

# Wartime Civilian Mobilization: Demographic Profile, Motivations, and Pathways to Volunteer Engagement Amidst the Donbas War in Ukraine

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## Abstract

This article examines civilian mobilization amidst the Donbas war, Ukraine. It focuses on ordinary residents of the frontline regions who voluntarily got together to address the humanitarian and military consequences of war in the environment of lacking state support. It explores the micro-level dynamics of mobilization, particularly the demographic profile of civilian volunteers, their motivations to join, and pathways to engagement. In so doing, it provides an account of how ordinary residents of seemingly passive regions – Southern and Eastern Ukraine – become active in times of crisis. Contrary to the mainstream accounts that credit civilian mobilization to the rise of patriotism in wartime, it demonstrates that local security concerns and affective reactions to the heightened precarity of others are crucial factors that propel collective action at the rear. In the case of Ukraine, the efficiency of wartime mobilization was increased through the structures that emerged during the proceeding Maidan protests, as well as preexisting private and entrepreneurial networks. By employing ethnographic tools of inquiry, the article interrogates the mobilizing potential of seemingly latent communities in times of crisis and contributes to the literature on wartime collective action at the rear.

**Key words:** collective action; wartime volunteering; civilian engagement; violence; Ukraine

## Introduction

When the Donbas war in Ukraine broke out in the spring of 2014, many civilians responded to the humanitarian and military crisis by donating their resources, energy, and time to assist combatants and internally displaced persons. A multitude of volunteer networks mushroomed in the rear to take care of soldiers, war veterans, and those displaced from their homes. Committees of mothers, wives, and sisters began to support combatants and their families, help them get through traumatic experiences, and advocate for their rights. An immense collective undertaking was underway in Ukraine to strengthen its faltering military capacity and mitigate the humanitarian costs of the war. The assemblage of networks in Ukraine later became known as a “volunteer movement,” with an emphasis on the voluntary and collective nature of engagement.

This article focuses on two key questions in relation to voluntary mobilization at the rear. First, it looks at the demographic profile of joiners, analyzing the socio-economic, ethno-linguistic, and gender composition of civilian networks. In doing so, it seeks to identify who got engaged and what characteristics were crucial in driving war participation. Second, it scrutinizes the factors that initiated and sustained wartime engagement, particularly the motivations of volunteers and their pathways to engagement. Theoretically, the article contributes to the literature on civilian

grassroots mobilization in wartime. Focusing on previously passive regions of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, it highlights the mobilizing effects of local security concerns and emotive reactions to the precarity of others in times of war.

Previous discussions of collective action in wartime emphasized the importance of preexisting networks for wartime mobilization. Looking at the favorable impact of great wars on civic volunteerism in the United States, Skocpol, Munson, Karch, and Camp (2002) recognize that the abundance of membership organizations in times of peace served as a basis for further mobilization during war. New associations evolved and grew around the existing ones, fueled by the skills of civic leaders and government support. Kage (2010) makes a similar observation, analyzing the causes of the postwar growth in civic engagement in Japan. Pre-war structures of participation, she argues, influenced the availability of opportunities for civic engagement by shaping the costs of association-building and information-gathering (Kage 2010). The importance of preexisting networks for mass mobilization has been noted in other contexts too, with Boin and Bynander (2015) looking at the role of preexisting networks in efficient crisis management and Bosco (2001) discussing their significance for collective action more generally. These and similar studies primarily focus on the analysis of collective action at the macro level with little attention paid to the engagement of individuals, their motivations, and pathways to wartime activism.

Another important theoretical insight of the scholarship on collective action in wartime pertains to the cooperation between citizens and the government. Scrutinizing the state-society relations during America's major wars, such as the Civil War and World War I, and probing the cases of smaller conflicts, such as the Spanish American War and the war in Vietnam, Skocpol, Munson, Karch, and Camp (2002) demonstrate that government was central in civic engagement for a number of reasons. By and large, it provided the institutional setting within which voluntary groups operated. In addition, supportive actions of the government enabled civic groups to increase the outreach and productivity of their efforts, eventually allowing them to grow very large. Data on membership participation, it is argued, indicate that big spikes in civic participation during wars go hand in hand with official partnerships with the government (*ibid.*). Thus, the literature emphasizes the "institutional synergy" between the state and society whereby civilian engagement during wartime is woven into the institutional fabric of the state and shaped by government decisions.

The mushrooming of volunteer networks in Ukraine amidst the Donbas war poses a challenge to this body of scholarship in at least two important ways. Firstly, the Ukrainian state capacities have been considerably constrained since independence due to the administrative, economic, political, and social challenges the state has faced since the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The war in Donbas exposed Ukraine's limited state capacity and tested it on a new level.<sup>2</sup> Following the outbreak of violence, the Ukrainian state found itself grappling with military action, mass displacement, and social unrest.<sup>3</sup> Civilian mobilization unfolded sporadically, often autonomously from or in parallel to state efforts to address the crisis. Given these circumstances, the state-society relations during the Donbas war in Ukraine cannot be understood through the "institutional synergy" framework between state and non-state actors as formal partnerships with the government were limited or absent altogether. Studying the environment within which war volunteers operated, as well as the resources and networks that they drew on, is necessary to understand how collective action gains sway amidst limited state capacity – not consolidated statehood, as was the case in other contexts.

Similarly, the insights about the importance of preexisting membership organizations for wartime mobilization should be calibrated to capture the realities in Ukraine. Since independence, Ukraine has consistently been marked as a country with low levels of associational life. The World Value Survey, a large-scale comparative study of more than 50 states, ranked Ukraine among the three countries with the lowest levels of participation and organizational capacity, even among post-communist states (Howard 2002). The ranking was based on the average number of organizational memberships per person in nine types of groups, including non-political associations, political, professional, recreational, and charitable organizations. Non-participation in membership

organizations has been reflective of a general trend in the Ukrainian society, where individuals rarely engaged in volunteer initiatives out of historically lingering distrust of volunteering, which was state-imposed during the Soviet times (Pranaityte 2015). Thus, the overall levels of formal organizational membership have been low across Ukraine and could not serve as the infrastructure for wartime mobilization.

Within Ukraine, the Eastern and Southern regions were classified as pervasively passive and incapable of collective action (Birch 2000). Scholars of regionalism (Arel 2006; Birch 2000) noted that, due to the diverging historic trajectories, Ukraine's regions developed a different capacity for political mobilization and public activism. This was visible during Ukraine's most recent waves of mass protests. During the 2004 Orange Revolution, protesters overwhelmingly came from Western and Central Ukraine (Arel 2006) and the dynamics were similar during the Maidan protests of 2013–2014.<sup>4</sup> Regionally, the protesters overwhelmingly came from Western (55 percent) and Central Ukraine (24 percent), with Southern and Eastern regions comprising 21 percent of the demonstrators (Kiev International 2014). Months preceding the war in Donbas, Southern and Central Ukraine showed widespread indifference towards the protests occurring in the capital with low levels of participation.

