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# Framing war: The evolution of the social perception of war in Ukraine

## *Introduction*

The study of war perception in the social sciences has evolved significantly, integrating insights from sociology, political science, psychology, media studies, and history. Researchers examine how societies understand, react to, and internalize war experiences, which are shaped by historical memory, media narratives, national identity, and political discourse. However, war perception is not static; it fluctuates over time in response to battlefield developments, government policies, external influences, and public expectations. The way societies perceive war influences national resilience, public mobilization, the sustainability of military efforts, and ultimately, the possibilities for conflict resolution or prolonged attrition.

Despite extensive research on war and society, less attention has been paid to the evolution of war perception in the midst of an ongoing, high-intensity war like the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. This gap is particularly relevant in the case of Ukraine, where public attitudes have undergone rapid and complex shifts in response to the realities of full-scale invasion, military counteroffensives, prolonged attritional warfare, and evolving international support. The war has not only transformed Ukraine's political and military strategies but has also deeply affected societal consciousness, national identity, and civic engagement.

To analyze this fluid and evolving perception, a structured periodization is essential. Breaking down the evolution of war perception into distinct phases allows for a deeper understanding of the factors driving changes in public sentiment, from initial shock and mass mobilization to strategic endurance and the routinization of emergency conditions. This approach helps identify patterns in how societies adapt to protracted

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conflicts, how resilience is maintained or eroded, and how expectations regarding victory, compromise, and long-term security evolve.

Understanding these dynamics is critical, not only for Ukraine but for broader theories of war perception and societal responses to conflict. Historical cases of long wars — from the trench warfare of World War I to Cold War-era proxy conflicts — offer valuable points of comparison, yet Ukraine's case presents unique features, particularly in its digital-era information environment, the scale of civic resistance, and its geopolitical significance.

This article contributes to the scholarly discussion by addressing the following key questions:

- How has the perception of war evolved in Ukrainian society from 2022 to 2024?
- What phases can be identified in the evolution of Ukraine's war perception, and what are their defining characteristics?
- To what extent do Ukraine's war perceptions align with or differ from historical cases of defensive wars?
- What insights does Ukraine's case offer for broader theories of war perception in prolonged conflicts?

By answering these questions, this study not only deepens our understanding of war perception in Ukraine but also offers a framework for analyzing how societies navigate the psychological, political, and cultural dimensions of war over time.

### *Theoretical foundations of war perception study*

Our review briefly explores the state of the art in social science research on war perception, highlighting key theoretical contributions, empirical insights, and emerging trends that merit further exploration. It also critically examines how modern conflicts, including the ongoing war in Ukraine, challenge existing theoretical paradigms and demand new frameworks for understanding war's impact on societies.

Social perception of war, as first conceptualized by Jerome Bruner and Renato Tagiuri (Bruner & Tagiuri, 1959), refers to the process by which individuals interpret and make sense of social stimuli — ranging from other people to societal phenomena. Unlike the perception of inanimate objects, social perception is a socially constructed phenomena which is inherently dynamic and reciprocal. It is shaped by past experiences, cultural narratives, political discourse, emotional states, media representation, and the individual's active engagement with their social environment. Since Bruner's seminal work on social perception, scholars have emphasized that how individuals interpret war is deeply embedded in social structures and historical consciousness.

Later, Alexander Wendt (Wendt, 1999) argued in his constructivist approach to international relations that perceptions of war depend on social interactions and historical narratives that define friend-enemy relations, the justifications for war, and the moral obligations of societies. This process is further complicated in times of conflict, where perceptions are not only about interpreting events but also about positioning oneself within the moral and political narratives of war (Jasper, 1997). Similarly, the Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) highlight that risk perception in war differs depending on whether individuals perceive themselves as

defending the status quo or seeking to alter it. Expending these ideas, Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how in-group and out-group biases intensify during conflicts, reinforcing nationalistic sentiments. In the Ukrainian context, the social perception of war has been deeply influenced by historical experiences of foreign domination, cultural suppression, and previous conflicts, notably the Soviet era's repression and the Holodomor famine (Applebaum, 2017).

These theories highlight a crucial point: war is not only fought on battlefields but also in the minds of those who must endure or justify it.

