

# Geosocietal Support for Democracy: Survey Evidence from Ukraine

Mikhail A. Alexseev and Serhii Dembitskyi

We examine why public support for democracy in Ukraine increased after Russia's 2014 intervention and surged after Russia's 2022 invasion—despite concerns that the wartime quest for security would diminish support for political freedoms. We statistically analyze original data generated as part of annual opinion surveys by the Institute of Sociology at Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences in 2017 (N = 2,199), 2018 (N = 1,800), and a 2021–22 panel survey with the same respondents (N = 475) interviewed before and after Russia's invasion. Our findings indicate that wartime support for democracy is in significant respects *geosocietal*—arising from the mobilization of civic national identity conditioned by salient geopolitical threats. Civic pride, attribution of threat to an external authoritarian aggressor, and war onset were the strongest and most robust predictors of multiple democracy support indicators, overriding personal loss and stress. The findings call for more attention to the interaction of geopolitical and social contexts shaping political attitudes, with implications for democratic futures globally.

All those who seek to destroy the freedom of the democratic nations must know that war is the surest and the shortest means to accomplish this.

—Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) 1969, 650


## Introduction


Public support has long been considered essential for the survival of democracy (Diamond 1999; Easton 1975; Lipset 1959; Weber [1919] 1965), a claim upheld more recently with systematic rigorous analyses of multinational, multiyear survey data (Claassen 2020). Legitimation of democracy, however, has been shown to decline in states experiencing or threatened with armed conflict. Large longitudinal studies found that

involvement in militarized disputes dimmed the democratic prospects of states from 1816 to 1992 (Rasler and Thompson 2004; Reuveny and Li 2003). Likewise, civil wars (Dyrstad 2013; Marshall and Cole 2014; Tir and Singh 2015) and terrorist attacks (Davis and Silver 2004; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009) have arguably undermined democratic development. While lauding and analyzing Ukrainian society's inspired resistance to Russia's 2022 massive and brutal military invasion, *The Economist* (2022, 19) warned that “there will be a risk of backsliding on democracy and liberalism in a country which will be focused on its security as never before.”

That Ukraine would confound these research findings and dire warnings with sustained democratic resilience has

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not been a given, as it may now seem in retrospect, particularly going back to 2014. Early that year, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and fomented armed conflict over Ukraine's Donbas region (Kuzio 2017). The ensuing Donbas war, fought along a 250-mile front, claimed over 14,000 lives and wounded 30,000; displaced over 1.3 million people within Ukraine; left 3.4 million in need of sustained humanitarian assistance; and damaged or destroyed 50,000 civilian homes from 2014 through 2021, the first two years being the deadliest and most destructive (Melnyk et al. 2019; OHCHR 2022; Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN 2021).<sup>1</sup> Concomitant drivers of democracy erosion, such as economic stress (Collier 2007; Collier et al. 2003) and incentives for rule breaking (Walter 2015), were evident. By 2017, Ukraine's GDP contracted by half, unemployment hit 11%, the value of the currency (hryvnia) shrank threefold against the dollar, and Transparency International ranked Ukraine within the top third of the world's most corrupt countries (Transparency International 2020). Considering those factors, the Kremlin's strategists could plausibly imagine that Ukrainians would abandon democratic aspirations when faced with a wholesale military invasion.

And yet, democratic institutions and public support for democracy across Ukraine held up and rose sharply after Russia's full-scale invasion of February 24, 2022. Surveys by Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociology (UNASIS) saw the percentage of respondents who considered democracy important or very important rise from an average of 67% between 2002 and 2012 to 71% between 2014 and 2021, while the percentage of those who considered freedom of expression important rose from 64% to 72% (N = 1,800/year). Following Russia's mass invasion, those numbers rose to 81% and 87.2%, respectively, in July 2022 (N = 475).<sup>2</sup> Onuch (2022, 37) described the rise in the public's preference for democracy in Ukraine between 2019 and 2022 as unprecedented in democratization history.

What could explain sustained public support for democracy in the face of grave threats, devastating losses, traumas, and deprivation, as has been the case in Ukraine? Why, in the quest for security and national defense, have Ukrainians overwhelmingly mobilized for political freedoms rather than for strong, autocratic rule?

Drawing from the literature on second-image-reversed theory, rallying, and social identity, we develop an explanation recognizing that wartime democracy legitimization can be *geosocietal*. This term describes a causal process of democracy support arising from the combined mobilization of two dimensions of social identity: the domestic dimension (civic national identity) and the geopolitical dimension (salience of external authoritarian threats to the nation). Our analysis of multiyear survey data, including our own original questions (see section 4), yields strong evidence for this proposition. In Ukraine amid the 2014–

22 Donbas war, civic national identity (pride in Ukrainian citizenship) and geopolitical threat (identification of authoritarian Russia, rather than local separatists or/and foreign volunteers, as the principal enemy) were the strongest and most robust predictors of support for democracy. We found their effects to be not only additive, but in significant ways interactive. And in our separate panel survey with the same respondents about three months before and after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 that threatened Ukraine's very existence and mobilized intrinsic national pride, we found that support for democracy had surged across Ukraine, controlling for major confounders. We proceed to explicate the theoretical foundations of geosocietal identity mobilization for democracy, our empirical findings, and their implications for the comparative analysis of support for democracy globally.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Principal Phenomenon under Investigation*

The definition and measurement of democracy is one of the most extensively debated subjects in political science,<sup>3</sup> and it is not our purpose here to engage in these debates. Our focus is on the perceived desirability of democracy as a political system, one of the principal aspects of diffuse support reflecting Lipset's (1959, 83) concept of political legitimacy, a "belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society." A study of the panel data of 2,435 nationally aggregated estimates of support for democracy from 135 countries finds that diffuse support, when compared to other measures, is the most significant correlate of democracy's survival and endurance (Claassen 2020). Corroborating those findings at the individual level, quantitative analysis of focus group narratives in Chile and Argentina indicate that desirability of democracy as a system, compared to 48 other measures, generated the most consistent variation in strongly held positive and negative orientations across multi-item democracy support profiles in both countries (Carlin 2018). These studies indicate that focusing on this measure is theoretically and substantively warranted and important—in no small part because it has proved to be diagnostic of real-world democratic futures regardless of what individuals specifically mean by democracy when answering survey questions.

We ask how a society's exposure to war—focusing on ordinary civilians rather than the combatants—may affect this diffuse support for democracy at the individual level.

### *Theoretical Puzzle*

Although we lack cumulative research on individual-level support for democracy in cases like Ukraine during Russia's invasion, two major literatures and debates therein offer relevant insights.

First, we have research linking political preferences to *generalizable psychological factors* due to war conditions,

notably death and destruction, which Ukraine has continually experienced since 2014 and particularly since 2022. But the assessments of specific attitudinal effects diverge. On the one hand, extensive studies show how war eroded support for democracy in different countries due to “shattered assumptions” of personal invulnerability (Janoff-Bulman 1992), “the ball of rage” syndrome (Chemtob et al. 1997), “mortality salience” (Rosenblatt et al. 1989), personal loss and traumas (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Dyrstad 2013), social intolerance (Bakke, O’Loughlin, and Ward 2009; Tir and Singh 2015), the prioritizing of control over freedom (Davis and Silver 2004), and “authoritarian thinking” (Hetherington and Suhay 2011).

On the other hand, we have research indicating that the impacts of war loss and trauma may be muted or may lay the ground for stronger support for democracy. Individuals may interpret even grave threats of violence as manageable “perturbations” that are followed by the resetting of democratic norms (Sniderman et al. 2019). The human tendency to become desensitized to repeated stimuli means political attitudes may change less as violence persists (Nussio 2020). Individual post-traumatic growth in response to life-threatening events may boost prodemocratic attitudes (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004) and political tolerance (Carmil and Breznitz 1991).

The second category of relevant research points to *generalizable social factors* affecting political preferences in wartime, notably group mobilization. Here, too, conclusions diverge. On the one hand, war arguably raises public support for personalist centralized rule. External threats have been shown to bolster “rallying-around-the-flag” behavior (Mueller 1970) in different contexts, with the public more willing to delegate authority to individual leaders and the executive over other institutions (Frye 2019; Lai and Reiter 2005; Lambert et al. 2010; Tudor and Slater 2021), mute political opposition (Baum and Groeling 2008; Brody and Shapiro 1991; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996), and bolster social intolerance (Godefroidt 2023; Grosjean 2014). Moreover, rallying for the incumbents has been shown to be more durable and intense under conditions similar to Ukraine’s, such as during major uses of military force, severe hostility between parties, and fighting over territory (Baker and Oneal 2001; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996, 265; Tir 2012)—particularly territory of symbolic significance, such as Ukraine’s Crimea (Alexseev and Hale 2019).

On the other hand, we have evidence that the same quest for group unity while under threat, often in the same or similar countries, gives rise to grassroots civic mobilization, favoring social inclusivity within a nation and strengthening liberal democratic values (Berinsky 2009). Skocpol (2002) noted a 45% rise in public trust in the US government in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks and cited historical evidence that the surge in trust

was even more significant during World War II, when Americans needed to “roll bandages for GIs or collect scrap metal to make airplanes.” Similar conclusions were drawn about September 11 (Gaines 2002; Woods 2011), and about responses to terrorist attacks in Spain (Dinesen and Jæger 2013) and France (Van Hauwaert and Huber 2020). In Ukraine, Darkovich, Savisko, and Rabinovych (2023) document how Russia’s full-scale invasion boosted political decentralization as citizens mobilized predominantly around local communities (*bromady*), and President Volodymyr Zelensky’s popularity surged along with—and not at the expense of—support for democratic institutions and values (Onuch and Hale 2022).