It is important to point out that, in view of the Maidan protests, a number of scholars set out to reevaluate the claim about the “weakness” of civil society in Ukraine. They note that formal membership organizations might poorly capture the state of civil society in countries like Ukraine where informality undergirds social and political life (Burlyuk et al. 2017; Krasynska and Martin 2017; Krasynska 2017). Particularly, Krasynska and Martin (2017) look at the informal and formal dimensions of the Maidan initiatives, revising the question of the strength and weakness of civil society. Their focus on informal networks on Maidan and the emergence of social regulation mechanisms provides a fresh venue for investigations of self-organization modes not captured by a focus on formal organizations. Similarly, the special issue “Civil Society in Ukraine: Building on EuroMaidan Legacy” (Burlyuk et al. 2017) reassesses the claims of the weakness and impotence of civil society in Ukraine and Eastern Europe more generally. Looking at informality more broadly, Polese (2008) contends that its rise in post-Soviet Ukraine should be understood as a fundamental aspect of survival in an environment where the state fails to fulfill its core functions. In these instances, informal networks act as safety nets against state's failures to care and provide for its citizens. Moreover, in environments with high degrees of informality, everything functions through personal connections, making informal networks key to “getting things done” in public and personal life. These studies broaden the scope of analysis away from formally established organizations to include informal groups that are not registered but involved publicly. This article further expands the scope of these insights by making visible the role of preexisting private and entrepreneurial networks in wartime mobilization and their contributions to various wartime initiatives.

### Data Collection and Research Design

In the months following the outbreak of war, Ukraine saw an outburst in volunteering and charitable activities. According to the UN estimates, there were 750 volunteer groups in Ukraine helping the army and internally displaced individuals with 75,000 people engaged in volunteer work (Volonters'koie dvizhenie 2014). Survey data suggest that 2.5 percent of the Ukrainian population engaged in volunteer work to assist the army and the injured and that 0.7 percent helped out internally displaced persons (IDPs) – approximately 105,000 and 60,000 individuals respectively (Corestone Group and GfK 2018). Volunteer assistance drew on larger societal support with many more people donating for the military and those displaced. Residents of Kyiv and Western regions have been noted to be more active in volunteer initiatives compared to other regions (Corestone Group and GfK 2018). Yet, the rapid emergence of volunteer networks has also been observed in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. This development has been puzzling in that these regions allegedly

had little infrastructure for successful mobilization and no notable history of public engagement in recent decades. Given an unanticipated spike in collective action and their proximity to the frontlines, these regions were chosen as field sites for this analysis.

This article employs ethnographic tools of inquiry to examine grassroots mobilization in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. My analysis relies on 95 interviews with civilian volunteers as well as participant observation of their work in three cities – Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovs'k (now Dnipro) and Odesa.<sup>56</sup> I used conversational and semi-structured interviews for data collection. The inherently public and social nature of volunteering helped me identify the most active individuals in each city and establish contact with them for research purposes. I then expanded participant recruitment by interviewing volunteers who did not occupy leadership positions but helped consistently with the war effort. This included volunteers knitting camouflage nets, preparing packages for the front, assisting with various tasks at the hospitals, and attending to the needs of the displaced. The timing of the interviews – in the spring–summer of 2015 – allowed me to study volunteer practices and visit volunteer sites in the midst of war mobilization. Most individuals I contacted felt proud of the work volunteers were doing and wanted to share this appreciation. Some wanted their stories and the stories of their fellow volunteers to be known and acknowledged. This made volunteer sites and participant accessible for the purposes of research. Along with collecting interviews, I spent time observing the work of volunteers at fundraising and volunteering sites, enriching my study with ethnographic insights and making note of space-specific realities of volunteer engagement. Participant observation helped me to elaborate on the affective nature of engagement and better capture the impact of local insecurity on my respondents. By and large, the design of the research allows for the generation of analytical insights into the micro-level dynamics of civilian mobilization in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, focusing on who got involved in volunteer networks, how, and why.

In response to the outbreak of violence in Donbas and state's lacking capacity, three types of volunteer networks emerged to address the needs of combatants and displaced persons. This includes (1) military-oriented networks aimed at assisting combatants on the frontlines; (2) hospital networks helping the injured combatants with medical care; and (3) networks focused on supporting the displaced. These types of volunteer networks appeared across Ukraine, with many developing interregional and international ties. Given the focus of my research on Eastern and Southern Ukraine, networks in other regions and abroad mostly remained out of scope. Therefore, the theoretical contribution of this study would be most pertinent for expanding the theorizing of wartime collective action in regions with relative proximity to war zones, similar to that of Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

### The Demographic Profile of War Volunteers

The studies documenting low public participation before the war in Ukraine in general (Howard 2002), and Southern and Eastern regions in particular (Arel 2006), are consistent with my findings. Only 10 volunteers out of 95 reported being active in community affairs and/or political life at the local level before the war. One was a member of a political party, mostly channeling efforts into issues of identity and Ukrainian language use in Kharkiv. Three volunteers from Odesa and Kharkiv were actively engaged in volunteer initiatives aimed at increasing the use of the Ukrainian language and the knowledge of Ukrainian history among Russian speakers. Three other volunteers in Odesa had a church affiliation through which they participated in community life by helping the most disadvantaged populations, namely drug addicts and single mothers. Finally, two volunteers from Odesa reported volunteer work on various social issues before the war. A few noted that they had supported their elderly neighbors or vulnerable individuals with small financial donations, but they did not see this as community work. About 90 percent of interviewed volunteers did not participate in any associations outside work or family and said they were not engaged in any community initiatives before war.

The Maidan protests presented a notable exception to this disengagement.<sup>7</sup> About one third of my respondents reported participating in the protests, joining the demonstrations either in Kyiv or their respective cities of residence. Their participation was diverse, ranging from full-fledged engagement, with frequent trips to Kyiv to more occasional visits. Ten other volunteers indicated they supported the protesters but did not personally participate in the demonstrations. Family and professional commitments were cited as preventing more active engagement. A few confided that they were fearful to go to the streets because of security risks associated with participation. Five respondents reported that the protests caught their attention only in the latest phase, when people were shot in Kyiv. Around that time, they started actively following protest developments, eventually engaging in volunteer work. The rest, over one third of all interviewed volunteers, indicated that they did not take an interest in the Maidan demonstrations and became concerned with in the situation in Ukraine only afterwards, when violence broke out.

