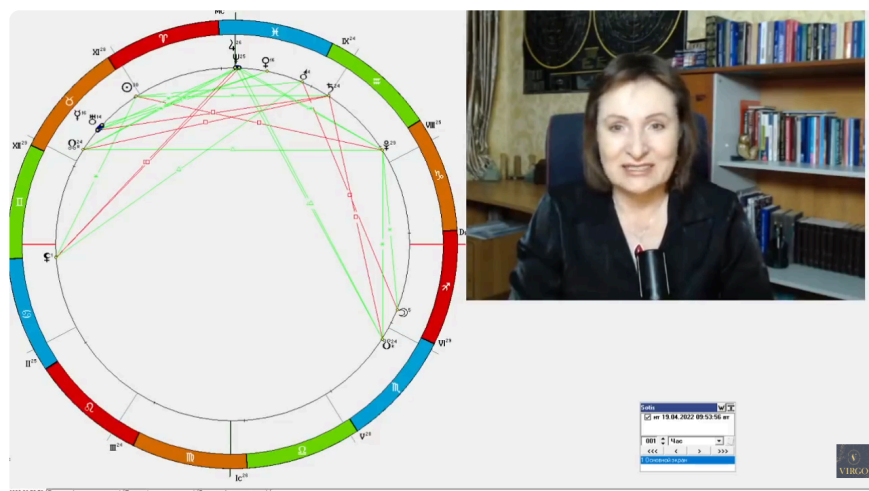
"This is where the beauty of astrology and all its power is revealed. The ruler of the 10th house is the Moon, and if we click on it, we can see it is very close to Alcyone, a rather ominous star. Moreover, it touches the constellation of Perseus in that part...just a minute to make it clearer for you - the severed head of the Gorgon Medusa held by a warrior - from this we can assume that in the second half of 2026 the Khamenei regime will be overthrown because the Moon rules the 10th house of power." (Tatyana Kalinina)



Picture 3. Tatyana Kalinina explains a horoscope to the viewers (retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ia20Rj44acI&t=33s>)

The house in astrology is another important element of the natal chart, which is responsible for a particular area of life. For example, the 10th house in the horoscope of a country shows power, and the 4th house - territories and infrastructure. As well as signs of the zodiac, there are 12 houses in astrology, but if the first 12 constellations are in the sky, then houses are 12 conventional sectors calculated based on the time and geographical coordinates of birth. Interestingly enough, it seems that this horoscope has really started to come true, only somewhat earlier than Kalinina predicted. On February 28, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, was killed in an airstrike on his residence in Tehran.

Tatyana Kalinina also uses this same approach in her retrospective analysis to explain the astrological causes of current political events. For example, in her prediction of peace in Ukraine, which garnered 243,000 views, she explains why military operations in Ukraine began at that specific time rather than earlier, noting that the planet ruling that period was not associated with the 7th house of war and peace. At the same time, when Mars became the ruler of the period in Ukraine's horoscope—a planet that symbolizes the military in and of itself and is also associated with the 7th house—military operations began. Many other astrologers also use this approach. Thanks to this approach, even someone with no prior training can understand the logic behind an astrologer's forecast and may even arrive at similar conclusions.



Picture 4. Another astrologer, Irina Abdramova, demonstrates a horoscope from her computer. (retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHTiPZ9ur78>)

Retrospective analysis is a common feature of astrological predictions, underscoring the importance of the rational component in astrology; indeed, this rationality does not differ greatly from that accepted in scientific discourse. For example, Pavel Andreev generally begins all his sessions with “*what came true and what did not come true.*” In contrast, Tatyana Kalinina and Konstantin Daragan present separate sections in which they analyze predictions that proved accurate and those that did not. On the one hand, by doing so, they can clearly demonstrate that astrological predictions come true, thereby legitimizing them as a source of valid information. On the other hand, it creates the impression that astrology is a discipline open to internal verification of its methods and their refinement, an important characteristic of scientific knowledge. Tatyana Kalinina herself notes in one of her videos that, for her, the retrospective analysis of past predictions is an integral part of “*learning from her own mistakes.*” Self-correction is also a main feature of scientific knowledge.

In addition, astrologers clearly define the boundaries of astrology, noting, for example, that it is impossible to create a horoscope without a precise time, as Pavel Andreev does. In turn, Tatyana Kalinina, in the same forecast on Iran, considers whether Crown Prince Pahlavi of Iran will return after the regime's overthrow and notes that she cannot give an affirmative answer due to the absence of his exact birth time.

“I can't guarantee that this power will accurately go to him since I don't have his exact time, but even from the inaccurate one, I can see his elevation” (Tatyana Kalinina)

Astrology, therefore, is not presented as secret knowledge accessible only to the chosen few, nor as a static relic of the past. On the contrary, it is presented as a discipline open to dialogue, undergoing continuous development, and possessing its own disciplinary framework, which makes it far more akin to science than to magic. This positioning of astrology is certainly

relevant to the establishment of an astrologer's legitimacy, since the dominant scientific discourse implies that all knowledge must be produced using rational, verifiable methods. Astrology partly adheres to this principle, at least through its reflexivity, openness, and internal logic.

6.1.5. *Incorporation of political analysis*

However, what further legitimizes astrologers within the discourse of political forecasting is that they supplement their predictions with substantial political analysis that is not directly related to astrology. This factor is even more important than the previous ones, since when reviewing most astrological forecasts, it becomes obvious that the person making the predictions is knowledgeable about politics.

To begin with, the general rhetoric of astrologers is quite politicized, as evidenced by the vocabulary they use in their predictions. For example, Ukrainian astrologer Vlad Ross, in his interview with Ukrainian YouTube channel TCH in June 2023, speaks of “nighttime provocations,” “the fall of the Crimean bridge,” and “Putin’s overthrow,” which largely mirrors the dominant narratives on Ukrainian television; astrologers from Russia do the same.