The sociology of war perception expands this understanding by looking at the structural, cultural, and agentic dimensions of how societies engage with war. Siniĵa Maleĵeviĵ (Maleĵeviĵ, 2010; p. 2017) argues that war perception is shaped by structural processes such as state propaganda, ideological militarization, and institutionalized violence. His research underscores the importance of "ideological militarization", where war becomes a normalized part of societal discourse, even in peacetime. Jeffrey C. Alexander (Alexander, 2004) brings in the concept of cultural trauma, showing how war can reshape national identities, leaving lasting imprints on societies. For instance, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 fundamentally transformed public narratives about security, heroism, and national identity. Mary Kaldor's "New Wars" theory (Kaldor, 2013) further highlights the shift in war perception due to asymmetrical warfare, hybrid threats, and the erosion of traditional battlefield distinctions. Unlike conventional wars, modern conflicts are fought not just through military engagements but also through economic pressure, cyber warfare, and disinformation campaigns, fundamentally altering how societies perceive war's legitimacy and outcomes.

A crucial factor shaping public perception of war is undoubtedly the war's nature and duration. The character of warfare — whether it is a short, decisive conflict or a prolonged attritional struggle whether it is defensive or offensive war, anti-imperial \ postcolonial — significantly influences societal resilience, mobilization, and expectations for victory or resolution (Maleĵeviĵ, 2010: p. 2017; Kaldor, 2013; Hutchinson, 2020).

Today, there is no doubt that media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of war. Noelle-Neumann's "Spiral of Silence" theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) suggests that individuals conform to dominant media narratives on war, suppressing dissenting opinions. The Framing theory (Entman, 1993) further explains how media strategically frames war events to create specific interpretations, often justifying or opposing military actions. In furtherance of these ideas, Chouliaraki (Chouliaraki, 2006) explores "the spectacle of war", where modern conflicts are mediated through sensationalized images, influencing emotions rather than rational deliberations. The "CNN Effect" (Robinson, 2002) argues that real-time media coverage pressures governments to act swiftly, often shaping foreign policy decisions.

Thus, a comprehensive understanding of how society perceives war must consider both *the rational and emotional components* of social perception. Public opinion, often seen as a rational aggregate of individual attitudes, is influenced by internalized values and life experiences. In contrast, public sentiment — defined as the emotional climate within a society — plays a crucial role in shaping collective reactions to war. As empirically proved by Ukrainian researchers (Dembitskyi et al., 2024), sentiments, as

long-term emotional states influenced by numerous wartime stressors, create an underlying emotional background that colors the perception of social realities. They reflect the general state of societal well-being and acceptance or rejection of prevailing circumstances. Social well-being serves as an indicator of how people relate to societal transitions, acting as a barometer for societal resilience and adaptive capacity during war. In wartime, these sentiments become amplified, influencing not only individual psychological responses but also collective actions such as mobilization, resistance, and civic engagement.

So, social perception in the context of war is mediated through various psychological and sociological mechanisms, including stereotyping, identification, reflection, empathy, and causal attribution. Stereotyping, for example, becomes more pronounced during conflicts, as societies simplify complex realities into binary categories of “us” versus “them.” This process is evident in the Ukrainian context, where the portrayal of Russian aggression has reinforced national identity and solidarity (Golovakha et al., 2022; Onuch & Sasse, 2022; Stepanenko, 2022). Empathy and identification also play significant roles. The ability to empathize with fellow citizens affected by war fosters a sense of collective responsibility, social and political unity (Golovakha, 2022). This emotional connection is crucial for sustaining long-term resistance and resilience. Reflection and causal attribution, on the other hand, involve the critical assessment of the causes and consequences of war, shaping how societies understand their role in the conflict and their expectations for the future.

Empirical studies on public opinion towards war have shown significant variations based on historical experiences, national identity, and political ideologies. So, the Gallup and Pew Research Centre surveys indicate that support for war declines over time as casualties rise and war fatigue sets in (Baum & Potter, 2008). Studies on the Vietnam war (Mueller, 1973) and Iraq war (Berinsky, 2009) demonstrate how early optimism gives way to disillusionment, with media exposure playing a decisive role. Post-9/11 studies (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003) found that the “rally-around-the-flag” effect boosts war support temporarily but diminishes when conflicts become prolonged in Afghanistan and Iraq. Other studies on civil-military relations (Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; etc.) show that casualty sensitivity influenced war perceptions, with high troop losses eroding support. The framing of terrorism (Campbell, 2017) shaped the perception of an endless war, similar to Russia’s portrayal of Ukraine as a “perpetual conflict.”