The majority of my respondents referenced the economic and professional instability of the 1990s as the main reason of their previous disengagement. They noted that the volatile environment after the fall of the Soviet Union made them focus on the well-being of their families at the expense of broader engagement. The preoccupations about the financial stability might have to do with the fact that many volunteers I interviewed came of age in the 1990s, in the midst of acute economic and political transformations. This is particularly true for the lead volunteers, those in leadership positions in volunteer networks, two thirds of whom were between 30 and 40 years of age in 2015 when they joined volunteer networks. Since these volunteers came of age in the 1990s, one can assume that individuals whose formative years coincided with the profound economic, political, and economic instability of the transition period acquired various competences necessary for the organizational success of volunteer efforts, such as agility, flexibility, and an entrepreneurial spirit of surviving in the unstable environment. As Shevchenko (2002) points out, navigating the fast-changing environment and the informal economy that grew exponentially in the wake of the Soviet Union dissolution with a certain degree of success required entrepreneurial prowess and resourcefulness, skills that proved to be of great value during wartime volunteering.

This assumption is particularly credible if we consider the economic stratification of volunteers. The data indicate a high presence of small and medium entrepreneurs in volunteer networks. About one third of all respondents reported being small or medium-sized entrepreneurs, either owning a family business or creating employment for themselves.<sup>8</sup> These included a family-based legal consultancy company in Dnipropetrovsk, an IT business in Kharkiv, a tourist agency in Dnipropetrovsk, an entrepreneurial business in Barabashova market in Kharkiv, and small-scale entrepreneurial activities, such as handmade toys for sale.<sup>9</sup> Being an entrepreneur made one a likely target for assistance requests, with people asking for donations or other types of assistance. Some entrepreneurs stated that they could “afford” volunteering due to the flexible work schedules and the availability of financial resources.<sup>10</sup> The number of entrepreneurs was especially high among lead volunteers, suggesting that entrepreneurial skills were crucial for the organizational success of volunteer work.

Other volunteers had different economic and occupational backgrounds, from students to pensioners and professionals of various sectors. Doctors, psychologists, and lawyers played an active role in the volunteer efforts as their professional skills and competence were especially valuable in attempts to cope with the traumatic consequences of war and to protect the rights of combatants and displaced persons. The informal nature of volunteering with flexible hours of work and a wide range of needs allowed people of different economic backgrounds to find space for engagement on terms acceptable for them. There was a general sense that the strength of the volunteer movement lies in its popular support where “everyone can contribute as much as they can” and “no help is too small to count.” Whereas entrepreneurial skills, resources, and infrastructure were key for the organizational success of volunteer work, the scope, reach, and sustainability of war volunteerism owed much to the participation of individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds and their ongoing contributions.



In terms of gender patterns, my data suggest that women were more active in volunteering. More than two thirds (73 out of 95) of interviewed volunteers were women. Some volunteer networks – cooking battalions, camouflage knitting squads, and hospital groups and groups taking care of the internally displaced – were female initiatives with men helping occasionally or contributing financially. Volunteer networks assisting the army and voluntary battalions were gender-mixed, with men and women participating in different capacities. The asymmetrical gender composition of Ukrainian volunteer networks is indicative of the gender-charged nature of wartime mobilization. While men were called up to take up arms and fight for the country, women saw it as their responsibility to support those on the front.<sup>11</sup> The endless scope of needs generated by war engaged many women in war-related initiatives on the front and away from it, collecting food supplies, procuring combat-related items, and caring for the injured among others. All these tasks demanded hours of work requiring volunteers to become engaged in collecting resources, developing designs, cutting, and sewing. Female volunteers also provided emotional support to the combatants and IDPs, mediating trauma and easing their distress. At rear, women joined forces to cook, support, and provide for those impacted by war, tasks that are traditionally positioned as female labor. While no sociological accounts of volunteer networks exist to validate the generalizability of these findings, available ethnographic evidence (see Shukan 2018) confirms the gendered dimensions of rearward mobilization and captures patterns of mobilization that are consistent with the findings of this study.

Many of my female respondents reported having a family business, with both partners engaged in it. After the outbreak of war, women seemed to be more likely to become volunteers, since many of its tasks, such as support and emotional care, were associated with feminized labor. In contrast, male entrepreneurs remained in charge of the family business and assisted volunteers indirectly by providing money, resources, and occasional physical labor. It is plausible to suggest that men's role of breadwinners constrained their ability to engaged in unpaid labor, limiting their participation in volunteer activities. The engagement of women in volunteer work required some of my respondents to rearrange the division of labor within families. Some of them noted that they either had to quit work for volunteering or withdraw from family business, with their husbands picking up financial responsibilities. Talking about volunteer engagement, female volunteers often referred to it as “a privilege” that they can “afford” thanks to their financial wellbeing or husband's support. This suggests that the intersection of gender, class, and occupation were key in driving and sustaining engagement at the rear with middle-class women spearheading many volunteer initiatives. Undeniably, women with limited financial resources contributed to volunteer efforts as well, investing their labor, time, and energies in various initiatives. The informal nature of volunteering with flexible hours of work and a wide range of needs allowed people of different economic backgrounds to find space for engagement on terms acceptable for them. At the same time, my findings suggest that the backbone of volunteer networks consisted of middle-class women who had the resources to “afford” volunteering at full capacity, devoting numerous hours of time to supporting the war effort.

When it comes to the ethnic composition of volunteer networks, it is difficult, if not impossible, to compile credible data. Most of my respondents indicated being of mixed ethnic origin. The combination of Ukrainian and Russian ethnic background was most common; some reported having Belarusian, Bulgarian, or Jewish lineage. Only a small percentage said they were “pure Ukrainian” or “pure Russian.” Some found this question irrelevant altogether, saying they saw themselves in terms of territorial belonging, rather than in terms of an ethnic group. A considerable number noted that local identification with a region or city of residence or a pan-ethnic identification with a Slavic or Soviet space previously superseded their ethnic and national identification.<sup>12</sup> While my respondents identified with Ukraine to a varying degree before the outbreak of war, Russia's role in it and the subsequent engagement of my respondents in volunteer work had a profound effect on how many came to think about their national belonging. Their identification

with Ukraine came to supersede other forms of identification. They increasingly identified with Ukraine as a state, with Ukrainian institutions and with Ukrainian culture (Author *forthcoming*).