While showing that war exposure and group mobilization are important to factor into any analysis of war effects on political attitudes, divergent findings point to a theoretical puzzle: Why would the same psychological and social factors associated with war violence affect polity preferences differently? If war brings with it insecurity and the quest for group unity across societies, why may support for democracy in any given society weaken or strengthen in wartime?

While this partly reflects the problem of drawing generalizable inferences from studies that use different variable specifications in different contexts with different data types and methods, the puzzle points to two knowledge gaps. The first one is war type: almost all the individual-level findings on how violence affects support for democracy come from cases of civil wars, insurgencies, terrorist attacks, or militarized interventions in other states.<sup>4</sup> However, econometric analysis (Besley and Persson 2010) and survey research (Grosjean 2014) indicate that war type may significantly affect at least some political preferences, with exposure to internal war more likely to drive social antagonisms, but exposure to interstate war more likely to favor social inclusivity. Building on these insights, we further examine how individual-level exposure to *interstate* wars might affect diffuse support for democracy, particularly under the threat of territorial conquest.

The second factor has to do with society and national identity mobilization. Most of the relevant rallying research focuses on the “shifts in attitudes toward the American president” (Feinstein 2022; Lambert et al. 2010, 886) and on leadership approval elsewhere (Feinstein 2018, Frye 2019; Hale 2021; Lai and Reiter 2005). However, Godefroidt’s (2023) meta-analysis of political attitudes under the threat of terrorism in 30 countries over 35 years (drawing on 326 studies of 400,000 individuals) showed that rallying is contingent on a country’s context and its issues. A significant “rally around President Bush” effect in response to September 11 was not observed in many other countries, particularly in relation to non-Islamist threats. Indications have emerged that rallying is multifaceted. Societies may rally not only for leaders, but also for institutions (Hetherington and

Nelson 2003) and military operations (Feinstein 2018). The growing salience of civic national identity in Ukraine within a year of the onset of the Donbas war in 2014 (Kulyk 2016; Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018), in contrast to a drop in then president Petro Poroshenko's support, implies that societies may literally rally around the flag and other state symbols, for nation and polity, regardless of declining support for the leader.<sup>5</sup> As a next step, we examine how *civic identity mobilization* in war-time may translate into support for democracy as a political system.

### ***Geosocietal Support for Democracy: The Logic and the Hypotheses***

To develop a generalizable explanation of Ukraine's democratic resilience, we propose that support for democracy in a state at war can be *geosocietal*, in the sense that it is likely to be significantly conditioned by both the public salience of geopolitical (external) threats to democracy and the society's capacity for civic national mobilization. The geosocietal logic indicates that the international system-level context (notably, war type, the nature of the aggressor and target states, and international alliances) would set the stage for whether civic national mobilization may affect support for democracy positively or negatively and reinforce these effects. At the same time, the society's intrinsic capacity for civic mobilization, based in domestic conditions, will contribute significantly toward the total effect as a fundamental underlying condition.

We know from well-established literatures about the significant impacts of international-level factors—such as power balances, institutions, and norms—on the domestic structures and politics of states (known as the “second image reversed,” as described by Gourevitch [1978]), and more specifically about the importance of war in the formation of states and national identities (Greenfeld 1993; Tilly 1992). Expanding on these insights, we recognize that national identity is not only intrinsic (rooted in a sense of common citizenship or traditions and amplified by common effort and interests) but also relational, grounded in the human tendency to “cleave and compare” across groups (Horowitz 2001; Nair and Sambanis 2019). This means national identity must entail a sense of where one's nation-state stands in relation to others—of its distinctiveness and commonalities, its strengths and weaknesses, and the costs and benefits of its external interactions. We refer to this identity dimension as geopolitical. Factoring this dimension into the analysis of democracy support is essential to our contribution.

The extent to which a threat is external is a critical factor. The fundamental insight of social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1986) is that invasive external (out-group) threats play a particularly strong part in identity mobilization by amplifying intergroup differences

across multiple categories. The perceived degree to which the threat of war comes from another state or external actor is likely to amplify the perceived differences between the polity of the aggressor and that of the target state. Intergroup bias—a combination of out-group hostility and in-group solidarity—would then translate into individuals casting the opposing state's polity in a more negative light, and their own polity in a more positive light, than they would in the absence of the external war threat.

The SIT logic also implies that *sensitivity* to external threats would depend on how salient civic national (in-group) identity is within a society before it comes under external attack. In theory, the stronger the salience of civic national identity (i.e., the degree to which citizens feel pride in their citizenship) in a democratic or democratizing state before such an invasion, the more there is at stake to defend. Consequently, we would expect a stronger response in support of democracy. A relevant indication comes from a meta-analysis by Bauer and colleagues (2016, 268), who note that war violence affects individual political and social attitudes such as trust differently depending on whether the aggressor is internal or external and whether a population under attack “already possesses a national identity.” Though Bauer and colleagues do not examine whether this logic applies to diffuse support for democracy, their analysis suggests it is plausible through evolution of parochial altruism. On these considerations, we may expect to observe both direct and interaction effects of external attack and national identity salience on support for democracy.

A derivation of SIT known as the common in-group identity model (CIIM) (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000) also indicates that when individuals feel their whole nation or country is under external attack they are more likely to strengthen their civic national identity (i.e., identify more strongly as Americans, French, or Ukrainians) and group cohesion at the national level, while reducing the salience of ethnic, religious, or other subnational group identities within the state (Rodriguez-Carballeira and Javaloy 2005) and boosting social capital and trust in institutions (Besley and Persson 2010; Grosjean 2014). By extension, this logic suggests that when geopolitical threats come from an authoritarian state, the salience of sociodemographic characteristics underlying these subgroup identities in a democratizing state would decline and they would have a less significant impact on support for democracy than civic national identity mobilization and war threat.

SIT also prompts us to recognize that because in-/out-group categorization at the interstate (geopolitical) level is likely to compound intergroup bias, then support for democracy could be mobilized not only by external attack, but also by perceived external (interstate) threats of different types. For example, an external actor may not only threaten to undermine or suppress democracy in the target state by direct force but may also (or instead) undermine



the state's prospects of membership in international democratic coalitions by waging or threatening limited wars or incursions, or by supporting insurgencies, in the hope of depleting the target state's resources and demoralizing its population. If the external actor's aggression is indirect and/or obfuscated, (which could well be the case in internationalized hybrid conflicts), the target state's mobilization of geopolitical identity will reflect the extent to which the target state's citizens blame the external actor for war. If such aggression is direct and overt, we would expect the war onset to mobilize out-group hostility directed at the external authoritarian aggressor and bolster in-group solidarity in support of democracy in a society. Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, one Kyiv resident vividly summarized this logic of geosocietal mobilization: "Don't you see what kind of monster is attacking us? Of course, we fight for democracy!"<sup>6</sup>

Representing our theoretical propositions in the order laid out above, we formulate the following hypotheses on geosocietal support for democracy applicable to Ukraine (i.e., within a democratic or democratizing state under military attack):

- H1: Civic national pride will increase support for democracy.
- H2: Threat of war from an authoritarian state will increase support for democracy.
- H3: Civic national pride and threat of war will have robust effects on support for democracy across sub-national sociodemographic cleavages (such as gender, language, and region).
- H4: In a multi-actor (hybrid) war, civic national pride will increase support for democracy more among individuals who also attribute the war to an external authoritarian aggressor.
- H5: A direct military attack by an authoritarian state will increase support for democracy compared to support before the attack.

## The Context: Ukraine's Identity Mobilization

In Ukraine, significant capacity for geosocietal mobilization developed over the two decades leading to Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Regarding the societal component, the UNASIS annual nationwide surveys (N = 1,800/year) show a sustained 20–30% cumulative increase from 2002 through 2020 both of pride in Ukrainian citizenship and primary self-identification as citizens of Ukraine (rather than as natives of a province, city, town, or village, or as citizens of the former Soviet Union) (figure 1). The 50% threshold was crossed around the 2004 Orange

Revolution,<sup>7</sup> where domestic issues (electoral manipulation) were dominant (Beissinger 2013). The next surge followed successful anti-government protests in 2013–14 (Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, detailed further below) in which mobilization against corruption and repression was prominent.

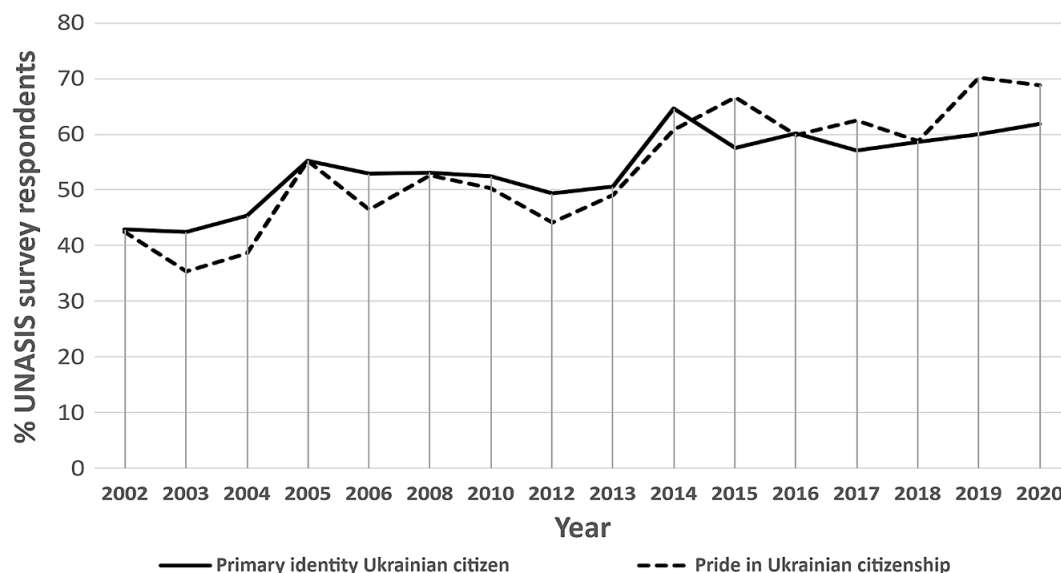
Subsequent surveys showed that citizenship became "a cornerstone of civic national identity" and the central part of post-Soviet nation-building in Ukraine (Barrington 2021). In 2016, 24% of Kyiv-controlled Donbas residents reported feeling more like Ukrainian citizens than before the 2014 Donbas war, compared to only 6% who reported feeling less so (Sasse and Lackner 2018).