Empirical studies also highlight those defensive, just wars generate high national unity and civic mobilization, while offensive wars (e.g., U.S. intervention in Iraq) face greater public skepticism (Walzer, 1977). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrates how long-term exposure to war normalizes militarization, shaping public discourse on security threats (Bar-Tal et al., 2007). During the Russo-Georgian war (2008), Georgian public initially viewed war as a fight for sovereignty, but prolonged Russian occupation led to war fatigue and acceptance of frozen conflict (Chincharadze & Goodson, 2024). Similar patterns may emerge in Ukraine’s occupied territories.

Studies on post-war Germany, Japan, and the Balkans contributed to revealing that collective memory affects future war perceptions. In particular, Germany’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“Reconciliation with the past”) policies led to pacifist attitudes (Herf, 1997). In the same time, Japan’s post-WWII pacifism (Dower, 1999)

contrasts with Russia's militarization of WWII memory (Kangaspuro et al., 2017), reinforcing expansionist narratives. And the post-Yugoslav war studies (Gallagher, 2003) highlight competing war narratives, fueling nationalist myths.

Thus, the social sciences have provided valuable insights into war perception, highlighting its psychological, media-driven, temporal and historical dimensions. Key trends include at least the following:

- the shifting nature of war support over time (initial mobilization → adaptation → war fatigue);
- the influence of media framing on war legitimacy;
- the role of collective memory in shaping war narratives;
- the difference between defensive and offensive war perceptions.

Against this backdrop, this study explores how Ukrainian society's perception of war has evolved over time, situating it within broader comparative and theoretical frameworks.

### *Methodology and data sources*

This study employs a multi-dimensional analytical framework to examine the evolution of war perception in Ukrainian society during 2022–2024. Given that war perception is a complex and dynamic social phenomenon, shaped by historical legacies, political contexts, and psychological processes, our approach integrates structural, cultural, and agentic dimensions of perception within a temporally structured analysis.

To systematically analyze shifts in public perception, we define four interrelated parameters that capture both the rational and affective components of societal attitudes toward war:

- *Timeframe* — aligned with the phases of military conflict and battlefield dynamics, reflecting how key moments in the war (e.g., initial invasion, counteroffensives, stalemates) influence societal attitudes.
- *Primary emotions* — capturing dominant affective responses at different stages of the war (e.g., shock, resilience, fatigue), as emotional states strongly correlate with decision-making, mobilization, and political engagement.
- *Public sentiment* — referring to collective societal moods that shape discourses on war objectives, expected outcomes, and tolerance for prolonged conflict. This includes trust in institutions, expectations of victory or compromise, and levels of war-weariness.
- *Key developments* (manifestations of agency) — examining how various actors (civil society, state institutions, media, international allies) shape and respond to war perception through mobilization efforts, resilience-building strategies, and strategic narratives.

This study adopts a confirmatory approach, relying on triangulated empirical data from multiple sociological research institutions and public opinion surveys conducted during the war. The primary data sources include:

- The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) — monitoring surveys on war attitudes, national identity shifts, and public trust in institutions;

- Sociological Group “Rating” — real-time polling on public sentiment, emotional states, and policy preferences related to the war;
- The Razumkov Centre — in-depth sociopolitical analysis of war-related transformations in Ukrainian society;
- Info Sapiens — quantitative assessments of resilience, migration, and public engagement trends;
- Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine — monitoring studies on war’s impact on social cohesion, well-being and civic participation.

By integrating these diverse empirical datasets, we aim to validate observed trends and account for potential biases in single-source studies.

While the primary focus remains on Ukraine, this study engages in selective comparative analysis with other historical cases of defensive wars. Rather than constructing a systematic cross-case study, contextual references to conflicts such as World War II, the Vietnam war, and the Yugoslav wars help illustrate both the universal and distinctive aspects of Ukrainian war perception. By situating Ukraine’s case within broader theoretical debates, this research enhances our understanding of how societies perceive, endure, and narrate defensive wars over time.

This study more or less contributes to three key methodological advancements in the study of war perception:

- Integrating structural and agency-based perspectives — bridging macro-level trends (institutional narratives, state responses) with micro-level experiences (individual emotions, community resilience);
- Incorporating temporal dynamics — recognizing that war perception is not static but evolves in response to battlefield developments, policy decisions, and shifts in public morale;
- Applying interdisciplinary methodologies — combining sociological surveys, political and historical analysis to provide a holistic understanding of wartime social transformations.