The language profile of my interviewees indicated a predominance of Russian speakers in volunteer networks – an unsurprising finding given the dominant position of the Russian language in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. About three quarters of the interviews were conducted in Russian with only 5 respondents out of 95 saying they exclusively used Ukrainian as their language of everyday use before the Maidan protests. A few more indicated the use of both languages for everyday communication. Amidst war engagement, some tangible change has taken place in terms of language preferences. This pertains to increased cultural, symbolic, and emotive identification with the Ukrainian language among Russophone volunteers. As I demonstrate elsewhere (Author *forthcoming*), the use of Russian language as a pretext for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, war mobility, and war socializing played a key role in enabling attitudinal change. Increased social openness to Ukrainian, however, did not automatically translate into changes in sociolinguistic practices.<sup>13</sup> Only 6 out of 95 respondents reported switching to Ukrainian in the midst of war engagement, while others retained Russian as the main language of communication.

Generally speaking, my data show that mobilization at the rear was driven by individuals who had little experience of public or political engagement before the Maidan protests and the outbreak of war. Entrepreneurs joined the ranks of volunteers, using their financial and human capital resources to expand the scope of the work, but the flexibility and grassroots nature of volunteering allowed individuals of different socio-economic background to contribute based on their abilities. Volunteer work was driven by gendered solidarities, with men's responsibility seen as joining the military and women's responsibility viewed as assisting and supporting them. Ethno-linguistic factors seemed to be insignificant in the war-driven mobilization, with the majority of respondents speaking Russian and identifying with Ukraine to a various degree before the outbreak of war and strengthening this identification amidst it. The success volunteers have had in turning initially sporadic efforts into effective bottom-up initiatives and the trust they now enjoy might be indicative of an important shift in collective action capacity in regions that were previously seen as disengaged.<sup>14</sup>

### Motivations for Volunteer Engagement

What drives volunteers to invest time and considerable personal resources, while often placing their lives at risk, to help with the war effort? For this study, the respondents were asked to elaborate on the context within which their initial engagement occurred. They were encouraged to discuss their understanding of the situation at the time and their emotional response to it. Attention was paid to the concrete details of the first instance of volunteering – who was the recipient of help, what kind of assistance was provided, what the relationship was between the recipient and provider of assistance, and whether assistance was provided on someone's request.<sup>15</sup> This section presents an analytical typology of self-reported motives for engagement focusing on three reasons for engagement: the participation in Maidan protests, the fear of war spillover to home towns, and concerns with the precarity of combatants and displaced individuals.

### “It Was a Continuation of the Same Fight”: From Maidan Protests to Volunteer Engagement

One third of interviewed volunteers participated in the Maidan protests with a varying degree of commitment. Some of them saw war volunteering as a natural continuation of the protests, and their volunteer work grew out of Maidan participation. This group of respondents pointed out that participating in the protest and volunteering were driven by the same considerations – “a fight for Ukraine's better future.” As one of my respondents commented, “practically everyone engaged in volunteering now are people who were active in the Maidan protests. I understand very well that the

current war is a continuation of the Maidan Revolution. It's the same fight that we started on Maidan: the fight for our independence" (Dnipropetrovs'k, Fieldwork Interview, August 8, 2015). Participation in the Maidan protests strengthened the commitment of some to do "whatever it takes" to build a stable and democratic country. The Maidan protests that resulted in the overthrow of Yanukovich regime also played an important role in convincing people that their actions mattered and could have a tangible effect.

Some of those who participated in the Maidan protests became wartime volunteers of their own volition, while others were pulled into rearward participation by requests for help from fellow protesters. One of my respondents reported being approached by her friend, also a Maidaner, with a request to help with the internally displaced. A year later, during my fieldwork, she was still taking care of displaced persons and was one of the main volunteers in Odesa. Another respondent from Odesa mentioned that she started making *balaclavas* (head coverings) for Maidan. During that time, she had met people who went on to organize volunteer initiatives when violence broke out. They remembered her and asked her for assistance with balaklavas, this time for the front. Similarly, a few other respondents reported being approached with requests for help because of their participation in the protests. As my respondent from Kharkiv noted, he did not "decide" to volunteer. Some acquaintances, knowing about his Maidan engagement, called and asked for help purchasing army boots. This request signaled the beginning of his wartime work providing, fundraising, and procuring for the army. To an extent, participation in Maidan was seen as a marker of one's willingness to assist in one way or another and acted as a pull factor for war volunteerism.

More broadly, structures created at Maidan were crucial in recruiting wartime volunteers. For example, the 14th *sotnia*, a defense unit formed in the capital at the time, split up and evolved into different initiatives. Some participants joined voluntary battalions and went to the front to fight, while others stayed behind to assist by obtaining necessary supplies. Similarly, Maidan networks, who helped beaten activists during the protests, remained active in Kharkiv afterwards, redirecting their help to those injured on the front. These Maidan networks sustained, expanded, and provided leadership for grassroots mobilization at the rear, providing support to combatants and displaced persons alike. The findings of Worschech (2017) resonate with these observations. She contends that many war volunteer initiatives were extensions of the ones that emerged on Maidan, with activists drawing on the organizational innovations, expertise, and connections established during the protests.<sup>16</sup> The Maidan protests provided a venue where organizational innovation could take root, allowing wartime volunteers to adopt "templates" of successful initiatives and expand them to war realities. The significance of the Maidan protests went beyond that as the protests provided space for inter-regional socializing and building of trust, increasing the effectiveness of wartime volunteering. Proceeding protests, one can conclude, played a pivotal role in the success of war-driven collective action at the rear.

### "The War Was Knocking on our Door": Fear and Anxiety in Initiating Engagement

The second large group consisted of people who were not active in the Maidan protests but mobilized because of the looming uncertainty and the fear of war spilling over to their home cities. The reported reasons for anxiety included the physical proximity of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs'k to the war zone, the closeness of Kharkiv to borders with Russia and Odesa to borders of Russia-controlled Transnistria, as well as the narratives of "re-establishing Novorossia" in these regions. Recalling the instability of that time, one of my respondents commented: "There was unverified information circling that Dnipropetrovs'k could be invaded within days. The priority at that time was not to let it become part of Novorossia."<sup>17</sup> The geographical proximity of Kharkiv, located only a few kilometers from the Russian border, and of Odesa, positioned near the Russia-controlled Transnistria and Crimea, alarmed residents of these regions. The situation in Dnipropetrovs'k was similar, as it borders the Donbas region and is in close proximity to the contact line.



The respondents in this category reported that they saw the annexation of Crimea as the first step of external aggression and were worried that their cities might be next. A few said they felt the war was “at the door.” Some experienced distress observing the unfolding violence and hostilities and noting the signs of war in their cities. An increasing circulation of emergency vehicles and helicopters bringing those injured on the front to hospitals was disturbing and difficult to ignore, as some remarked. This category of volunteers stressed the volatility of the situation, coupled with their anxiety that violence could easily engulf their peaceful lives. “People were killed on the streets of our city; cars were set on fire. We witnessed it firsthand and we understood perfectly well that war could break out here too. In fact, war did break out here but lasted only a few hours,” shared a volunteer from Kharkiv.