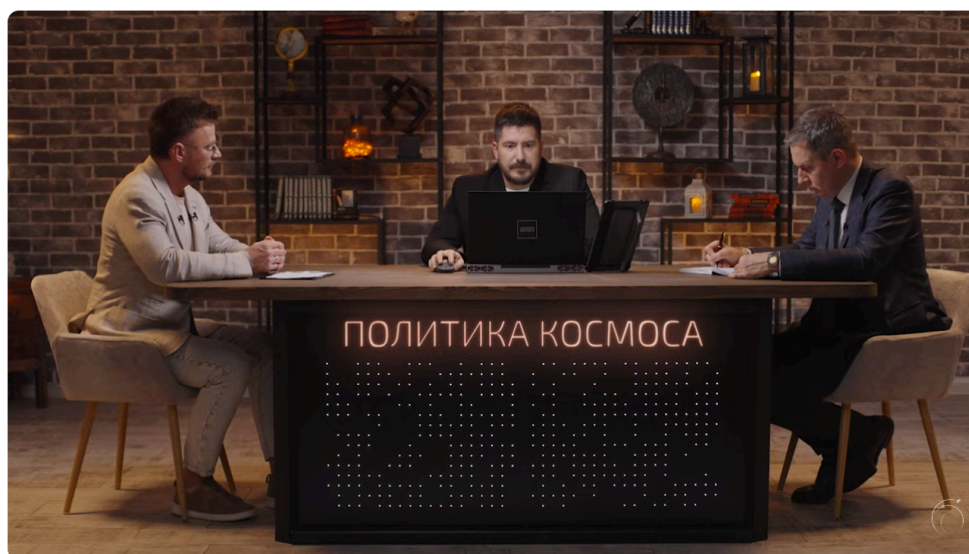
*"This trend is, of course, related to the planet Pluto, and Pluto will now be turning around and going retrograde into Capricorn again, so it's going to happen on June 11. And of course after June 11, there's a chance that these **nighttime provocations**, nighttime gunshots, will start to diminish."* (Vlad Ross)

*"Most importantly, the stars are already starting to lean toward overthrowing Vladimir Putin. I said that Mars enters the house of **Putin's overthrow**, the 8th house, the house of catastrophe, in June, and it will continue its influence right through November."* (Vlad Ross)

*"Friends! June will be very interesting to watch as **the Crimean Bridge is destroyed**. At most, I will give you that it could be July, but most likely it could happen in June, especially when Saturn goes retrograde."* (Vlad Ross)

But it isn't just the astrologers' rhetoric; it's that a significant portion of their astrological predictions is based on political analysis, which sometimes even outweighs the astrological part itself. The current situation is often explained through the lens of the relationships among key political actors and the balance of power among them, and only then are the political predictions superimposed on this backdrop. For example, Pavel Andreev begins his forecast for Donald Trump by asserting that real politics is shaped by “clans” and “shadowy elite groups,” rather than by “sovereign rulers,” of whom, in his view, there are almost none left in the world. He also describes Trump not as an independent figure, but as a “puppet” whose goal is to place his associates in control of financial flows. Only after this analysis does he begin to introduce

astrological “formulas” - as he calls the astrological techniques used to interpret a natal chart. Moreover, even the host himself, asking Pavel Andreev for his opinion, asks what he thinks about the situation “as an astrologer and as an expert”, thus recognizing that Pavel Andreev's analysis includes a significant amount of political science in addition to astrology. At the same time, prominent political and military experts often appear with him in the studio, corroborating his political observations. Another astrologer, Konstantin Daragan, when asked by the interviewer about the likelihood of a new wave of mobilization in Russia, replies that there is “neither a logical nor an astrological basis” for it, which once again confirms the argument that political analysis, beyond astrology, plays a significant role in forecasting.



Picture 5. Pavel Andreev's program “Space Policy,” featuring political experts. (retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbczqbdCKJ4>)

There are, admittedly, astrologers like Tatyana Kalinina who explicitly try to distance themselves from political science and politics in general. For example, in her video with a rather provocative title, “When the lands of Ukraine will be taken away,” from April 2021, which gained roughly 87,000 views, she emphasizes that she is not a political scientist and that her forecast is based solely on astrological techniques.

“I'm not a political scientist, but according to the horoscope, an invasion (of Ukraine) is going to happen after all.” (Tatyana Kalinina)

Nevertheless, even her speech contains political analysis and a clear political stance, especially when it comes to foreign countries, for which her Ukrainian and Russian audiences seem more loyal to her forecasts. For example, in the previously cited forecast on Iran, she supplements the

astrological forecast about the possible return of the Pahlavi heir to Iran with her own political thoughts:

*"Even in the same horoscope of Iran, too, we see that there is a Leo there, that this new ruler is all very regal. Overall, it could be the successor of the previous ruler. **But the question here is how much the people of Iran want that. That this candidate is favorable to Trump, I understand. But the question is how much Iran itself will want him. They didn't overthrow the royal government for nothing. There are doubts about that.**" (Tatyana Kalinina)*

Moreover, despite Tatyana Kalinina's claims that her predictions are based solely on what her "astrological tools" indicate, in one of her videos, she lets slip that she "borrowed a few ideas from political scientists." Thus, even in the case of such astrologers as Tatyana Kalinina, reliance on political analysis plays a certain role.

This, in turn, raises a legitimate question: to what extent are astrological forecasts actually astrology, rather than political analysis or a news summary presented as a prediction? Viewers often ask the same question: for example, Ukrainian astrologer Vlad Ross has been criticized for simply repeating news; Svetlana Dragan, in turn, has been accused of regurgitating news in her predictions.