Regarding the geopolitical dimension of identity mobilization, the surveys demonstrate a sea change in threat perception and a concurrent geopolitical reorientation among Ukrainians after 2014. Following Russia's militarized annexation of Crimea and intervention in the Donbas in 2014, the number of respondents who felt threatened by external aggression rose from about 10% to 60% (figure 2a). Geopolitical orientation between Russia and Europe flipped.

In terms of SIT, that amounted to a superordinate (geopolitical) identity recategorization. Prior to 2014, for most Ukrainians, the Russia–Belarus Union was their geopolitical in-group (figure 2b). After 2014, it was the European Union. In-group preferences also became polarized. The results in figure 2b are based on two separate questions. Prior to 2014, about 20–30% of respondents answered "yes" to both, thus supporting Ukraine's membership in both the EU and the Russia–Belarus Union (ignoring the practical impossibility of such an outcome). After 2014, that number dropped to 3–6%. And despite an uptick, opposition to both the EU and the Russia–Belarus Union (implying support for Ukraine's geopolitical neutrality) stayed under 10% through 2021. Other studies showed a concurrent public reorientation toward NATO (Haran and Zolkina 2017).

Societal and geopolitical dimensions of identity mobilization converged in the mass popular protests of November 2013–February 2014. Symptomatically, Ukrainians refer to those events as both the Revolution of Dignity and the Euromaidan Revolution, emphasizing, respectively, each dimension: rallying for civil liberties in response to riot police brutality and protesting the then president Viktor Yanukovich's withdrawal from the EU Association Agreement under pressure from Vladimir Putin. Hundreds of thousands staked out Kyiv's central Independence Square (Maidan) and defied police batons and sniper fire until Yanukovich was ousted. Ukrainian scholars analyzing the revolution captured this convergence of identity dimensions. Riabchuk and Lushnycky (2015, 45) called it "an explosive moment of truth ... a confrontation of two diametrically opposed worlds, two political systems and sets of values—the 'Europe' embodied by the EU and the

**Figure 1**  
**Capacity for Civic National Mobilization in Ukraine Shows Long-Term Buildup**



*Notes:* The 2014 survey was conducted in July, about a month before the Russian military significantly escalated the Donbas war. Donbas residents were polled afterwards only in Ukraine's government-controlled areas (GCAs). Crimea data was excluded in all years.  
*Sources:* See appendix section A12(v)a.

'Eurasia' embodied by Putinist Russia, Yanukovych's 'Family,' and the hired thugs, 'titushki,' that harassed, tortured and killed the protesters." Stepanenko and Pylynskyi (2015, 12) noted Ukrainian identity's embeddedness in "the cultural and legal landscape that is currently called the European Union" and described Euromaidan as "another stage for Ukrainians' striving for their freedoms and also for a European future."

This capacity for geosocietal mobilization would drive Ukrainians' spirited democratic resilience all the way through Russia's 2022 invasion, upsetting the Kremlin's plans to swiftly occupy and erase Ukraine from the world's map.

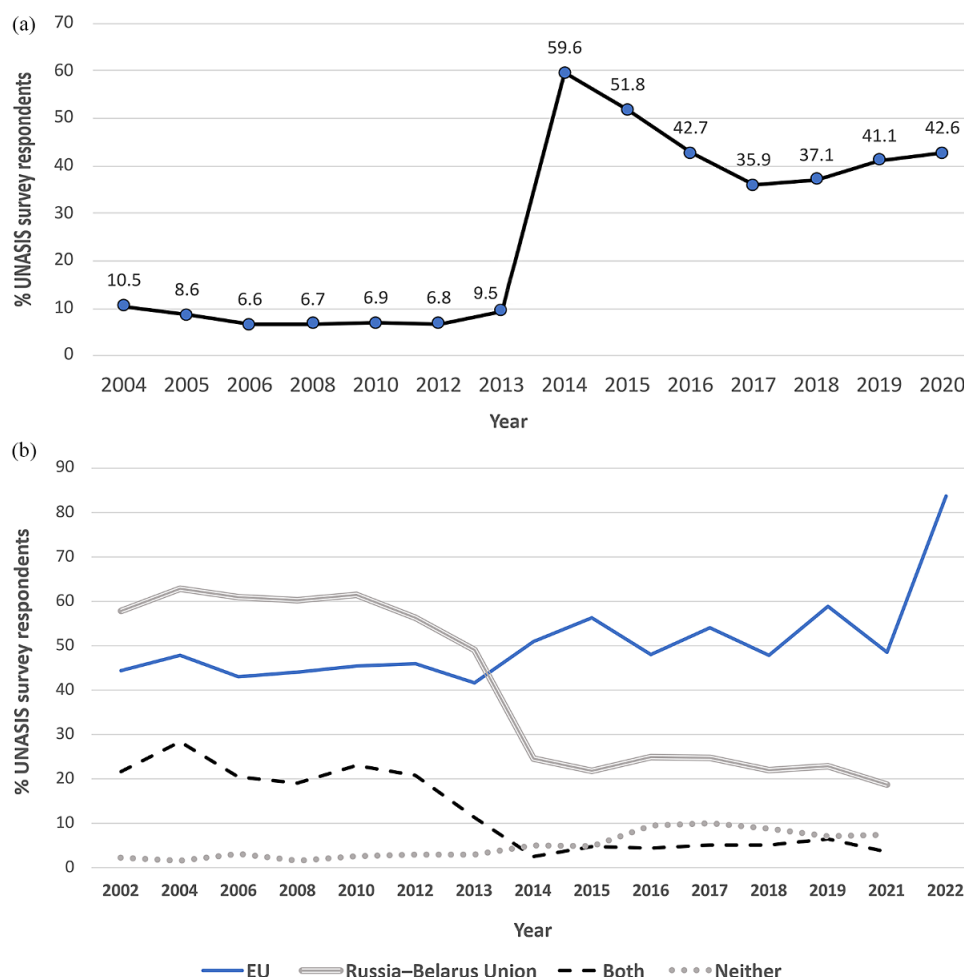
## Survey Tests and Findings

We test our hypotheses on geosocietal support for democracy with survey data in three settings: (1) within Ukraine's Donbas region (2017); (2) in Ukraine outside the Donbas (2017 and 2018); and (3) in Ukraine before and after the full-scale Russian invasion (2021 and 2022).

The data comes from our original research project on war and democracy in Ukraine, initially conducted in conjunction with the annual opinion surveys of UNASIS between June 1 and June 19, 2017 (N = 1,800, plus a 399 oversample in the Donbas); between September 13 and October 1, 2018 (N = 1,800); and between November 1 and November 30, 2021 (N = 1,800) (Alexseev and Dembitskyi 2024). These surveys were based on multistage probability cluster sampling of the

adult (over the age of 18) population; were proportionate to the estimated population size by gender, age, education, settlement type, and province from 120 primary sampling units randomly selected from the national list of local legislative electoral districts; and were representative of the adult population of Ukraine and of each of Ukraine's 25 territorial units. Polling took place in every province of Ukraine excluding the Crimea and non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) of the Donbas. Respondents were selected through face-to-face contact and filled the survey questionnaires in writing.<sup>8</sup> The survey instrument and procedures followed the methodological and ethical standards of the European Social Survey (Golovakha and Gorbachik 2014). In June 2022, UNASIS tasked the Sociological Rating Group,<sup>9</sup> a reputable polling agency in Ukraine, to contact by phone all of its November 2021 annual survey respondents and to reinterview as many of them as possible. Given telephone survey constraints, the interviews were limited to about 30 questions of primary interest repeated verbatim from 2021. Interviews were completed with 475 verified repeat respondents (polled June 25–July 2, 2022)—generating a panel of the same individuals interviewed approximately three months before and four months after the onset of full-scale war.<sup>10</sup> That panel closely matched the sociodemographic characteristics of the UNASIS 2021 sample that was representative of the population in territories then under Ukraine's control.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2**  
**Geopolitical Identity Recategorization in Ukraine. (a) Fear of Attack by a Foreign Power. (b) Pro-Russia versus Pro-Europe Orientations**



Sources: See appendix section A12(v)a.

### Principal Variables of Interest

For the dependent variable we use the UNASIS survey question closely related to diffuse support for democracy, which has been shown to be a significant predictor of democracy survival (Claassen 2020) and internally consistent across cultural settings (Carlin 2018). We asked: “How important do you find the following personally to you: the democratic development of our country.” The answers were on a five-point Likert scale.<sup>12</sup> We use two specifications of this measure: (1) the original scale to estimate the degree of democracy support<sup>13</sup> and (2) a dummy variable with “important” and “very important” coded “1” and all other responses coded “0” to estimate the probability of explicit support, rather than differences on a scale.<sup>14</sup> With other surveys showing that most Ukrainians define democracy as freedom of expression (National

Democratic Institute 2022; Szostek and Orlova 2022), we use the importance of free speech on the same response scale in robustness checks.