The fear of war in these cities was so palpable that some respondents were prepared to join the underground resistance in the event of external aggression and discussed this possibility with others. Stocking up on sand bags, getting basic military and medical training, and repairing trench shelters in the cities were among the preparations of volunteers in the spring–summer of 2014. Some made a commitment to defend the city “if the war comes” and even established an undercover meeting point in case of external aggression. In Dnipropetrovsk, for example, volunteers set up headquarters in the oblast state administration to prevent the violence from reaching their city:

The headquarters were not just a civilian organization. It was a military-patriotic formation. We were divided into squads (*sotnias*), underwent a military training – some of us for the first time. It was a territorial defense unit of Dnipropetrovsk. We created over 50 checkpoints to prevent separatism from spreading. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovsk, August 22, 2015)

Volunteering became one of the ways individuals dealt with a heightened sense of insecurity and worked to prepare for “the worst-case scenario” of military aggression. Aiding combatants, as some indicated, was directed at “constraining the war elsewhere” and not allowing it to engulf the homes of my respondents. Helping the military exposed volunteers to some of the problems and needs of soldiers and volunteer battalion fighters, as well as the Ukrainian army at large. They referenced the importance of “seeing it” with their own eyes – the hardships and destitution in the military – and “personally hearing” the stories of combatants about the lack of supplies and state support. Witnessing the precarity of the Ukrainian army compelled my respondents to action, indicating the importance of firsthand exposure to war-related issues to sustained engagement. For this category of respondents, volunteering also became a coping mechanism for overcoming a sense of disorientation and helplessness amidst unfolding violence and lacking state support. A mix of confusion and anxiety over the ensuing events propelled my respondents to inquire about combatants and their situation, eventually leading to sustained engagement. Exposing themselves to war realities, they developed a sense of solidarity with and attachment to those they sought to help, strengthening their determination to assist.

In discussing the motives for engagement, it is important to note that internally displaced persons also actively assisted the army and others who were displaced. Some joined out of gratitude for assistance received from others. For most of my IDP respondents, however, volunteering was a means of social integration and starting life anew – building social and professional networks at a new place of residence and meeting like-minded people. Most found themselves socially isolated after moving to new cities and cutting ties with relatives and friends who espoused pro-Russian views. They reported that joining a volunteer community was emotionally fulfilling. One said: “There are people of similar spirits here; people who support Ukraine, just like I do. It was a great relief for me to meet them! The year I had was a complete nightmare, and it lifted me up.” This comment sums up these views of my displaced respondents. For many, volunteering was a coping mechanism, allowing them to counter the feeling of helplessness and loss generated by displacement and trauma – it uplifted them and gave hope and comfort so they could get on with their lives.

### **“My Heart Was Breaking”: Identification with the Precarity of Combatants and Displaced Persons**

The third motive for engagement had to do with affective reactions to the needs of war-affected civilians and soldiers and identification with the precarity of these groups. Affective focus on the fate of other people became a stimulus for action to protect and help those in need. Individuals to whom this motive applies tended to focus on the needs, situation, and emotional states of those they helped. As war produced dispossession and suffering on a large scale, some responded to the vulnerability of others by donating their resources, time, and energy to aid them.<sup>18</sup>

Some volunteers indicated that their ability to relate to displaced persons was a triggering factor in engagement. For example, one of my respondents, a stay-at-home mother of three children, said that she did not know personally anyone hospitalized. She came across a post in Facebook about injured soldiers with their names and dates of birth and noticed that some soldiers were the same age as her daughter, born in the same year. “My heart was breaking to think that someone’s children are in great pain,” she shared. The identification with suffering urged her to collect some clothing she had from her past entrepreneurship and donate it to the hospital. She decided to bring the remaining items to an IDP shelter, calling on her social circle to help out as well. The first encounter with those internally displaced was eye-opening and shocking, as she recalled:

When you come to the shelter for the first time and see a child, completely devastated and shocked by the horrific experiences of fleeing home and leaving everything behind... and he tells you about thugs and stuff... and how Ukrainian flags were taken down in his town... I am used to stories like this one now, but back then it was utterly shocking for me. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, June 8, 2015)

Throughout the interview, my respondent kept recalling experiences of single mothers arriving with their children at the train station, with nowhere to go and nobody to rely on. The emphasis on motherhood is important, because it vividly shows that “the private/public” divide is not fixed and can be easily transgressed in certain instances, like war. Many female volunteers extended the sense of motherhood beyond their families to provide care to injured soldiers seen as “imagined children” or displaced women seen as an “imagined self,” and they explained their willingness to help using gender-charged language. In the context of war, as these testimonies suggest, the ideals and norms of motherhood can become powerful triggers for engagement.

It should be noted that perspective-taking was not limited to motherhood and often focused on the precarity of IDPs and combatants more broadly. The vulnerability and dispossession of the internally displaced, who lost their homes and whose habitual ways of life got disrupted by violence, elicited empathy and compassion among this group of respondents. Similarly, the precarity of soldiers and volunteer battalions who were sent to fight and die on the front, with almost nothing provided, impelled some to invest energy and time into providing material support and emotional assistance to combatants.

These accounts suggest a correlation between precarity and mobilization. The high number of displaced persons in the regions bordering the war zone created “pockets of precarity” to which ordinary residents felt compelled to respond. The highest number of internally displaced persons aggregated in government-controlled areas of Donbas with Donetsk accommodating 539,547 and Luhansk 213,758. Eastern regions of Ukraine accommodated three quarters of the IDP population with Kharkiv accepting 186,674 and Dnipropetrovsk 72,391 by August 2015 (IDMC 2015). Odesa accepted a smaller number of IDPs (30,800) but hosted the majority of disabled persons and orphans, the categories who required additional care and funds (UNHCR 2015). In comparison, Western regions accommodated lower numbers of IDPs, with Lviv sheltering 10,000, Volyn 3,700, and Ternopil 2,700 (UNHCR 2015). Similarly, a high number of injured soldiers were stationed in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa. The profound vulnerability of

those sent to the front and returning with wounds or disabilities impelled the residents of these cities to respond with assistance.

The theme of precarity featured strongly in testimonies about initial engagement, pointing to its mobilizing potential. The sense of precarity was intensified by the state's apparent incapacity to address the most vulnerable individuals, leaving them in protracted crisis. In these cases, some respondents felt it was a moral imperative to respond to the needs of others. The initial reaction to the needs of others often exposed individuals to the scope of war-generated needs, giving them better insight into the situation and strengthening their commitment to help.