*"Vlad, why don't you do something else? What comes true for you, **we hear on the news.**" (about Vlad Ross)*

*"Svetlana's predictions are always so vague. What she is talking about, **we already know from the press and EVENTS THAT'S GOING ON IN THE WORLD.** And every time, thousands of people, hopeful, watch her forecasts... and everything is, as always, about nothing! History.....cosmos..... transition..... nature planet...tried.... ideas...people.... changed... testing change..... **WELL DONE SVETLANA, KEEP IT UP!**" (about Svetlana Dragan)*

*"I never listen to Dragan. **Feels like listening to Channel 1 (Первый канал) news. Dislikes.**" (about Svetlana Dragan)*

Yet the astrologer's political stance significantly affects how their forecasts are perceived by their audience. As my analysis has shown, an astrologer's political viewpoint and overall vision are of paramount importance in establishing the legitimacy of the astrologer and their predictions, as these must align with the audience's views. Otherwise, the predictions and the astrologer themselves will not be taken seriously. For example, in Tatyana Kalinina's previously cited forecast about the peace in Ukraine, numerous comments accuse her of using Russian terminology and presenting a negative picture of Ukraine's future:

“Been watching Tatiana for a long time, really liked everything she told us. At the beginning of the war, when she was in Egypt, she really sympathized with us. But this broadcast just killed me. I feel sorry for you, Tatiana. I realize that money is money, but you chose the wrong country and the wrong side. Stay with your ever-living Putin. I don't believe a single word you said on this broadcast. We don't have SVO (Special military operation) in Ukraine, we have a real War. We have small children being killed by the packs. And you keep praising the terrorist country. Ukraine and Poland will be together....”

“What did you think? Of course, she sold out! Propaganda against Ukraine is in full swing; their task now is to demoralize the people of Ukraine! They won't succeed! Ukraine will win!”

Moreover, predictions must also be realistic in the eyes of the audience. For example, one commenter writes that Tatyana Kalinina's prediction sounds true if “you set aside astrology and just apply logic.” Unrealistic predictions, on the other hand, are usually not taken seriously, which suggests that the perceived realism of a prediction may have a greater impact on its legitimacy than the astrologer's own opinion. This, in turn, emphasizes the rationality of the audience of political astrologers as opposed to the stereotype that only illiterate, irrational people believe in astrology. On the other hand, this also begs the question of what the real point of astrological predictions is: to provide a clear answer in a context of uncertainty, or to confirm a pre-existing opinion that a given person already has?

6.1.6. *Scientific capital and the audience*

Thus, the legitimacy of astrology and astrological issues depends heavily on their connection to political science and scientific discourse in general. At first glance, this might be attributed to the very nature of astrology, which epistemologically relies on quasi-scientific methods. Indeed, in the past, astrological predictions in the form of almanacs (astrological calendars with a yearly schedule) and their accompanying prognostications (specific political forecasts for rulers and kingdoms) were supplemented by astrological explanations. However, these explanations were rarely as simplified as they are today, since astrologers did not need to justify their right to exist, thanks to the relatively high status of astrology as a discipline. Modern astrologers, by contrast, often emphasize explaining the logic behind their forecasts, which is related to the dominance of scientific discourse at the institutional level, as well as to the popular perception of it as the most “correct” way of thinking. Prognostications also included elements of political and academic reasoning, as astrological explanations were supplemented by analysis of current political events and references to well-known philosophers. Modern political predictions, however, largely rely on political science terminology and politological analysis - elements of political science, which now occupy a leading place in the discourse of political forecasting. Thus, we see how astrology and astrologers adapt to the modern regime of truth. In my view, this fits perfectly with

Foucault's theory of the dominant regime of truth: since scientific discourse fulfills this function in political forecasting, astrology, as "subjugated knowledge," must find ways to adapt to it for its existence as legitimate knowledge to become possible. It is precisely for this reason that astrologers use scientific terminology and methodology and appeal to scenarios that are realistic from a political science perspective.

Importantly, the audience for astrologers is not very distant from scientific discourse. Although I cannot claim it with 100% certainty, as I have not directly interacted with the commenters, based solely on the analysis of the comments, it is safe to say that a significant portion of the astrologers' audience is quite rational by modern standards. For instance, many of them note that they revisit predictions to verify their accuracy and also compare astrologers' predictions with those of political experts.

"I re-examined everything you predicted about Ukraine, and 80% of it was spot on. A true professional, what can I say? I can say there are only a few like Tatyana Kalinina."
(about Tatyana Kalinina)

"It is very difficult to watch this kind of presentation of material. It's not really an astrological forecast, but rather musings, doubts, assumptions, stuttering, forgetting names, listing historical facts, and attempting to draw logical conclusions from them. Only two nuclear bombs were dropped, so let's hope nothing happens. Nothing of the sort follows logically... It's just a stream of consciousness, thoughts on the topic, and very poorly presented material. It's difficult to watch, and even more difficult to find the astrological component between the long drones." (about Tatyana Kalinina)

"There were more predictions from military analysts; everyone clearly stated that about Ukraine, when the war would begin, but Tatyana continues to play the fool." (about Tatyana Kalinina)

"There were other predictions for 2024 and about certain individuals. Well, nothing came true!" (about Konstantin Daragan)

"I wrote down Svetlana's prediction last year. Nothing came true. NOTHING!" (about Svetlana Dragan)

Thus, we can see that the audience of astrologers is not simply consumers of their predictions but human agents who critically evaluate the information they receive, even when it comes from alternative epistemologies. This is fully consistent with the findings of Bauer and Durant (1997), who showed that rational thinking and belief in astrology are not mutually exclusive. Since a significant part of the astrologers' audience thinks in scientific terms, astrologers must also meet the criteria of scientific discourse. By doing so, astrology is not perceived as the antithesis of scientific discourse; on the contrary, it fits quite well within its framework, which allows

astrology to operate within the dominant regime of truth, where the right to predict the future is formally assigned to institutionally recognized experts.