For the civic national identity dimension of geosocietal mobilization, we use *National Pride* based on the question: “How proud or not proud are you to be a citizen of Ukraine?” Responses were on a five-point Likert scale. For the geopolitical threat dimension, we use *Russia Aggressor*, based on the question: “Against whom do you believe the Ukrainian forces (the army, the national guard, police, the state security service, and others) mostly fight in the Donbas? (Please select one option from the list.)”<sup>15</sup> Respondents who stated that Ukraine was primarily fighting against “local rebels financed, armed, and run by Russia,” or “mercenaries (local or foreign fighting for money) supported by Russia,” or “the regular Russian

armed forces” were coded “1.” The rest (who picked “local insurgents who act independently,” or “local insurgents and foreign volunteers who act independently,” or “hard to say”) were coded “0.”<sup>16</sup> In the 2021–22 panel study, *War Year* serves as a proxy for geosocietal mobilization, given practically no variation on pride and threat after Russia’s full-scale attack.

### Control Variables

We selected the following control variables to test for established alternative explanations and, in doing so, to minimize the possibility that some unobserved value may drive the results.

*War Exposure.* Based on the extensive literature reviewed earlier and following Dyrstad (2013) and Dembitskyi (2016), we use two dummy variables: *War Loss* identifies respondents who said they lost a family member, a friend, health, or property due to war; and *War Stress* identifies respondents who said they experienced tension or anxiety or had disturbing war-related nightmares.<sup>17</sup> In the 2017 Donbas tests we add *Warzone* residency (see the next subsection).

### Sociodemographic Characteristics.

1. *Language and Religion.* Given the role of language as an ethnic identity marker (Arel 2017; Laitin 1998) and its enduring, complex relationship with political attitudes in Ukraine (Barrington and Faranda 2009; Shevel 2002; Szporluk 1997), we pretested for three linguistic identity specifications following Onuch and Hale (2018), found them strongly intercorrelated, and settled on reported language use at home based on Chapman and Gerber (2019) and Pop-Eleches and Robertson (2018).<sup>18</sup> For tests outside the Donbas we follow Chapman and Gerber (2019) by using *Language Mostly Ukrainian* (coding respondents using mostly Ukrainian “1” and mostly Russian or some Russian “0”). For the Donbas study, we use *Language Some Ukrainian* (coding mostly Ukrainian or some Ukrainian “1” and mostly Russian “0”).<sup>19</sup> In robustness checks on religious identity, we use respondents’ self-identification with the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.
2. *Modernization.* Based on research linking democracy with economic development through the rise of an educated urban middle class (Lipset 1959; Rostow 1971), we use a dummy for *Rural* residency based on the Ukrainian government registry; *Income* based on respondents’ valuation of their income on a seven-point scale; and their *Education* level, measured on a five-point scale.
3. *Socialization.* Given the established significant effects of socialization differences across generations (Krosnick and

Alwin 1989), including communist legacies (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017) and by gender (Lizotte 2016), we control for *Age* (six categories, robustness checks for three categories) and *Female*, based on self-identification.

4. *Regionalism.* We control for the well-established political significance of regional differences within Ukraine, which reflect complex interactions of ethnolinguistic, socioeconomic, cultural, and historical factors (Arel 2002; Onuch and Hale 2018), by (1) holding the region constant in our 2017 Donbas tests and (2) including dummy variables for three of Ukraine’s four macroregions (*West*, *Center*, and *East*), following Barrington and Herron (2004) in all other tests.<sup>20</sup>

*Media Effects.* We run robustness checks for reliance on Russian versus Ukrainian news sources (see appendix table 1A.8).

Whereas no statistical model can rule out all unobserved value effects, our single-country/region large-N design with theoretically grounded, context-specific control variables provides a strong guardrail.<sup>21</sup> Reverse causality is controlled with the inclusion of the pre/post-war-onset panel data tracking the same individuals. In cross-sectional tests, for reversed causality to drive the findings would imply that decreases of support for democracy in wartime would systematically depress both national pride and perceived external threat, contradicting the evidence.

### The Donbas Regional Study

*War Exposure.* We tasked UNASIS to oversample from the Donbas GCAs in their 2017 annual national survey, resulting in 399 new respondents for a total regional sample of 565. That gives us enough power to identify statistically significant relationships of interest. The Donbas setting provides three design benefits. First, we control for region. This is important because regional differences capture complex interactions of ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and other factors that remain subject to divergent interpretations and scholarly debate (Arel 2002; Darden 2010; Frye 2015; Kudelia and van Zyl 2019; Kulyk 2011; Kuzio 2017; O’Loughlin 2001; Sasse 2010). In the Donbas these effects have arguably accounted for significant regional specificity in Ukrainian politics, relations with Russia, governance, social identity, and warlordism (Driscoll 2015; Kudelia 2017; Osipian and Osipian 2006; 2012).

Second, we can assess the impacts of war exposure more rigorously. Our *Warzone* binary variable distinguishes between respondents who reported living in the “zone of combat operations” as “1” (N = 203) and others as “0” (N = 350).<sup>22</sup> On theoretical, methodological, and empirical grounds, physical proximity to war violence could be an important variable in its own right, as it may capture



unanticipated or hard-to-operationalize effects aside from loss and stress (Bakke, O'Loughlin, and Ward 2009; Dyrstad 2013).

Using respondents' self-categorization has significant advantages in the context of the 2014 Donbas war. To begin with, this measure identifies individuals to whom war exposure has been salient enough to report (thus controlling for otherwise hard-to-estimate individual-level salience and the effect duration of any discrete war event that count measures, typically based on media or observer reports, cannot control). It also captures views of respondents in areas that did experience war damage, but whose specific personal experiences may not have been significant enough to register in media or observer reports (notably, in our sample, the Sartana settlement).

At the same time, this measure captures respondents who experienced both principal types of war exposure in the Donbas in 2014–17: (1) in settlements seized by Russia's proxy forces but retaken by Ukrainian forces in 2014, mostly after fierce battles (Melnyk et al. 2019, 7–13), and (2) in settlements with sustained war fighting of variable intensity along a 250-mile "line of control" cutting through the Donbas from north to south. The line changed little from mid-2015 through survey time in mid-2017. Figure 3 illustrates how the distribution of reported war exposure in our survey broadly reflected the uneven patterns of fighting in the Donbas war.

We see larger proportions of respondents reporting war fighting in the region's center where Russia-backed forces made the most advances in 2014; yet within that area we see more respondents reporting warzone experience in places more intensely contested (Lyman [75%], Kramatorsk [100%], Slov'yansk [70%], and Druzhkivka [60%]) than many settlements closer to the front lines—for example, Chasiv Yar (26%), Bakhmut (27%), and Pokrovs'ke (10%). In the south, we see respondents reporting war exposure in Mariupol (17%) and Pokrovs'ke (20%), where fighting took place in the spring of 2014 as local residents and Ukrainian forces overturned the Russia-backed takeovers, but was less intense than in Kramatorsk and Slov'yansk.

Coding respondents' reports also captures indirect war experiences that event counts typically miss. According to our Donbas focus groups (in Druzhkivka and Mariupol, 2017), those experiences included witnessing troop movements; encountering and commiserating with war victims; fleeing the horrors of war and not knowing if one might return; stressing out when discovering unexploded bombs at children's playgrounds; or knowing people whose hair turned gray overnight or who had been wounded, had disappeared, or had died (illustrative citations in the appendix, section A4).

Ordinary Donbas residents in our survey did not choose war experiences, war experiences chose them. Since most intense battles in 2014–17 were for cities, significantly more urban than rural residents in our sample reported

living through war fighting (reflected in Pearson *R*s for *Warzone* of 0.183\*\* with urban residency; 0.107\* with education; and 0.119\* with income). In contrast, factors uncorrelated with the urban–rural divide—age, gender, and language use—were also uncorrelated with *Warzone*. Further validating our measure, we found that reporting war exposure significantly correlated with *Loss* ( $R = 0.338^{***}$ ) and *Stress* ( $R = 0.146^{**}$ ).<sup>23</sup> Yet, we also found *Warzone* residents to be 10–12% more likely to view democracy and free speech as important compared to other Donbas residents (both binary relationships being significant).

*Statistical Analysis.* To test our hypothesis in the context of the Donbas war, we estimated full effects of each independent variable while holding all other predictors constant using multiple linear regression with robust standard errors for *Democracy Importance Scale* and logistic regression for *Democracy Importance Probability*.<sup>24</sup>

The results show strong support for H1 through H4. Figure 4a reports the estimated percentage-point change in *Democracy Importance Scale* from minimum to maximum value for each predictor (all rescaled from 0 to 1). *National Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* both have highly significant positive full effects (at  $p < 0.001$ , there is less than a 0.1% probability that these relationships were due to chance). Respondents who were very proud of their Ukrainian citizenship ranked the importance of democracy about 21% higher than respondents who were not proud at all. Respondents who saw Russia as the aggressor in the Donbas war ranked it 12% higher than others. Confidence intervals indicate, however, that *Russia Aggressor* effects are less prone to variation (about half of respondents who saw Russia as the aggressor were likely to rate the importance of democracy about the same or higher than about a quarter of the respondents who were very proud of their Ukrainian citizenship).