Through this multi-layered approach, the study not only maps the evolution of war perception in Ukraine but also offers broader insights into how societies respond to protracted existential conflicts.

### ***The shifting perceptions of war: from shock to endurance***

The periodization of the war is generally based on shifts in military strategy, battlefield dynamics, territorial control throughout the conflict, and the broader geopolitical and societal transformations they trigger (Freedman, 2022; etc.). The delineated phases provide a structured understanding of the war’s progression, reflecting the evolving strategies and resilience of the involved forces. Scholars and military analysts (ISW, 2025; ICG, 2025) have delineated several key phases of the current full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, which began on February 24, 2022, namely:

- 1) Initial invasion and rapid advance (February – March 2022), when Russia launched a comprehensive invasion targeting multiple fronts, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, and southern regions. The objective was a swift overthrow of the Ukrainian government. However, logistical challenges and robust Ukrainian resistance impeded these plans.

- 2) Stalemate and attrition warfare (April – August 2022), when following the initial setbacks, Russian forces regrouped, focusing on the Donbas region. This period was characterized by intense artillery duels and incremental territorial changes, leading to a protracted stalemate.
- 3) Ukrainian counteroffensives (September – November 2022): Ukrainian forces initiated counteroffensives, notably reclaiming territories in Kharkiv and Kherson regions. These operations demonstrated Ukraine's growing operational capabilities and strategic acumen.
- 4) Winter stalemate and attrition (December 2022 – February 2023), when the war entered a phase of reduced mobility due to harsh winter conditions, with both sides engaging in attritional warfare, leading to significant casualties without substantial territorial shifts.
- 5) Renewed Russian offensives and Ukrainian defense (March – June 2023): Russia launched renewed offensives in eastern Ukraine, achieving limited gains at high costs. Ukrainian defenses remained resilient, preventing significant Russian breakthroughs.
- 6) Ukrainian counteroffensive and stalemate (July 2023 – March 2025 at least), when Ukraine conducted a counteroffensive in June 2023, facing stiff Russian defenses and limited progress. The war has since settled into a stalemate, with ongoing attrition and minor territorial changes.

The perception of war evolves over time as society experience different phases of war. This temporal dimension is critical for understanding how Ukrainians' views of the war have shifted from 2014 to the present.

Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, societal perceptions of national security and external threats evolved amidst fluctuating geopolitical orientations. The Euromaidan Revolution of 2013–2014 marked a pivotal shift in public consciousness, as Ukrainians mobilized in masse to resist authoritarianism and corruption. Despite this awakening, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following up hybrid war in Donbas were initially perceived by many as a localized, hybrid war, *distant* from their immediate realities. The war in Donbas was often seen as a regional issue, confined to the eastern territories and disconnected from the everyday lives of those in central and western Ukraine. This perception was reinforced by the hybrid nature of the conflict, characterized by irregular warfare, covert operations, and information warfare — a form of conflict that blurred the lines between peace and war (Kaldor, 2013). The term “ATO” (Anti-Terrorist Operation) used by the Ukrainian government downplayed the scale and implications of the conflict, contributing to a sense of detachment among the broader populace. While the annexation of Crimea was widely condemned, the gradual nature of the war in Donbas did not immediately galvanize national resistance.

Despite the ongoing conflict in Donbas, many Ukrainians underestimated the likelihood of a full-scale Russian invasion. Early attitudes towards the threat of a larger-scale Russian invasion were marked by a mix of skepticism and unpreparedness, reflecting a fragmented national security consciousness (Reznik, 2023). Surveys conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS, 2021) in late 2021 revealed a divided public: approximately 49% of respondents believed the threat of invasion was real, while 41% dismissed it as unlikely (KIIS, 2021). This ambivalence

reflected a broader societal reluctance to accept the possibility of widespread war, rooted in a belief that such aggression would be irrational and counterproductive for Russia.

The persistence of Soviet-era narratives, emphasizing historical and cultural ties between Ukrainians and Russians, further complicated threat perceptions. Despite growing support for European integration and NATO membership, a significant portion of the population maintained ambivalent views about Russia's intentions. This cognitive dissonance hindered comprehensive national preparedness, leaving society vulnerable to the psychological shock of the invasion.