6.2. *An astrologer's spiritual capital*

6.2.1. *The role of spiritual capital*

However, this is apparently not the scientific capital that constitutes the major part of an astrologer's symbolic capital, but their spiritual capital. The essence of the phenomenon of astrology lies in the idea that it is possible to interpret the divine message based on the position of stars; therefore, astrologers, as people who possess the knowledge of astrology, are commonly perceived as some sort of mediators between heaven and earth. The recognition of astrologers as such is what constitutes their spiritual capital. However, I argue that an astrologer's spiritual capital is not static, but a dynamic property, because it becomes recognized only in very particular conditions. From a functional perspective, this spiritual capital can be understood as stemming from astrologers' role in coping with uncertainty, a role that becomes particularly relevant in politically turbulent times like ours. Because science has limited capabilities when it comes to political forecasting, astrologers take on this role. The discursive explanation is more complex and comprises three parts. First, the discourse of political forecasting itself is not entirely scientific, as evidenced by the importance of possessing what is called "intuition" to be considered legitimate or prestigious in it. Because the discourse of political forecasting includes a magical element, astrologers, who possess the requisite spiritual capital, are also recognized as legitimate within it. Second, an astrologer's spiritual capital is shaped by the historically and culturally conditioned role of prophets in the discourse of predicting the future, which overlaps significantly with the discourse of political forecasting. Since the dominant status of science within the discourse of political forecasting is not yet fully established, predictors, as bearers of historically and culturally conditioned legitimacy in the discourse of predicting the future, acquire a special status in the discourse of political forecasting as well. Third, the discursive explanation of the nature of spiritual capital is linked to the role of esoteric ideas in shaping contemporary national narratives in Russia and Ukraine. For this reason, astrological forecasts fit perfectly into existing public discourse, and the spiritual capital of an astrologer, as someone who confirms the benevolence of higher powers toward one or another country, increases exponentially.

6.2.2. *Functional interpretation of spiritual capital*

From a functional perspective, an astrologer's spiritual capital can be explained by the functional significance of magic in reducing anxiety. According to Bronisław Malinowski's definition of magic, magic serves as a "coping mechanism" in situations of uncertainty, when scientific methods are unable to guarantee an accurate result fully. Since the discourse of political forecasting is, by definition, a field with a high degree of uncertainty, and the accuracy of expert political forecasts in the long term does not exceed mere guesswork (Tetlock, 2005), it is entirely

logical that the symbolic capital of the astrologer, as a person who can give people the required sense of certainty, increases.

If, in this context, astrologers' predictions turn out to be accurate, this will only further cement the astrologer's reputation as a reliable source of knowledge about the future. Astrologers themselves repeatedly emphasize the accuracy of their predictions that have come true, and commentators do the same (in both positive and negative ways). For example, it was already mentioned that Pavel Andreev starts his show by analyzing previous predictions; Tatyana Kalinina also frequently refers to her successful predictions, such as her forecasts about the war in Ukraine, Israel, and the results of American presidential elections in 2016, 2020, and 2024. This, however, does not mean that the accuracy of astrological predictions is significantly higher than that of political experts' predictions. Even without conducting any statistical analysis, it is easy to conclude from the angry comments under some videos that not all astrologers' predictions come true.

However, the main difference between astrological and political science predictions lies not in their accuracy but in the very nature of astrological predictions, which are distinguished from expert forecasts by their unambiguity and concreteness. Let's take as an example the astrological forecast for Ukraine by Tatyana Kalinina, published on her website in September 2023. The astrologer writes:

"The forecast for Ukraine remains bleak: experts don't expect the conflict to end until March 2026. A significant event that will end the hostilities will occur on March 11, 2026, when Jupiter makes a major astrological transition. After this event, peace should return to Ukraine, and the country will enter a phase of recovery. Ukraine will become part of a large military-economic union by 2026-2027, thereby expanding its cultural and economic opportunities. However, part of the country's territory may remain uncontrolled, which could create new challenges for its development."

As can be seen from this example, the astrologer clearly names dates and specific events, such as the arrival of peace in Ukraine and its entry into a certain large military-economic union (although the name of the specific union is not specified, one can guess that it is most likely the EU or NATO). Predictions by political experts, on the other hand, are generally more vague and rarely provide specific details, such as exact dates. In such a situation, astrology becomes the only tool capable of providing concrete predictions. Astrologers themselves also point this out. For example, Tatiana Kalinina notes that

"With the help of astrology, you can obtain information that you would never be able to get anywhere else by any other means."

Judging by the comments, astrology also seems to fulfill its role as a coping mechanism to some extent - many people write that they feel more at ease after listening to the forecasts. For example:

"Thank you, Irina! You radiate light and peace, which we all desperately need right now. Please come see us more often." (about Irina Abdraimova)

"I think Svetlana's most important characteristic is that she always offers a positive outlook on the future, and this maintains people's confidence that the country will emerge from the state of horror we currently find ourselves in. In short, everything will be fine; we just need to adopt a positive outlook ourselves." (about Svetlana Dragan)

"Only thanks to Konstantin's forecasts can one maintain a more or less balanced psyche during these difficult times." (about Konstantin Daragan)

Predictably, however, such comments are more often found under positive forecasts; negative forecasts are often accompanied by significant skepticism or even insults directed at the astrologer for inflaming an already volatile situation. In my opinion, this demonstrates the extreme instrumental nature of astrological forecasts in public perception, as people use them as additional support for their views, which is especially relevant in such turbulent times as ours. As Rosenthal (1997) notes, it is precisely at such turning points in history that magic becomes popular. In difficult times like these, it is more important than ever to have a clear understanding of what tomorrow holds. For this reason, the astrologer's spiritual capital, often rendered inactive by the stigmatization of this population and its exclusion from scientific discourse, acquires new significance in a time of uncertainty, when the usual "scientific" methods of predicting the future cannot provide the necessary sense of calm.