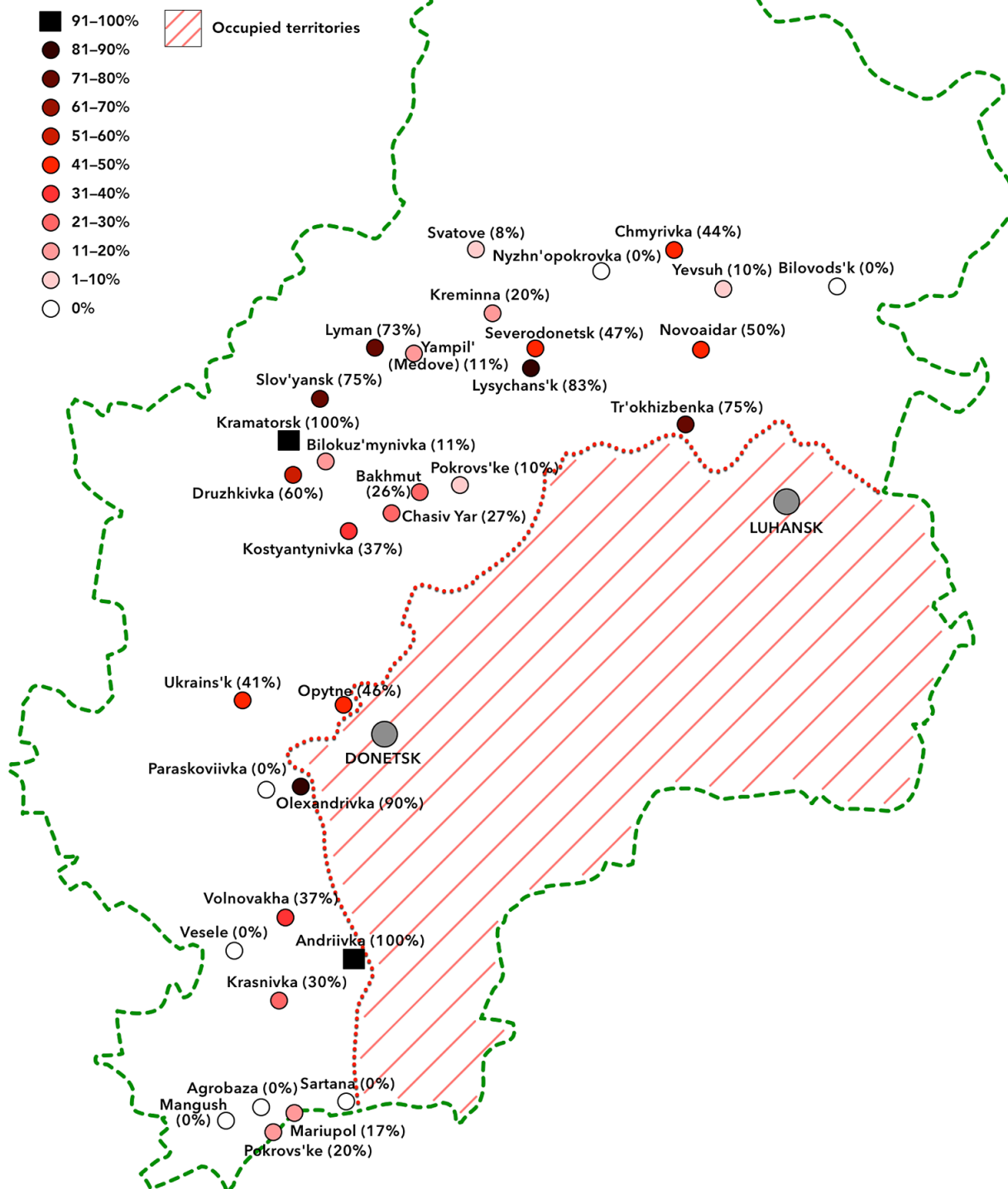
Figure 4b shows that the average probability of a respondent considering democracy to be important increases by nearly 24% when *National Pride* changes from "not proud" to "very proud," and by over 21% when *Russia Aggressor* changes from "no" to "yes" with all other predictors held constant.<sup>25</sup> Once again, the *Russia Aggressor* factor is more reliable in the sense that the probability of support for democracy among 95% of respondents who considered Russia to be an aggressor is higher than among about one-fifth of respondents at the highest *National Pride* level. This is reflected in the higher significance level for *Russia Aggressor* ( $p < 0.001$  compared to  $p = 0.005$  for *Pride*).

H3 is supported in that (1) most social cleavage markers are not significant, and (2) for those that are, the significance levels are lower than for *Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* (cf. above, with  $p = 0.003$  for education and  $p = 0.014$  for age on the democracy support scale, and  $p = 0.012$  for income and  $p = 0.019$  for age). The sole exception was the

**Figure 3**  
Respondent's Warzone Experience in the 2017 Donbas Survey

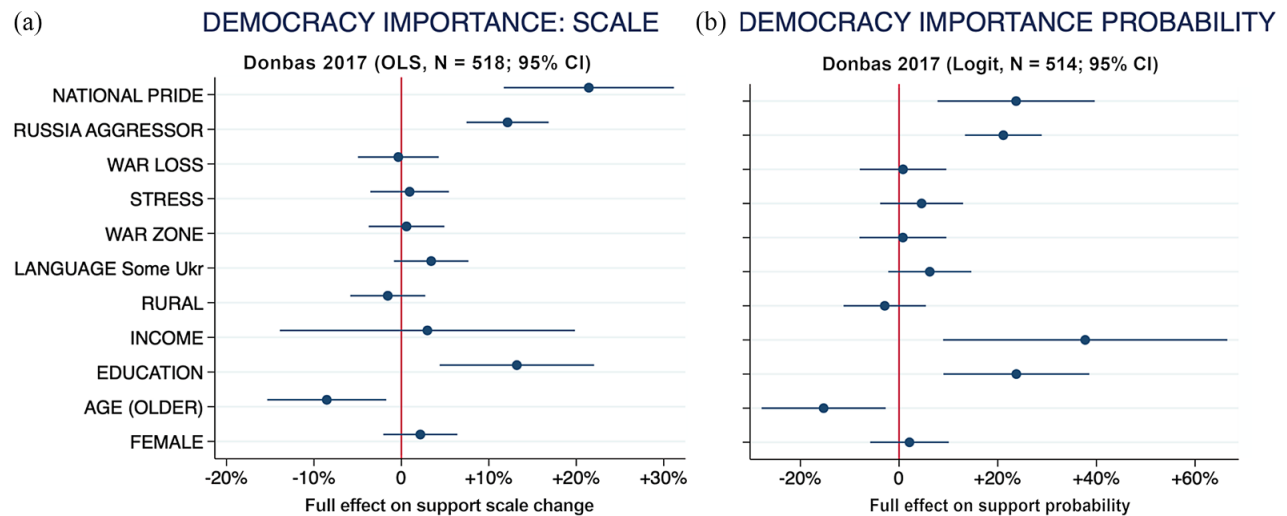
### Luhansk and Donetsk regions:

percent of respondents in survey locations reporting warzone experience



Note: N = 565.

**Figure 4**  
**Donbas GCAs, 2017: Geosocietal Factors Consistently Predict Democracy Support**



effect of education on support probability ( $p = 0.002$ ) being slightly more significant than *Pride* ( $p = 0.005$ ).

We also considered that demographic variables may have indirect effects on democracy support by affecting related attitudes, and estimated them with a procedure known as seemingly unrelated regression (*sureg* in Stata). It shows that the proportion of *Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* total effects on the democracy support scale—mediated by education, income, age, rural residency, language, and female gender taken together—while statistically significant ( $p = 0.005$  for *Pride* and  $p = 0.002$  for *Russia Aggressor*), was substantively minor (13% and 13.2%, respectively). While supporting H3, these findings indicate that pride and threat do not displace well-established sociodemographic factors, but act alongside them, albeit more strongly and consistently.

To test H4 we estimated marginal effects of the interaction term between *Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* on *Democracy Importance Scale* using Stata. Figure 5 shows the effects of pride and the Russian threat on democracy support while controlling for all other variables, with the estimates from the same regression model as reported above. Based on the visual inference rule (Cumming and Finch 2005) for error bar overlaps, the interaction effect of *Pride* with *Russia Aggressor* was statistically significant except for those respondents who were not at all proud of their Ukrainian citizenship. That total interaction effect (the difference between the leftmost bottom dot and the rightmost top dot) is about 1.5 on a five-point scale—that is, 50% higher than the effect of *Pride* while holding *Russia Aggressor* constant (about a one-point total difference from left to right on either line), and three times as high as the effect of *Russia Aggressor* while holding *Pride* constant at

any level (a 0.5-point vertical gap between the lines). This upholds H4.<sup>26</sup>

With free speech importance as the dependent variable, we got near-identical results, with the main difference being that *Pride* related to the probability of free speech support at 2.4 percentage points below the conventional 95% significance level (at  $p = 0.074$ ) (see appendix section A5).