### Pathways to Volunteer Engagement

Admittedly, the Maidan protests provided an infrastructure for the subsequent war mobilization, but it was only one of the ways individuals got engaged. Two thirds of my respondents did not actively participate in the Maidan uprisings but became engaged afterwards. This raises the question of how these individuals got started and which networks were crucial for initiating their engagement. My fieldwork data indicate that private, professional, and entrepreneurial networks were central in recruiting volunteers at the rear.

Particularly, friendship networks were the basis for a great deal of war mobilization at the rear. The joiners generally knew someone who was directly impacted by the consequences of war or who was conscripted into the military. For example, Ivan, a demobilized soldier, said when he was conscripted that his university friend, not a very close one, became his "personal volunteer." He was the first person who responded to Ivan's conscription offering help and assisted Ivan throughout his military service. There were many other instances when individuals contacted their university classmates, school friends, or former and present colleagues to maximize the scope of their assistance. Calling on one's private contacts had diverse outcomes; some engaged personally in volunteering; others responded by donating money or resources. Commenting on the dynamics of volunteer mobilization, one of my respondents compared it to multi-level marketing where people relied on the "bring your friend in" scheme to collect funds and find needed supplies.

Interestingly, very few of my respondents, and none of the lead volunteers, had family members directly impacted by war – either by military conscription or displacement. Out of 95 respondents, only 2 female volunteers had husbands serving in the war zone, and neither referenced her husband's service as a reason for engagement. In fact, they got involved with the war effort before their husbands joined the military and remained active throughout their service. Another female respondent reported that she became preoccupied with locating missing soldiers after her son went missing on the front. But these were isolated cases. Most people I interviewed had someone from their close or distant private or professional, not familial, circle impacted by war. Others did not have any acquaintances at all.

Undoubtedly, some family members were involved. Across Ukraine, committees of mothers, wives, and sisters formed to support soldiers and their families, to help them get through traumatic experiences, and to advocate for their rights. My fieldwork interviews and observations, however, indicate that these committees represented a small fraction of the volunteer networks mushrooming in the fieldwork sites. As some of my respondents explained, family members of soldiers helped their sons and husbands directly, purchasing clothing and transferring money to them. Many were unable to help on a larger scale, it was noted, because they faced increased financial, domestic, and emotional burdens associated with war and military conscription. These burdens often constrained their ability to help in a more sustainable and consistent manner outside familial preoccupations.<sup>19</sup>

These accounts suggest that strong private ties underpinned the formation of voluntary networks, injecting public concerns into private ties. Some scholars consider strong private ties as inimical to broader engagement. Howard (2002), for example, attributes the weakness of civil society in post-communist states to the persistence of friendship networks. He argues that,

“In post-communist societies, many people are still invested in their own private circles and simply feel no need, much less desire, to join and participate in civil society organizations” (2002, 163). Gibson (2001) echoes this point, claiming that societies with strong but closed social networks are “un-civil” and inhibit collective action. He argues that these circles tend to be homogenous and preclude interaction with those outside them. As a result, strong social networks cause the atomization of small groups, making them publicly and politically irrelevant. In contrast, weak ties enable interactions between diverse groups, something helpful for developing a sense of communal good and an appreciation of democratic norms (Gibson 2001).

Given the importance of private networks to the Ukrainian volunteers I spoke to, it seems plausible to suggest that, under dire circumstances, strong private connections can drive mobilization as people draw on them to address broader concerns and needs. Understanding how individuals are bound in networks of relations might explain the potential for mobilization better than indicators of associational life. Relations formed throughout the life course – school, university, work, childrearing, etc. – have the potential to be transformed into a social infrastructure for collective action and broader engagement in times of crisis. These findings challenge the analytical separation between the private and public spheres, showing that often people draw on private experiences and connections to address broader concerns. Accounting for the strength of personal networks and informality embedded in them is crucial for understanding the mobilizing potential of seemingly latent communities in times of crisis, more so than looking at formal organizational membership and other official indicators.

### The Role of Entrepreneurial Networks in Volunteering

In addition to Maidan and personal networks, entrepreneurial connections had special significance for the grassroots volunteer mobilization. Entrepreneurial ties, practices, and skills shored up volunteering and shaped its dynamics in numerous ways. My data provide evidence that entrepreneurs used their business contacts, suppliers, and customers for a range of activities related to volunteering. Entrepreneurial networks offered a mobilizing infrastructure, providing knowledge and information relevant for volunteering, including managerial skills, coordination, and large-scale procurements. By and large, entrepreneurial networks and skills increased the efficiency and scope of volunteering, enabling civilians to help a large number of people impacted by war.

One of the enabling factors driving entrepreneurs' engagement in volunteer networks was their “financial sustainability.” Some respondents noted that they initially drew on personal financial resources to assist those on the front. Given the scope of war-generated needs, this could carry a considerable cost. One of my respondents put it this way:

I have been in business for over 20 years now. I am quite successful financially. In a sense, I can afford volunteering. From May 2014 onward, after the war started, my main task was to supply water to the front. They call me “Water Queen.” I had a financial ability to buy and deliver water to the war zone. I was doing it out of my personal resources. (Dnipropetrovsk, Fieldwork, August 12, 2015)

Indeed, in the first months of volunteering, my respondent managed to organize a water supply chain to bring drinking water to the front in significant quantities. Using personal resources worked to build credibility and trustworthiness, allowing to engage more people and tap into more resources.

My respondent also referenced her business-like approach to volunteering as something that enabled her to assist efficiently. Responding to the first request for water, for example, she used her entrepreneurial skills and networks to deliver 20 tons of water to the Dnipropetrovsk airport, which accepted injured soldiers:

I am a businessperson. I started counting. I can borrow a tailor truck from my friends free of charge, but its capacity is 20 tons. It makes no sense to bring 20 liters of water in a 20-ton truck. We need to get a good price to deliver 20 tons of water. I used business connections, contacted some of the people I know, a plant that could give us a good price. And we arranged everything – 20 tons of water were delivered to the airport on request. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovsk, August 22, 2015)

As this statement illustrates, entrepreneurs made extensive use of their entrepreneurial skills and networks while conducting volunteer work. Being able to see a process in its entirety, do research and strategic thinking about the immense war needs, and use connections to execute a plan in the most cost-effective way were skills my respondents acquired in business and applied in volunteering. Many noted that good management, leadership, and accounting skills were of particular value in the context of war volunteering. Without organizational and management skills, one noted, “all you can do is to collect canned food by the supermarkets – that’s the limit of it.”