6.2.3. Discursive interpretation of spiritual capital

Despite the apparent simplicity of the functional explanation of astrology, it cannot fully explain the complexity of political astrology. For example, how can it explain the fact that not all predictions evoke a sense of calm in the audience? On the contrary, negative forecasts typically have the exact opposite effect. Therefore, to assume that astrology's popularity is explained solely by its psychological effects would be, in my view, a mistake. For this reason, I propose a discursive explanation, arguing that the discourse of political forecasting itself is not strictly scientific, but contains elements of magical discourse, within which astrologers possess spiritual capital. Considering the question of the legitimacy of astrologers from this point of view, their legitimacy is based not so much on the psychological function they perform for society, but on the symbolic role of the astrologer's spiritual capital that he plays in the discourse of political forecasting. I, in turn, associate the importance of spiritual capital with the following three factors: the unscientific nature of expert political forecasting, as evidenced not only by the lack of a consistent scientific methodology in forecasting, but also by the existence of such categories

as "intuition" and "prophecy" both in the professional environment and in the public discourse of political forecasting; the historically and culturally determined role of religious figures (prophets) and bearers of "subjugated knowledge" in the discourse of political forecasting; and the existence of esoteric ideas and narratives in the public discourse of Russia and Ukraine, which makes astrology a convenient tool for their legitimization.

The first evidence that the discourse of political forecasting contains elements of both scientific and magical discourse is that astrologers and political experts can operate freely in each other's discursive spaces. For example, astrologers invite political experts to their shows, and this apparently doesn't cause any serious problems for the latter. Astrologers themselves are invited to official television; for example, astrologer Svetlana Dragan is regularly invited to the show "Let Them Talk" hosted by popular Russian TV host Dmitry Malakhov. The show even has a dedicated call center where people can directly contact the astrologer with their questions. For example, at one such show, a question was raised about whether Russian athletes would be able to participate in the Olympic Games in the near future. On the one hand, this could be attributed to astrologers' scientific capital, which allows them to fit more succinctly within the framework of the dominant scientific discourse. This likely plays a significant role here. However, not all astrologers possess sufficient scientific capital (scientific language, knowledge of politics, and the ability to analyze it), so this factor is not decisive here. Moreover, it is obvious that the guests, the program hosts, and the majority of the audience who studied in schools and higher education institutions understand perfectly well that astrology is not a science in the modern sense of the word. What does this indicate? In my opinion, it primarily indicates that, at the vernacular level, astrology is recognized as legitimate knowledge for predicting the future. On the other hand, this can also be linked to a functional explanation of astrology, given the limitations of expert political forecasting. It will be shown later that both explanations are complementary rather than contradictory.



Picture 6. Svetlana Dragan gives an interview to the TV host Andrey Malakhov on the show “Let Them Talk” (retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNpPIIMiDAc>)

Further evidence supporting this explanation is that, at the discursive level, astrologers and political experts are often mentioned in the same context. For example, a commentary cited earlier compares Tatyana Kalinina's forecasts to the analysis of military experts. Furthermore, comparisons with political scientist Vladimir Zhirinovsky are common, as in the following example:

"Zhirinovsky said Warsaw and Vilnius would be bombed. Poland would disintegrate. The Poles would take over Western Ukraine. A 'heavenly Jerusalem' would be built on the remaining territories of Ukraine. All of V.V. Zhirinovsky's predictions always come true."

It is worth noting, of course, that Vladimir Zhirinovsky represents a unique case, since in public discourse he combines the functions of not only a political expert, but also a so-called “prophet.” Nevertheless, the comparison with other political experts is quite interesting in itself, as it suggests that astrological forecasts are of interest not only to those interested in or fascinated by esotericism (and judging by the comments, there are quite a few of them), but also to those who prefer conventional expert analysis. And since this is the case, the question arises: why? There is certainly a functional explanation here, as astrological forecasts, due to their greater certainty, serve as a more effective tool for combating anxiety. However, as noted, negative forecasts, on the contrary, evoke feelings of anxiety. If negative predictions fail to fulfill their function, then the astrologer's spiritual capital should also decrease. But since astrologers who say unpleasant things remain quite popular, an alternative explanation must exist. I call this explanation discursive, and it rests on the idea that the discourse of political forecasting itself confers value on those who possess “spiritual capital.”

Firstly, the discourse of political forecasting itself is not strictly scientific, which is connected not only with the absence of a rigorous scientific methodology in the preparation of expert forecasts, but also with the symbolic value of what is called “intuition” in it, not only in the sphere of political forecasting, but also in the sphere of forecasting in general. Tetlock (2005) lists the following problems in expert political forecasting: the lack of systematic analysis of past forecasts, experts’ fixation on a single big idea, the uncertainty and vagueness of political forecasts, and the impossibility of accounting for all political factors. Since expert forecasting is not strictly scientific, scientific capital loses its value in it. Not in the sense that it has no

significance at all, but in the sense that other forms of capital also acquire significance in it. First and foremost, intellectual capital.