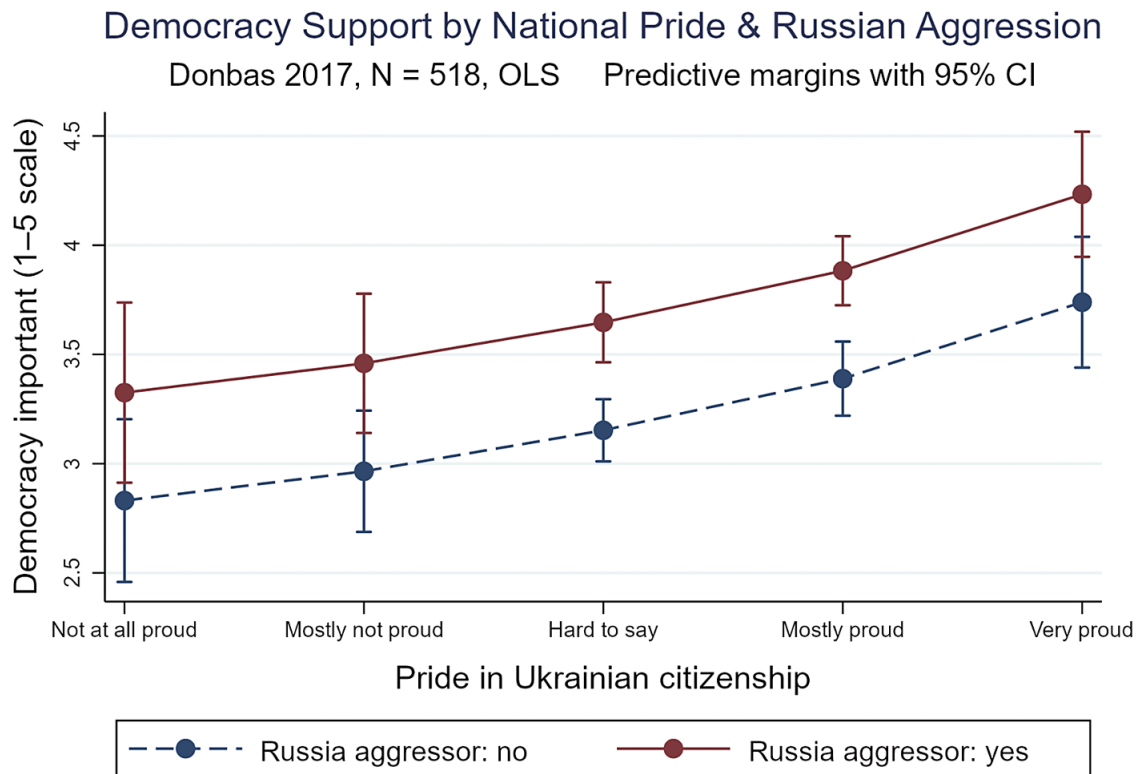
Finally, we observe that while macrolevel geosocietal context measures (pride and threat) are statistically significant, none of the direct microlevel measures of war exposure (*Loss*, *Stress*, and *Warzone*) are. *Warzone*'s relationship to democracy importance (significant at the bivariate level,  $R = 0.144^{**}$ ) is no longer significant in the multiple regression. *Sureg* tests indicate this probably happens because about 41% of the *Warzone* effect is mediated by *Russia Aggressor*.

#### Out-of-Initial-Sample Tests: Ukraine 2017 and 2018

Our Donbas results held up across the rest of Ukraine in the same year and the year after with the same regression tests (the only two UNASIS annual surveys when all measures of interest to us were available).<sup>27</sup> As figure 6 shows, both *National Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* are significant predictors of democracy support in all four tests (at  $p < 0.001$ , except for *Russia* on *Democracy Importance Scale* in 2017 at  $p = 0.003$ ).

Full effects are substantively meaningful. Respondents who were very proud to be Ukrainian citizens valued democracy 17% and 14% higher (for 2017 and 2018, respectively) and were 24% and 21% more likely to view democracy as important than respondents who were not at

**Figure 5**  
**Pride and Threat Interaction on the Democracy Importance Scale (Donbas GCAs, 2017)**



all proud. For respondents who saw Russia as the aggressor compared to those who did not, those effects were 10% and 5% and 18% and 9%, respectively. This upholds **H1** and **H2**.

**H3** is supported given that all other social subgroup markers are shown as either insignificant or less significant than *Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* or contingent on other sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age having negative effects in a historically stronger Sovietized Donbas, but being insignificant or positively related to democracy support elsewhere). The proportion of total effects of *Pride* and *Russia Aggressor* on *Democracy Importance Scale* mediated by sociodemographic variables in the *sureg* test was insignificant in both years (see appendix section A6).

Replicating our Donbas test of marginal effects for the interaction term between *Pride* and *Russia Aggressor*, we find strong support for **H4** in 2017 and partial support in 2018. While smaller than in the Donbas, the full interaction effect in 2017 is about twice as strong as the effect of *Pride* controlling for *Russia* and of *Russia* controlling for *Pride* (figure 7a). The results are mixed for 2018 (figure 7b). *Russia Aggressor* still gives a boost to *Pride* effects on the democracy support scale, yet for all levels of *Pride* except “mostly proud” it is not statistically significant at  $p$

$< 0.05$ . However, that exception is substantively important, because the “mostly proud” group comprises 44% of all respondents. It means that for nearly half of Ukraine’s respondents the interaction of *Pride* and *Russia* was significant.

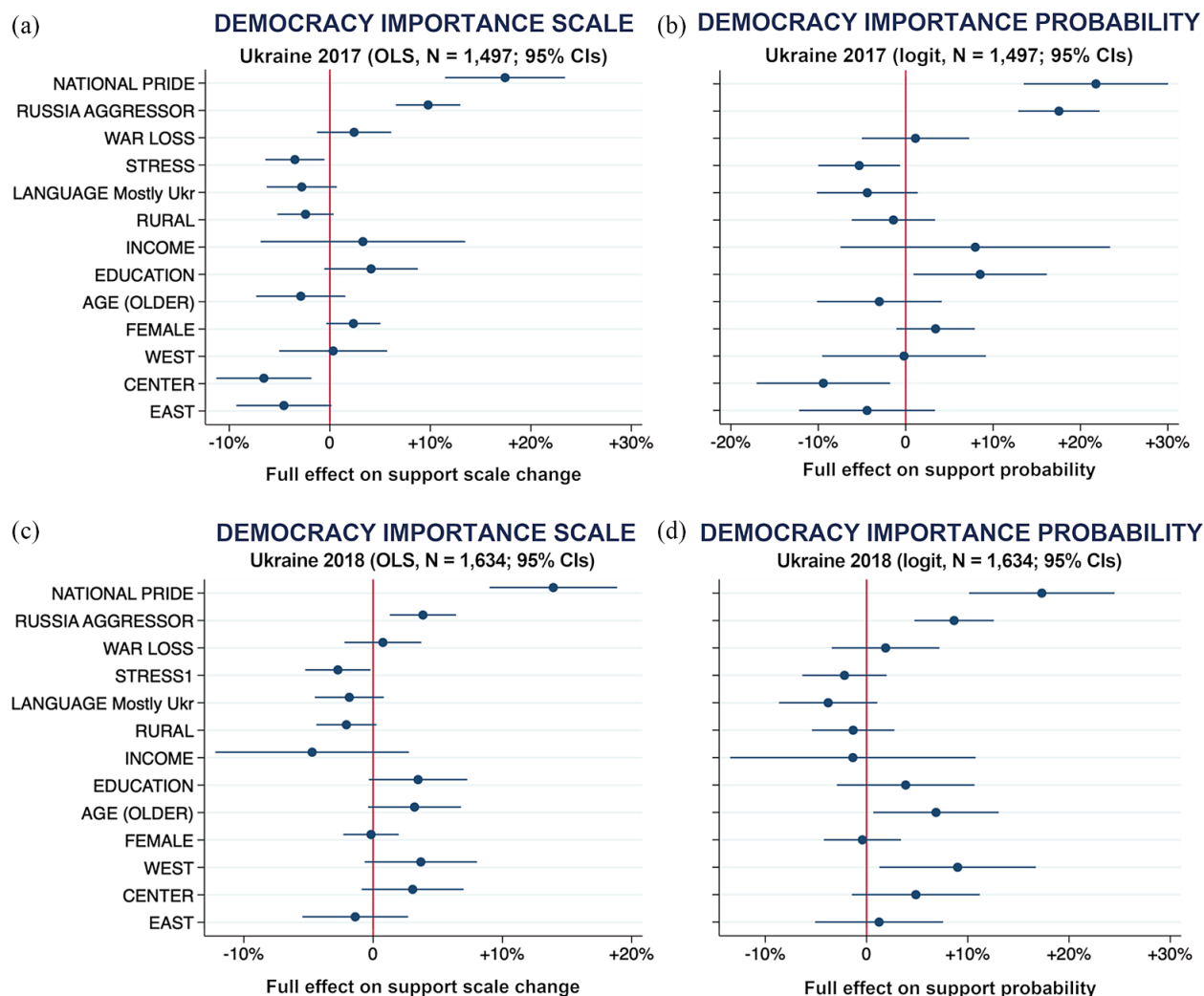
The decline of *Russia Aggressor*’s boost of *Pride* in 2018 reflects the reduction of *Russia Aggressor*’s direct effect on democracy support in 2018 compared to 2017 (figure 6). Macrolevel context offers a plausible explanation in that the battle death rates in the Donbas war dropped fivefold after mid-2016 and the front line stabilized, leading to its decreasing salience over time. Another indication is that in 2017 the combined effect size of *Pride*–*Russia Aggressor* within the Donbas, a region more affected by the war, was substantially larger than outside the Donbas.

Checking for free speech support, we again got near-identical results supporting **H1**–**H4**, the exception being that Russian threat was not a significant predictor of free speech importance scale in 2018 and consequently not a significant booster of *Pride*’s effect, although it was a highly significant predictor that same year of probability of support for free speech ( $p = 0.006$ ).

Finally, turning to the microlevel war exposure factors, *War Loss* has no significant association with democracy



**Figure 6**  
**Pride and Threat Boost Democracy Support across Ukraine outside Donbas (2017–18)**



*Note:* STRESS is a measure of anxiety, tension, and nightmares; STRESS1 is a measure of anxiety and tension only. See appendix section A8 for more details.