Entrepreneurial ties were also used for a wide range of informal practices, such as getting discounts, procuring for the army at self-cost, or finding people willing to provide services free of charge. One of my respondents, an entrepreneur previously doing business at the *7th Kilometer*, the biggest open market in Odesa, reported establishing contact with many retailers at the market and locating the best prices and good quality products for the military. She did not belong to any particular volunteer network. Instead, she found it more useful to assist various volunteers through her contacts and entrepreneurial skills to get the best prices or free-of-charge assistance from those who supported the cause. In Kharkiv, another respondent, an entrepreneur in the IT business, made an informal arrangement with his business partners to use their fitness center facilities as drop-off locations for donations. Dalia, the lead volunteer from the Odesa kitchen battalion, noted that their large-scale cooking for the army was made possible thanks to the generosity of restaurant owners, who gave access to their restaurant premises for volunteering purposes. By and large, entrepreneurs actively drew on their connections in the business sector to increase the scope of assistance. The success of these arrangements relied on the hyper-flexibility of personalized entrepreneurial networks that got reoriented, at least partially, toward war needs.

The hyper-flexibility of entrepreneurship in Ukraine that allowed some to discharge resources and labor for war needs was possible because of the informality engendered by the economic transition of the 1990s. One of my respondents, a lawyer engaged in volunteer work, noted that both small and medium business owners were forced to operate on the edge of legality in Ukraine, often sliding outside of what was permissible to make a profit and stay afloat. The taxation system, specific regulations of entrepreneurial activities, and the investment climate made entrepreneurial activities difficult to conduct and encouraged entrepreneurs to engage in informal practices to ensure the sustainability of their business. This often meant establishing ties with bureaucrats at the local and national levels to ensure the survival and profitability of business. The informality and flexibility of entrepreneurial networks in Ukraine has been documented by a number of scholars (Polese 2009; Smallbone and Welter 2001; Williams 2008; Williams, Round, and Rodgers 2010), who noted that informal arrangements were key to survival for many entrepreneurs. This flexibility allowed entrepreneurs to redirect some financial, material, and human resources for the needs of the army and internally displaced persons and to establish productive partnerships with others.

The added value of flexibility and informality embedded in entrepreneurial networks owed to the fact that “entrepreneurs-turned-volunteers” could solve bureaucratic issues and cut through red tape to speed up the pace of volunteer assistance – informally, if not illegally. Importing items for the front, for example, could not always be done following formal (legal) procedures. High custom duty payments and slow bureaucratic handling of imported products were cited as barriers to bringing much-needed supplies for the army. Entrepreneurial volunteers often worked to reduce custom duty payments, calling on their contacts with bureaucrats or relying on informal arrangements.



Commenting on the ways she procured items for the army, one of my respondents said she deployed her personal contact with the Head of the Customs in Ukraine:

This was a personal initiative; it was not legal. We wanted to legalize the process, but it would need to pass through the Parliament... If our order goes through the customs in Odesa, it is easier. Everyone knows me in Odesa. I don't have to pay anything. If our order goes through the customs in Western Ukraine, I can't say that we bribe a lot, but we spend some money to get it through. We pay about 10–20 percent from the value of the item. This is peanuts, to be honest. (Fieldwork, Odesa, July 24, 2015)

As this testimony suggests, the embeddedness of entrepreneurs in local bureaucracies allowed for fast decision making and rapid execution of tasks outside formal channels. As entrepreneurship in Ukraine is diverse, flexible, and well-embedded in local and national bureaucracies, entrepreneurial volunteers were able to draw on a multitude of resources to aid combatants and displaced individuals. Their skills and networks were crucial to the success of the wartime efforts.

Not all volunteers were embedded in entrepreneurial or Maidan networks. Some mentioned that they felt isolated and did not know how to help. Respondents from this category learnt about volunteering mainly through media and joined volunteer communities thanks to publicly available information. Television, Facebook, and newspapers were crucial in recruiting new people with diverse social and economic backgrounds. Fundraising booths set up by volunteers at supermarkets and informational posters put up in the cities were also useful, attracting more people and expanding the scope of volunteering. While the leadership of volunteer network mainly comprised Maidan protesters and entrepreneurs, ordinary citizens with diverse backgrounds joined in, ensuring a wide-reaching scope of assistance. Responding to the precarity of others amidst war and working to regain a sense of certainty in the highly volatile environment acted as pull factors for initial engagement. Being exposed to the needs and lives of combatants and internally displaced individuals shaped volunteers' relationships with those they helped and ensured sustained volunteering.

## Conclusion

This article analyzes the micro-dynamics of civilian grassroots at the rear that unfolded amidst the Donbas war. The findings of this study suggest that most of the interviewed volunteers in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa were Russian speakers, 30 to 40 years of age. A vast majority of them had no prior experience of public engagement, and only a third participated in the proceeding Maidan protests. This indicates that war volunteering in Ukraine has been driven by new actors who were not previously active in public life. In addition, an analysis of the demographic profile of volunteers demonstrates that rearward mobilization unfolded along gendered lines, with women taking leadership positions in the provision of care and support for those affected by war or mobilized on the front. The seemingly "ad hoc" grassroots mobilizing that happened amidst war, mass displacement, and military operations unfolded along, and was shaped by, existing gender norms and patterns of gendered labor division. In particular, this study indicates that volunteer engagement patterns and practices at research sites drew on the preexisting gender order, which positioned men as fighters and women as their protectors and supporters.

The article also reveals that many lead volunteers had a business that helped them to stay afloat during volunteering and to finance some of the expenses related to war assistance provision. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs-turned volunteers reported that their resource management skills and informal connections were crucial for mobilizing people, collecting resources, and delivering aid to the front. Therefore, one can conclude that successful rearward mobilizing has been driven by small and medium entrepreneurs, with individuals of different socio-economic background contributing to the war effort to varying degrees, based on their availabilities and resources.

In Ukraine, entrepreneurial networks acted as a social infrastructure, with entrepreneurs bringing with them their practical knowledge of resource management, procurement, efficiency, and contacts to expand the rearward collective action. In volunteer initiatives, entrepreneurs acted as “citizens” caring for the wellbeing of others and using their entrepreneurial capital to expand assistance in the war effort.

When it comes to motivations to engagement, the respondents of the study reported security concerns, the fear of violence spillover to their regions, and affective reactions to precarity of others as main mobilizing factors for engagement. Amidst looming uncertainty in the cities of research, the grassroots mobilization unfolded rapidly, with private, professional, and entrepreneurial networks becoming paramount for mobilization. These findings challenge the theoretical assumptions that the vibrancy of associational life and the abundance of preexisting formal networks are strong indicators of mass mobilization potential in the face of crisis (Skocpol et al. 2002; Kage 2010; Boin and Bynander 2015). As demonstrated by this research, in societies where informal practices are prevalent and private ties are strong, looking at support systems might be a better indicator of mobilization potential. Under dire circumstances, strong private ties, believed to be inimical to boarder engagement (Howard 2002; Gibson 2001), can facilitate mass mobilization as people draw on trust imbued in private networks to address public concerns and increase the efficiency of collective action.