The importance of spiritual capital in forecasting is supported by the scientific literature. However, it is worth noting that this issue has received little attention so far; therefore, this topic may represent an interesting area for further research. One such study is Harteis and Gruber (2008), who discuss the importance of "intuition" in stock market forecasting. The authors note that intuitive forecasts are, on average, more accurate than forecasts based solely on rational analysis, thus concluding that intuition is an important part of professional expertise. Although I was unable to find similar studies on the role of intuition in political forecasting, another line of evidence suggests that intuition plays a significant role. The fact is that the forecasts of political expert Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (1946-2022), sometimes called "Vovanga" for the prophetic accuracy of his predictions during his lifetime, are extremely popular in the Russian media space. Moreover, quite often the accuracy of his predictions is explained not simply by analytical abilities (although such an opinion also exists), but also by the presence of a certain "intuition". Intuition is the spiritual capital in the field of forecasting, since it cannot be developed simply by memorizing theory. It also does not always come with experience (Harteis & Gruber, 2008). Since spiritual capital itself carries weight in the discourse of political forecasting, it is not surprising that the astrologer's spiritual capital acquires symbolic weight. The nature of the astrologer's spiritual capital, however, lies not so much in his intuition as in his knowledge of astrology—hermetic knowledge that connects the spiritual and physical worlds—and the ability to use this knowledge to make political predictions about the world. This is also the experience of astrologers in political forecasting and of astrology in general, which many refer to in their videos, including Tatyana Kalinina and Konstantin Daragan. Thanks to this spiritual capital, astrologers can participate in the discourse on political forecasting, despite official science opposing astrology.

Second, if we consider the nature of spiritual capital at a deeper level, it can also be connected with the historical role of religious figures (prophets, saints) and bearers of "subjugated knowledge", which astrologers are. Historically, until relatively recently, various soothsayers, including astrologers, played a dominant role in the discourse of predicting the future. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian cultural region, where soothsayers and sorcerers, although facing certain difficulties, generally enjoyed considerable respect within society (Wigzell, 1998). As for the dominant role of science in the discourse of political forecasting, this status was established relatively recently, since expert political forecasting itself began to emerge toward the end of the 20th century (Tetlock, 2005). Since the discourse of political forecasting partially overlaps with the discourse of predicting the future, the astrologer's symbolic capital is also transferred from one discourse to the other. In addition to the historical factor, a religious factor might also explain the astrologer's symbolic capital within the discourse. Russian and Ukrainian cultures are Orthodox at their core, and today, in both countries, a significant proportion of the population is Orthodox. Orthodoxy embraces not only Christian

prophets but also Orthodox saints who possessed the gift of foresight (*prozorlivtsi*). Max Weber wrote about “charismatic authority” - a special form of authority possessed by religious prophets within the Abrahamic religions (Weber, 1978). Therefore, cultural memory of prophets and saints can lead to a search for such charismatic authorities in the modern world, a role that astrologers may well come to fill. I would like to emphasize that, according to Max Weber, astrologers possess spiritual capital rather than charismatic authority, since they are endowed with authority only when predicting the future. In other situations, they do not possess authority, but, on the contrary, in a certain sense, are on the fringes of society due to the discrimination of the dominant regime of truth against those forms of negative knowledge that do not satisfy the accepted standards of rationality.

Interestingly, some commentators, particularly those following astrologer Pavel Andreev's video featuring political experts, note that this dual format provides a "more complete picture" of the events unfolding. This, in my view, demonstrates the mutual legitimacy of two modes of knowledge production: one based on expert analysis of the hidden motives of political players and the dynamics of current events, taking into account an understanding of these motives, and the other based on the notion that the movements of the planets, the Moon, and the Sun directly influence events on Earth. If we consider this fact not in terms of different epistemologies but in terms of the different forms of capital possessed by political experts and political astrologers, it also suggests recognizing both forms of capital—scientific and spiritual—as valid for forecasting the future. Scientific capital (analytical skills, education, political understanding) represents the main source of legitimacy for traditional experts, while spiritual capital (proficiency in astrology) is the basis for the legitimacy of astrologers. For this reason, it is not surprising that the majority of comments under Pavel Andreev's content featuring both types of experts represent positive feedback, since the presence of both forms of capital in sufficient quantities in one place should increase the credibility of political forecasts. Following this logic, the presence of two types of capital in one person, whether a popular astrologer or a prominent political analyst, should also be reflected in their greater legitimacy within the discourse of political forecasting, thereby supporting the validity of my thesis.

Thirdly, the discursive explanation of the nature of the astrologer's spiritual capital may be related to the involvement of esoteric ideas in the formation of dominant political narratives in Russia and Ukraine. These ideas became most widespread after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when scientific atheism was replaced by a unique ideological formation at the intersection of science, religion, and esotericism, which some researchers call "late Soviet spirituality" (Lesiva, 2021). One such idea is the notion of Russia's "special path" as the center of Slavic civilization and its "sacred mission" in saving humanity, which underlies Dugin's neo-Eurasian ideology, which French scholar Marlène Laruelle considers one of the three pillars on which contemporary political ideology in Russia is built (Laruelle, 2008; Lesiv, 2018). Although ideological myths of this scale are absent in Ukraine, ideas about the spiritual nature of the political conflict with Russia have also been actively promoted in the mass media and public discourse over the past

15–20 years (Lesiv, 2018). As Lesiv (2018) and Neuburger and Hanzel (2025) show, visionaries' predictions play a significant role in maintaining these national narratives. As previously noted, the speeches of many astrologers, including Konstantin Daragan, Svetlana Dragan, Pavel Andreev, and Vlad Ross, are highly politicized and largely reflect the dominant political narratives in Russia and Ukraine, which may support the validity of this version. Furthermore, comments also suggest that astrological forecasts are valuable in this role:

"I'm watching and realizing how perfectly everything fits into the theory of the 'spiritual code' that Nicolae Kyrpale wrote about in 'Rus Svyata' (Holy Rus). It's a very short book; I got it from Litres, but it lays out exactly why we are the way we are and what our strength lies in. I recommend it to anyone who's into it—it's a half-hour read."