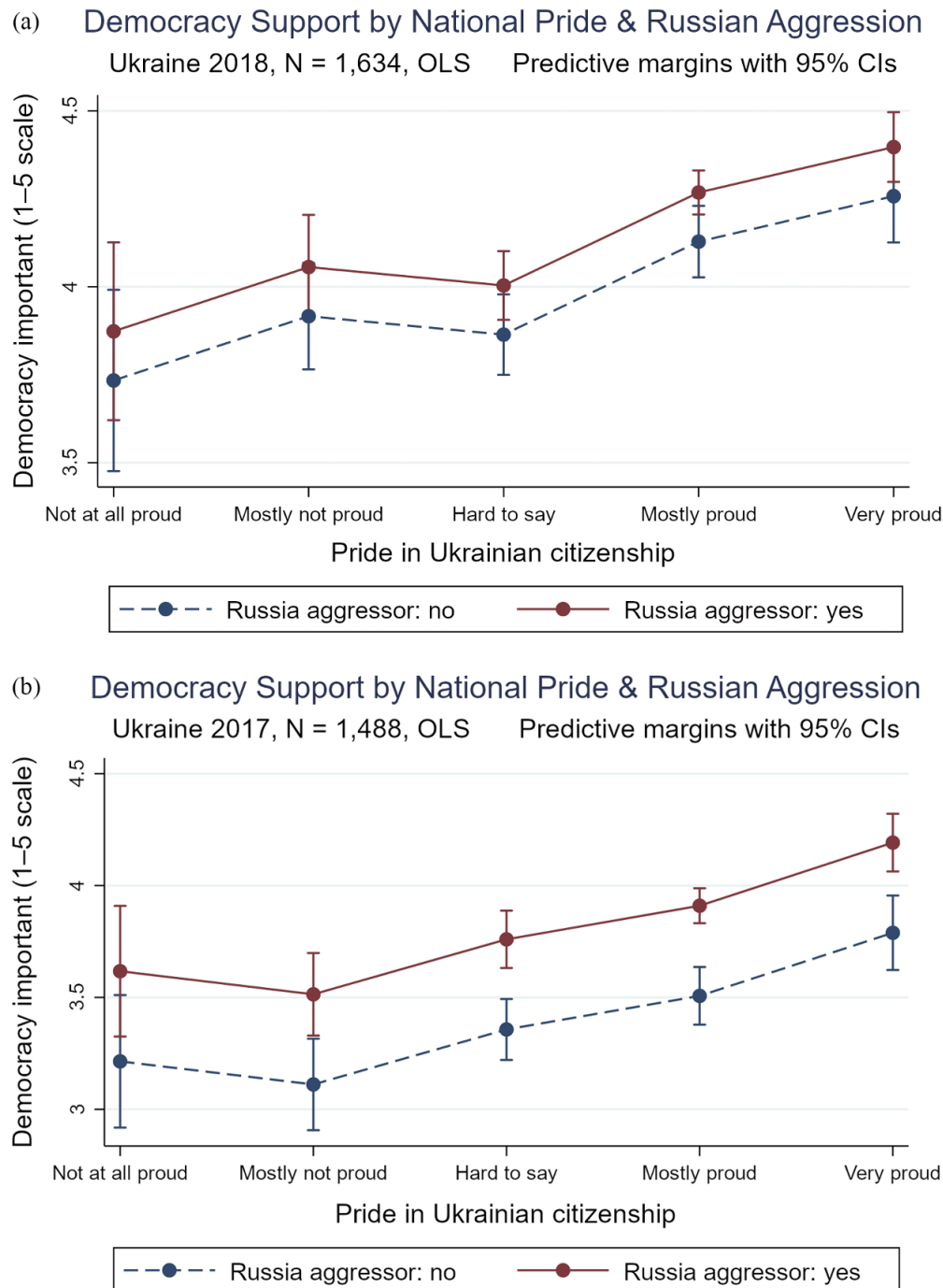
support and the effects of *Stress* are much weaker than the macrolevel (*Pride* and *Russia Aggressor*) factors. However, we see that outside the Donbas, *Stress* reduced democracy support in 2017–18. While these effects are small (between 2.7% and 5%), they remind us of the severe strains and grueling trials of war that Ukrainians are overcoming in pursuit of their democratic aspirations.<sup>28</sup>

#### ***Russia's Full-Scale Invasion Effects: Ukraine 2021–22 Pre/Post War-Onset Panel Study***

The geosocietal identity mobilization we observed in 2017–18 paved the way for a massive, spirited surge of democracy support across Ukraine in response to Russia's full-scale attack in February 2022. Our November 2021–June/July

2022 panel survey data enables a longitudinal pre-post (repeated measures) design with a continuous treatment condition (war), where prewar baseline data represents a de facto control group, and using the same subjects controls for confounders as the treatment continues.<sup>29</sup> In our case we have two repeated measures of the same subjects with an intervening “treatment” event (war) continuously affecting all subjects at the time of the repeated measurement. This design has significantly more leverage than (and should not be confused with) pretest-posttest one-group designs. Critically, the continuation of the treatment/intervening condition through the second measurement minimizes or removes common shortcomings of pretest-posttest designs, particularly intervening posttreatment effects and competing developments at treatment time. The scale and brutality of

**Figure 7**  
**Pride and Threat Interaction on the Democracy Importance Scale in Ukraine outside Donbas**



Russia's war on Ukraine generated conditions overshadowing any other putative intervening event at the time of the repeat survey, and it also minimized the likelihood of instrument reactivity and Hawthorne effects (Spector 1981, 28–30).

Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 also erased the ambiguity about enemy identification during the 2014–22 Donbas war, making the *Russia Aggressor* measure undiagnostic. In fact, our polling agency reported the question commonly elicited anger among respondents at the implied suggestion

**Table 1**  
**War Impact on Democracy Support, Nov. 2021–Jul. 2022: Linear Mixed Effects Model**

	DEMOCRACY IMPORTANT		FREE SPEECH IMPORTANT		TRUST IN MEDIA		TRUST IN PARLIAMENT		TRUST IN PRESIDENT		EU MEMBERSHIP		NATO MEMBERSHIP	
	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.
Model 1														
YEAR (WAR)	0.547***	0.054	0.566***	0.059	0.88***	0.061	0.844***	0.065	1.971***	0.061	0.462***	0.037	0.376***	0.04
Model 2														
YEAR (WAR)	0.528***	0.064	0.518***	0.068	0.895***	0.071	0.834***	0.077	1.986***	0.071	0.403***	0.043	0.313***	0.048
LANGUAGE														
UKRAINIAN	0.138	0.083	0.050	0.086	0.095	0.087	-0.056	0.096	0.001	0.092	0.067	0.050	0.157**	0.063
AGE (OLDER)	0.135**	0.048	0.003	0.050	0.168***	0.051	0.000	0.057	-0.068	0.054	0.023	0.029	0.022	0.037
GENDER (FEMALE)	-0.053	0.067	-0.110	0.069	-0.065	0.070	0.204**	0.077	0.263	0.074	-0.031	0.040	-0.047	0.051
EDUCATION	0.089**	0.031	0.076*	0.032	-0.012	0.032	0.097**	0.036	-0.035	0.034	0.032	0.019	0.037	0.023
INCOME	0.045	0.031	0.108***	0.033	0.094**	0.034	0.099**	0.037	0.088**	0.035	0.065***	0.020	0.043	0.024
LOSS	0.137*	0.069	0.179**	0.071	-0.080	0.075	-0.015	0.082	-0.093	0.075	0.126**	0.041	0.149**	0.051
STRESS	-0.169*	0.076	-0.096	0.080	0.129	0.082	-0.023	0.086	0.058	0.084	0.059	0.047	0.016	0.057
WEST	0.242	0.132	0.286*	0.136	-0.048	0.139	-0.016	0.153	-0.120	0.146	0.315***	0.078	0.437***	0.100
EAST	0.062	0.121	0.197	0.125	-0.210	0.127	-0.059	0.141	0.027	0.134	0.014	0.071	0.137	0.092
CENTER	0.14	0.117	0.250*	0.121	0.018	0.123	0.235	0.136	0.262*	0.130	0.265***	0.069	0.323***	0.089

Note: Estimate of fixed effects; \*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

that an entity other than Russia could have attacked Ukraine. In this context, we use *War Year* (coded as 2022 = “1” and 2021 = “0”) as a proxy for geosocietal mobilization while controlling for microlevel war exposure effects with *Loss* and *Stress*.<sup>30</sup>

We use a linear mixed-effects model in SPSS with respondents’ ID as subjects, *War Year* as a repeated measure, fixed effects for all variables, and random intercepts estimated for subjects with default covariance type (variance components). Model 1 features only *War Year* and model 2 adds the same controls as in the 2017–18 tests: time-invariant factors and covariates based on 2021 data (Ukrainian language use, region, age aggregated into three groups, gender, and education level) plus time-variant covariates (income level, loss, and stress).<sup>31</sup> Using the opportunity to analyze panel data, we estimate war effects on a broader range of attitudes related to democracy support than in 2017–18. First, we examine trust in key democratic institutions (media, parliament) and the leadership (presidency). Second, we assess support for Ukraine’s international (geopolitical) identity as a democracy with support for EU and NATO membership: while the former could be valued primarily as an economic union and the latter as a military alliance, democratic government is a core requirement for new members in both. Seeking membership in such organizations is a natural way for a democratizing state to “reinforce the commitment to democracy and provide an external anchor against retrogression to authoritarianism” (Huntington 1991, 87). We use only scale measures. Unlike binary measures they capture longitudinal shifts across response categories that otherwise would fall within either “0” or “1”—particularly from “rather important” to “very important” on *Democracy Importance* (55% shift) and *Free Speech Importance* (60% shift).

We find unequivocal support for H5. The coefficients (table 1) show *War Year* giving a statistically significant, strong, and robust boost to support for democracy: 12.5% on democracy and free speech importance, over 22% on trust in the media and parliament, 50% on trust in the president, and 16% and 20% on support for EU and NATO membership. The effects are nearly identical with or without control variables (cf., models 1 and 2) and all are highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Notably, respondents reporting personal war losses are significantly more, not less, likely to support democracy. It means rallying for democracy in Ukraine has been resilient in the face of extensive, devastating, and persistent hardship: close to 70% of respondents in June–July 2022 reported at least one form of war loss (losing or fleeing their homes, getting wounded, losing friends, or having family or friends displaced), a more than threefold increase from December 2021 among the same individuals. *Stress* has a statistically significant negative effect only on one democracy support indicator.