The insights of this article also indicate that in wartime there is no clear “public/private” divide when it comes to engagement. Some volunteers drew on intimate experiences of motherhood to facilitate care for combatants and internally displaced individuals as “imagined children” or “imagined self.” New structures of feelings arose when “affect” – a feeling of empathy or compassion – was attached to the bodies of those in need, propelling individuals to action. In these instances, female volunteers tapped in “traditionally” private feelings to get engaged in wartime community affairs. Therefore, analyzing new structures of feelings that emerge amidst war is crucial for understanding the dynamics of grassroots mobilization at the rear. Ethnographic tools of inquiry are best suited for capturing these dynamics and making visible micro-level changes in feelings, concerns, and realities of residents that drive broader engagement.

While this qualitative study traces the patters of grassroots mobilizing in three cities of Southern and Eastern Ukraine, it faces a difficulty of generalizing the findings to larger populations. One of the main challenges is that civilian war volunteering in Ukraine has not been carefully studied and theorized yet. Aside from a few sociological studies that focus on the notion of volunteering in Ukraine more generally (Corestone Group and GfK 2018), no credible sociological accounts exist to capture the scope, the socio-economic profile, and structural patterns of mobilization in war volunteer communities. Another challenge lies in the grassroots nature of civilian mobilizing and its region-specific dynamics. The research sites – Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and, to a lesser extent, Odesa – accepted much higher numbers of internally displaced persons compared to other regions and faced heightened levels of local insecurity in the context of war. Given the regional specificity of the research sites, the data presented in this study might have region-specific dimensions to it. Moreover, it captures the dynamics of urban civilian mobilizing; to what extent these trends reflect civilian mobilization in rural areas and smaller municipalities remains to be explored. More research is needed to understand the dynamics of civilian mobilization in other regions of Ukraine and identify the patterns of who got engaged and why.

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## Notes

- 1 Arguably, one of the major constraints faced by Ukraine since independence stems from the rise of an oligarchy in the 1990s (see Hellman 1998) and “state capture” where private firms could

- shape the institutional environment in which the state operated (see Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann 2003). These developments profoundly shaped the socio-political realities of independent Ukraine.
- 2 Ukraine lost 20 percent of the Ukrainian economy due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the uprising in Donbas within the first year of war (Croft 2014a).
  - 3 By August 2015, over 1.4 million individuals were registered as internally displaced in Ukraine, mostly from the densely populated Donetsk region and from Crimea. The actual number of internally displaced persons was higher (IDMC 2015).
  - 4 According to the survey conducted by Onuch (2014), 42 percent of the Maidan protesters were from cities other than Kyiv. Out of that percentage, most protesters came from Western and Central oblasts, with only one fifth coming from Eastern or Southern oblasts (Onuch 2014, 48).
  - 5 In May 2016, the city of Dnipropetrovs'k was renamed Dnipro by the Ukrainian Parliament resolution as part of decommunization effort. In this article, I refer to it as Dnipropetrovs'k, since it was the official name at the time of my fieldwork.
  - 6 Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs'k are located close to the Donbas frontlines. In the spring of 2014, there were attempts to create a "Kharkiv Republic" and an "Odesa Republic," echoing the attempt on Donbas with pro-Russia sentiments being palpable. While Odesa is located further from the frontline, it saw a pro-Russian rally numbering over 10,000 people in early spring of 2014. Within days, a Russian flag was erected on the building of the oblast state administration with the complicity of local police. During the time of the fieldwork, the instability engulfed all three cities. Concerns were exacerbated by the threat of Russia's incursion into the border regions (see Croft 2014a and Croft 2014b).
  - 7 I did not systematically analyze the participation of my respondents in the Orange Revolution, but some of them mentioned that they took part in it or supported it in general and felt disillusioned afterwards.
  - 8 Entrepreneurship in Ukraine includes a wide scope of activities, ranging from owning a business to engaging in petty trade or creating employment for oneself (Williams 2008; Aidis et al. 2007). Entrepreneurs in volunteer networks show this diversity.
  - 9 Barabashovo market is located in Kharkiv, Eastern Ukraine. It is one of the largest in Europe, occupying 75 hectares.
  - 10 Entrepreneurs participating in the Maidan protests comprised only 9.3 percent of all protesters (Info-Light 2013), suggesting entrepreneurs became more active in war-driven mobilization, spearheading the formation of volunteer networks.
  - 11 The overwhelming majority of the conscripted in the army and those in volunteer battalions were men. In 2014–2015, 22,000 troops from the National Guard were stationed in the conflict area. This number includes 500 (0,023%) women. In total, the number of the Armed Forces in the "anti-terrorist" operation reached 73,000 (with reserves) in August of 2015, but the total number of women partaking in the ATO was 938 persons (Martsenyuk, Grytsenko, and Kvit 2016).
  - 12 As Shulman (1998) noted, a local or pan-Slavic identification was complementary with loyalties to Ukraine.
  - 13 This is also the argument of Kulyk (2016).
  - 14 Surveys indicate that volunteers enjoy the second highest level of social trust in Ukraine, following religious organizations (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2017).
  - 15 Methodologically, asking specific questions on motivation is important to obtain credible responses. As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) note, volunteers might discover unanticipated gratification performing altruistic acts. This can include social recognition, socializing, the acquisition of political capital, and other forms of appreciation. As a result, they can unintentionally revisit and reevaluate the reasons for engagement in the first place. Consequently, reported motives are likely to reflect "the dictates of social desirability" of volunteer engagement, giving respondents incentives to emphasize, for example, civic-minded reasons for participation

- over other considerations (Verba et al. 1995, 237). The decomposition of a complex question into several more specific ones and facilitating recall cues yields more reliable and accurate responses (Schwarz and Oyserman 2001).
- 16 Particularly, Worschech (2017) notes that the first SOS organisation was *Euromaidan SOS*, established to provide beaten students with legal advice and assistance. Later, *Vostok SOS*, *Crimea SOS*, and other initiatives drew on that experience to respond to displacement and human rights violations in the context of Donbas war.
  - 17 Sources reported as many as 40,000 troops close to the Ukrainian border, ready for an “incursion” (Croft 2014b). Russia also launched military exercises near the border regions, heightening the anxiety of invasion.
  - 18 The dispossession and suffering were especially noticeable in the frontline regions that sheltered the majority of those fleeing violence and stationed a high number of combatants that required urgent medical care (see IDMC Briefing Paper 2015).
  - 19 The report produced by the Centre of Civic Initiatives documents some of the challenges faced by family members of those conscripted in the military and confronted by war realities (Zarady Imeni 2015).

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