"The core will be Vedic Orthodoxy. The forgotten Vedas were the core of all the world's religions, later rewritten to suit the needs of hucksters of all stripes."

Thus, from a discursive perspective, there are three possible explanations for the astrologer's spiritual capital, which are supported by the results of this study: 1) the unscientific nature of political forecasting discourse, 2) the historical role of prophets and soothsayers in predicting the future, and 3) the involvement of esotericism in shaping public discourse in both countries. It is also worth noting that the discursive and functional explanations are not simply different theoretical lenses but complementary models that contribute to a better understanding of why astrological forecasts remain popular despite the dominant role of scientific discourse in the modern regime of truth. The discursive explanation is complemented by the fact that expert political forecasting has low accuracy. In contrast, the functional explanation is possible, among other things, because the discourse of political forecasting in Russia and Ukraine attaches special importance to people with spiritual capital.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary

Thus, this study has shown that an astrologer's legitimacy within the discourse of political forecasting depends on both their scientific and spiritual capital; however, the latter is more important. The role of scientific capital is to legitimize astrology as "subjugated knowledge" within scientific discourse, which plays a dominant role in public political forecasting. Legitimization within scientific discourse is achieved through the use of quasi-scientific terminology and methodology, the incorporation of political analysis into forecasts, and a more scientific representation of the astrologer as a whole. Nevertheless, it is not the borrowing or imitation of scientific discourse, but rather the magical status of astrology as a bridge between the sacred and profane that is the main source of its legitimacy, since it is this status that forms the astrologer's special symbolic capital as an expert in predicting the future. The role of scientific capital, on the other hand, is determined solely by the contemporary historical and

cultural context, which prioritizes the scientific nature of knowledge; at the same time, the very understanding of scientificity is also conditioned by this context.

This study proposes and substantiates two complementary explanations of an astrologer's symbolic capital: a functional and a discursive one. From a functional perspective, an astrologer's spiritual capital rests on the functional meaning of astrology in reducing uncertainty in situations beyond human control. Political science cannot fully fulfill this function due to the low accuracy and vague nature of political experts' predictions; this is why society develops a need for magic. Astrological predictions, compared to expert political forecasts, due to their greater unambiguity and sometimes accuracy, cope better with this function. Moreover, the current political climate, due to its uncertainty, further contributes to its popularity. From a discursive perspective, the astrologer's spiritual capital is explained not by the functional significance of magic in reducing uncertainty, which modern science does not cope with sufficiently, but by the fact that the discourse of political forecasting itself is not entirely scientific and contains a magical component, which endows astrologers with special spiritual capital. The paper proposes three overlapping explanations for how the discursive formation of spiritual capital occurs: 1) the nature of the discourse of political forecasting itself, due to its limitations in predicting the future exclusively by rational methods; 2) the historical role of religious figures (prophets and saints), as well as bearers of "subjugated knowledges" in the discourse of predicting the future, intersecting with the discourse of political forecasting; and 3) the presence of esotericism in the formation of public discourse in Russia and Ukraine. These two explanations, functional and discursive, do not contradict but rather complement each other, as has been demonstrated in the paper.

Additionally, I would like to briefly mention the popularity of astrological forecasts and their practical significance, as this has not been addressed elsewhere in the work. Although the paper discusses how two types of experts construct their legitimacy in the discourse of political forecasting, it would be a stretch to call their relationship competitive. The maximum number of views for astrological forecasts rarely exceeds 600,000, and even then, such figures are only possible on third-party user channels, such as television or popular bloggers. At the same time, the number of views on the pages of the astrologers themselves is several times, and sometimes tens of times, less. For example, the most popular video on Tatyana Kalinina's channel has 282,000 views, while the average is no more than 30,000. The same is true for other astrologers. By comparison, virtually every episode with Ekaterina Shulman achieves more views in a shorter period of time (from 100,000 to 1,000,000 on average). The true popularity of astrological questions is also of interest for research, but only by comparing the number of views can one conclude that they are less popular than expert political forecasts. Nevertheless, astrological forecasts do have practical significance. While collecting data, I came across comments indicating that people actually followed astrologers' advice and, for example, moved from places where unfavorable events were predicted.

7.2. *Broader implications*

More broadly, the study contributes to our understanding of how practices and knowledge systems commonly labeled as ‘magic’ and ‘pseudoscience’ continue to function in contemporary societies. On the one hand, this occurs in areas where science faces inevitable difficulties and cannot fully satisfy human needs, such as predicting the future. During difficult historical periods, the demand for magic increases further, as the shortcomings of scientific methods for predicting events become especially apparent. Other such areas may include the treatment of incurable diseases, personal relationships, and justice, as achieving the desired results in these areas is not always possible using traditional methods. For this reason, people turn to sorcerers and healers, hoping they will solve their problems by casting a love spell on a loved one, transferring a disease to an egg, or casting a curse on an enemy. On the other hand, their functioning in these areas is possible due to the incomplete "disenchantment" of these areas of knowledge, which is explained by the historical and cultural role of those who hold "subjugated knowledge" in them. Of course, belief in magic can be linked to low education, but as this study shows, the psychological and cultural significance of magic plays a far greater role than individual characteristics. Astrologers' target audience is quite diverse, including people with varied mindsets and social backgrounds; furthermore, astrologers themselves are often quite well educated. It is unlikely that magic will ever lose its popularity in these areas unless science fails to achieve absolute results in the above-mentioned areas, which, however, is unlikely. Magic is not simply superstition. It plays a significant role in areas where it has historically been important and where scientific capabilities are limited. This once again proves that Max Weber's thesis about the inevitable "disenchantment" of the world is not true. Moreover, astrological forecasting might be viewed, on the contrary, as contributing to the "re-enchantment" of the world. By bringing the sacred back into explanations of political events, public astrological forecasting challenges the dominant scientific discourse, which rejects the influence of the sacred on the physical world, and instead presents a view in which the sacred and the material are once again closely connected.