We see the war galvanizing democracy support both among previously less supportive groups (older respondents) and more supportive groups (the better educated, the economically better-off, residents of Ukraine's west and center in 2021). We also do not see regional polarization (no significant negative estimates for Ukraine's east). Robustness checks are not indicative of social desirability bias. Exclusive reliance on Ukrainian national news media—a proxy for less-than-sincere rallying (Hale 2021)—had inconsistent and weaker effects on democracy support indicators than *War Year*.<sup>32</sup> Other empirical data (Onuch and Hale 2022, chap. 7) characterizes the surge in support for democracy as predominantly endogenous and not top-down, reflecting Ukraine as “a country of 44 million Zelenskys,” a civic nation with spirited resilience and surging determination to join global democratic coalitions.

## Conclusions and Implications

Survey evidence from Ukraine, including the war-torn Donbas region and a panel survey with the same respondents shortly before and after Russia's invasion in February 2022, indicates that support for democracy in the face of war is in significant respects *geosocietal*—arising from mobilization of civic national identity in a democratizing state and in response to a geopolitical threat from authoritarian aggressors. Not only do the effects of these factors obtain in defiance of massive personal losses and traumas and across sociodemographic cleavages, but we also see how civic pride boosts democracy support more when the salience of external threat rises. Similar results for supporting free speech indicate that this boost reflects a shift in values rather than an instrumental endorsement.<sup>33</sup> This is more than an interesting scholarly outcome. Russia's daily mass bombardments, which have caused more destruction in Ukraine since February 2022 than in any other contemporaneous human conflict, show that Moscow remains set on crushing Ukraine's democratic resilience. This is why those normatively committed to democracy need to keep supporting Ukraine in its war against Russian aggression.

Our findings contribute to three strands in the literature. First, our evidence shows that war type matters: war violence affects not only social capital (Besley and Persson 2010; Grosjean 2014), but also polity preferences. Second, we demonstrate that wartime mobilization of national identity could rally support not only for incumbent leaders and institutions, but also for political systems, including, in our case, democracy. The findings support a recent argument that wartime societal mobilization represents not only a quest for security, but also for national honor (Feinstein 2022). This contributes to research showing that the “Zelensky effect” (Onuch and Hale 2022) was due less to the president of Ukraine's special powers to induce followership, and more to his acute sense

of long-evolving civic Ukrainian identity, exemplified by his asking the US president for “not a ride, but ammunition” to fight against Russia's full-scale invasion.

Third, we contribute to the second-image-reversed theory (Gourevitch 1978; Rogowski 1989; Zarakol 2013) by showing that geosocietal mobilization may bolster democracy legitimation above and beyond well-established domestic factors, such as economic development (Kitschelt 1992; Przeworski 1991), revenue mobilization (Skocpol et al. 2001; Tilly 1992), social structure (Moore 1966), institutional performance (Chu et al. 2008; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998), political culture (Almond and Verba 1965; Inglehart 1990), and communist legacies (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017), and regardless of international-level factors, such as the global balance of power between democracies and nondemocracies (Boix 2011; Gunitsky 2017) and the West's democratization efforts (Huntington 1991; Samuels 2023).

In terms of geosocietal mobilization's plausibility beyond present-day Ukraine, one can think of Soviet military interventions in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Poland (1980s) boosting popular support for liberalization; of the greater success of US democratization efforts during the Cold War in regions where the Soviet Union posed a stronger geopolitical challenge (Europe and East Asia) compared to Latin America, and more so to Africa, where the Soviet Union positioned itself as a geopolitical ally against Western neocolonialism (Huntington 1991); and of how China's growing military assertiveness may bolster support for democracy in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan.

Another way to probe external validity is to ask if geosocietal logic may work in reverse, undermining democracy. First, autocrats may frame democracy as a geopolitical threat. The Economist (2023) has attributed much of the autocratization trend that has “wiped out” 35 years of global democracy advances (Papada et al. 2023) to “paranoid nationalism”—to autocrats legitimating their rule by “vowing to defend people against confected threats” from abroad. Second, within consolidated democracies including the US, a diminution of the geopolitical threat posed by autocracies could contribute to domestic political polarization and authoritarian populism. Third, support for democracy may decline in states whose prospects of joining international democratic coalitions diminish, with Turkey and the EU a plausible illustration.

One specific suggestion for future research is to develop geopolitical threat and civic national identity indicators for the V-Dem dataset, with a focus on individual-level data. Related to that, extending longitudinal analysis is important, since our evidence is limited in time and more needs to be learned about how long geosocietal mobilization effects may last and how they may change as the war continues. Finally, future research can formulate and examine broader, policy-relevant questions on how to



balance domestic reforms with external support, including military and security assistance, as well as inclusion in international democratic alliances to win hearts and minds locally for enduring democratic resilience.

## Supplementary Materials

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592724000422>.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

- 1 The Donbas war refers to Ukraine's armed conflict with Russian and Russian-backed forces in Ukraine's Donbas region that began on April 12, 2014 and continued until February 24, 2022, when it was subsumed by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- 2 The Crimea exclusion effect after 2014 was insignificant; other surveys corroborated these trends. See appendix sections A12(v) and (vi).
- 3 Pemstein, Meserve, and Melton (2010), for example, identify 10 different scales.
- 4 Indicatively, Bauer and colleagues' (2016) meta-analysis of the impacts of war on sociopolitical attitudes captured only two studies out of 34 on exposure to interstate conflict, one of them a survey (on the effects of World War II after 65 years).
- 5 Pop-Eleches and Robertson (2018, 111) essentially define "a rallying-around-the-flag effect among Ukrainian citizens" in 2013–15 as "a substantial awakening of Ukrainian identities ... of a civic rather than ethnic nature," not as support for individual leadership.
- 6 Personal correspondence with an anonymized Kyiv resident, December 6, 2022.
- 7 Months of protests after the poisoning of Viktor Yushchenko, a candidate in the 2004 presidential election (whose backers wore orange), and mass electoral fraud by his rival, Viktor Yanukovich, which led to a fair revote and Yushchenko's win.
- 8 Response rates varied from 25% to 57% and the sampling error margin was about  $\pm 3.5\%$  for 50/50 response distribution. For more details on sampling, data collection, and ethnical practices, see appendix sections A10–A11.
- 9 ANONYMIZED03 in the appendix.
- 10 All polls complied with the US Institutional Review Board requirements for research with human subjects.
- 11 For more details, see appendix section A3.
- 12 For the distributional properties and wording of all survey questions, see appendix section A1.
- 13 Although support for democracy is high, distributional properties and our use of statistical procedures guard against significant distortion of results due to skewness (see appendix section A1[v]).
- 14 Coding neutral responses comprising about a third of the samples as "0" was substantively justified: when recoded into a separate dummy variable, they turned out to be significantly more common at 95% confidence interval among respondents in sociodemographic groups that viewed democracy as unimportant; this coding therefore partially controls for preference falsification, given that openly expressing a lack of support for democracy may be viewed as politically incorrect (see appendix section A9).
- 15 This question captured variation on the perceived origins and the course of the 2014 Donbas war, given that multiple actors were engaged, and Russia denied and obfuscated its involvement (Fischer 2019).
- 16 Cross-paneling with 23 other variables showed that coding "hard to say" as "0" was substantively justified.
- 17 For 2018 we used only the first item; the second was unavailable (see appendix section A12[i] for details).
- 18 Robustness tests with all three specifications had closely similar results (see appendix table 1.A8).
- 19 This way we avoided almost 100% of left- or right-skewed variables either in the Donbas or in Ukraine's west. We also did not include self-identification by nationality due to extreme skewness (over 90% picking Ukrainian) and based on input from supervisors of focus groups we conducted in May 2017 in Lviv, Odesa, Kyiv, and Donetsk Oblast (Druzhkivka and Mariupol) indicating it was substantively uninformative.
- 20 See appendix section A1.1 for scale specifications and A12(iii) for the list of provinces by region.
- 21 Generally, inflating the number of attitudinal control variables is not recommended as it complicates the interpretation of coefficients (Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018, 111).
- 22 We coded as "missing" six respondents who refused to answer the question and six who said they were combatants. Diagnostic tests showed no difference when this variable had the six combatants coded as "1."

- 23 Admittedly, self-reporting could have generated errors. However, since our surveys were explicitly depersonalized and questions were answered in writing without the interviewer present, respondents who reported having lived in the war zone had no plausible incentives to report or not report their experiences for extraneous reasons, such as putative economic gains or costs, publicity, social affirmation, etc.
- 24 For regression equations, the full effects definition, and regression tables, see appendix sections A2(i), A2(ii), A2(iv), and A5.
- 25 The full effect in logit is the average marginal effect of predictors scaled from 0 to 1.
- 26 For command syntax and estimation results for sureg and margins in Stata, see appendix sections A6–A7.
- 27 We excluded *Warzone* since only 2% reported it outside the Donbas in 2017 and 1.9% in 2018.
- 28 In robustness checks with multiple specifications of independent and control variables, 98.3% of 249 new effect sizes of *Pride* and *Russia* had the same significance levels and none were insignificant (see appendix section A8).
- 29 See, e.g., clinical studies (Cao et al. 2019) and psychology (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Mähönen, and Ketokivi 2012).
- 30 See appendix sections A8 and A12(iv).
- 31 *Rural* was not available for 2022. Education and income are partial proxies.
- 32 See appendix table 1.A8.
- 33 Other surveys corroborate this interpretation, notably a marked improvement in acceptance of the LGBTQ community in May 2022 compared to 2016 (Kravchuk, Zinchenkov, and Lyashchenko 2023, 13–15).

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