The results of this study may be relevant to a wide audience, including policymakers, political experts, and astrologers themselves. For policymakers, the key finding is that astrology influences the decision-making of ordinary people, which should be taken into account when developing laws governing the activities of astrologers and other individuals engaged in esotericism, both officially and unofficially. For political experts, this suggests the need to improve the methodology of political forecasting, for example, relying more heavily on modeling and other "scientific" methods of prediction to produce more accurate and socially relevant forecasts. As for astrologers themselves, they need to build their "scientific capital" and actively demonstrate it in the forecasting process to inspire greater trust among listeners. For example, they should use more explicit methods of communicating forecasts, as well as study politics and political science to communicate the issues they judge through astrology more effectively.

7.3. Areas for further research

The analysis also raises several questions for further research. First, it would be helpful to understand how popular political astrology actually is among Russians and Ukrainians, since it is difficult to draw any comprehensive conclusions on this topic using only qualitative methods. To address this question, it would be necessary to survey a sufficiently large sample of people in Russia and Ukraine. Second, which demographic groups are more likely to follow astrological forecasts (differences in gender, education level, etc.), which will provide a better understanding of who they are primarily targeting and, in turn, help us analyze at a deeper level how astrology and rational thinking are interconnected. Third, is this phenomenon unique to the Russian-Ukrainian cultural region, and does it have any distinctive characteristics? As an example, one can examine astrologers from the United States, Western Europe, and India and compare them with Russian-speaking astrologers and with one another. Such a study will provide a better understanding of how comparable the functional significance of magic is in the West, the East, and the post-Soviet space. To answer the second and potentially third questions, one could conduct interviews with commentators and astrologers themselves to identify the factors that encourage people to view astrological forecasts, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons that the interviewees themselves consider significant in establishing an astrologer's legitimacy.

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Appendix 1

Observation Sheet

ID:

Date of observation:

Platform:

Source/Link:

Source type (video, stream, TV show)

Astrologer's name:

Astrological tradition:

Country:

Content Title:

Date of publication:

Length:

Part A: Astrologer's performance

1. Framing and presentation:

- Tone and demeanor. How does the astrologer present themselves? (e.g., academic/mystical, conversational/serious, and so on.)
- Visual part of the performance. Setting, clothing, graphics, and symbols used. What does it resemble more? A scholarly lecture/magical ritual/news broadcast or something else?
- Language. Is the language more scientific or more magical? What words or specific terminology do they use?

2. Epistemological positioning:

- Claims to authority. On what basis does the astrologer claim knowledge? Tradition (references to ancient texts, education)/technical skill/personal intuition/empirical "accuracy" (references to predictions that came true)
- Use of evidence: How do they support their claims? Historical astrological correlations, use of astrological charts, political analysis, and so on.
- Relationship with science. Do they explicitly distance or align themselves with science?

3. Political narrative:

- Political position. Do they have a clear political position, or do they try to stay neutral?
- Causality. Do they attribute causality to the stars, or do they leave room for human agency? (This might be important for the discussion of function)

4. Function

- Political function. Do they try to mobilize/motivate people for something, legitimize/delegitimize some leaders, or try to stay neutral?

- Societal function. Do they try to calm people down, or do they try to incite panics? What might be their real motivations?
- Other functions. Do they try to demystify astrology and prove that it is scientific? Do they simply try to attract more customers with their predictions?

Part B: The audience

1. Commenter engagement:
 - General sentiment. What is the dominant emotional tone of the comments? (e.g., grateful, anxious, skeptical, combative, hopeful, and so on)
 - Level of engagement. Are commenters passive recipients or active participants? Do they ask follow-up questions, offer their astrological interpretations, and so on?
2. Audience positioning
 - How do commenters validate the astrologer's authority? (e.g., praise the accuracy of their previous predictions, astrologer's experience, alignment of their predictions with other predictions or political experts' forecasts, and so on)
 - Language. Do commenters adopt the astrologer's scientific/magical lexicon? Do they use their own?
 - Signs of skepticism. Does the audience challenge the astrological predictions? How? (e.g., "this is not a science", "frauds", "only God knows", "her predictions are always wrong", and so on)
3. Societal function:
 - Community building. Do comments show a sense of shared identity or belonging?
 - Coping mechanism. Do comments indicate that the content helps people cope with fear/uncertainty, or, conversely, that it creates uncertainty?
 - Political mobilization/discourse. Do the comments show that astrological predictions impose concrete political opinions on people or call for actions? (e.g., "This means we must support X", "We will not visit this country next year", and so on.)

Part C. Reflexive notes

1. Unexpected patterns. What unexpected connections are emerging between this piece of content and others I have observed? Any recurring symbols, narratives, or argumentative strategies?
2. Researcher's reflexivity. Here I will note my own reactions, biases, and surprises.
3. Questions for further investigation. What new questions does this observation raise? (e.g., "How do astrologers handle predictions that fail?", "Is there a difference in tone between Russian-language astrologers in Russia and Ukraine?" "How do the viewers react to positive VS negative predictions?" and so on.

Appendix 2

List of media sources

- Астролог Ирина Абдраимова. (2022, March 25). *Астропрогноз на апрель 2022 год. Будет ли перемирие* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHTiPZ9ur78>
- Астролог Павел Андреев. (2025, November 2). *Большой ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ПРОГНОЗ на ноябрь 2025 года | Павел Андреев, Александр Артамонов, Дмитрий Роде* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbczqbdCKJ4>
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