The gradual erosion of trust in Russia post-2014 was accompanied by incremental shifts in Ukraine's national security discourse. The Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) fostered a sense of civic empowerment, with volunteer battalions and civil society organizations playing critical roles in supporting the military effort in Donbas. However, institutional reforms and military modernization were slow to materialize, constrained by political instability and economic challenges.

By early 2022, there was a growing awareness of Ukraine's geopolitical vulnerability, but this was often overshadowed by economic concerns and political disillusionment. Public confidence in the government's ability to manage national security was limited — a December 2021 KIIS survey indicated that 57.8% of respondents viewed diplomatic and defense efforts as insufficient. This survey revealed a divided public: approximately 49% of respondents believed the threat of invasion was real, while 41% dismissed it as unlikely. Additionally, a December 2021 KIIS poll found that 50.2% of Ukrainians expressed willingness to resist Russian aggression, with 33.3% prepared to do so with arms (KIIS, 2021). This skepticism, combined with a fragmented media landscape and mixed messaging from political leaders, contributed to a lack of cohesive national preparedness.

The Russian full-scale invasion in late February 2022 came as a profound shock to Ukrainian society, triggering fear, uncertainty, and a sudden fight-or-flight response. The full-scale invasion brought war directly into the homes of Ukrainians, dramatically reshaping their perception of the conflict. The course of the war and its protracted nature have served as key triggers for the evolution of this perception.

Empirical research on war perception in different war-society cases demonstrates that societal attitudes do not remain static; they evolve through distinct phases. Drawing on historical and contemporary conflicts, researchers (Mueller, 1973; Kaldor, 2013; Malešević, 2021; etc.) have identified several key shifts in how societies internalize war. While various analytical frameworks exist, Understanding the evolution of social perceptions during the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war involves analyzing how Ukrainian society's attitudes and beliefs have shifted in response to the war's progression. While comprehensive academic periodization is still emerging, current analyses suggest five key phases, based on the criteria of the war's dynamics, intensity, and expectations manifested in their rational and emotional components. This perspective significantly overlaps with the distinctions between war phases presented by Yevhen Golovakha and Serhii Dembitskyi (Golovakha et al., 2022: p. 20). The Table presents an evolving social perception of war, capturing shifts in emotional states, public engagement, and strategic outlooks over time.

Table

## Phases of the perception of full-scale war by Ukrainian society

Phase	Timeframe	Primary emotions	Key developments	Public sentiment
1	2	3	4	5
<b>1. Initial phase of shock and immediate mobilization</b>	February — Spring 2022	Fear, uncertainty, anger	Mass realization of invasion, rapid societal mobilization, surge in volunteer initiatives and civic defense networks	Belief in swift victory and effectiveness of international support
<b>2. Shock euphoria and psychological adaptation</b>	Summer — Autumn 2022	Endurance, unity, confidence in AFU	Growing war fatigue but sustained civic engagement	Rising trust in state institutions, especially the military and President
<b>3. Moderate optimism, realization of war's prolonged nature</b>	Winter 2022 — Spring 2023	Realism, resilience, lowered expectations for quick victory	Acceptance of war as a long-term phenomenon, recognition of economic and social stability	National consensus on the impossibility of compromise with the aggressor
<b>4. Military fatigue and reflections on the future</b>	Summer — Autumn 2023	Exhaustion, critical reassessment, desire for stability	Stagnation on the front influencing public opinion	Discussions on military strategy, mobilization, social policies, and Ukraine's political future
<b>5. Routinization of emergency and long-term resistance strategy</b>	Late 2023 — Spring 2025	Overstrain, yet strategic perseverance	War perceived as the «new normal»	Reevaluation of the role of the West, the US, the EU, consideration of war termination scenarios

A closer examination of these phases will provide deeper insights into their distinct characteristics and implications.

**Phase 1: Initial shock and rallying effect (February 24 — Spring, 2022).**

In the first days, millions fled or sheltered from bombardment, yet amid the chaos a remarkable resolve emerged. Ukrainians from all walks of life rushed to join the defense: long lines formed at recruitment offices, volunteer battalions and local militias sprang up overnight, and civilians organized mass donations of supplies. Surveys in April 2022 showed 70% of Ukrainians were ready to take up arms and 73% believed in fighting until complete victory (Vološevych, 2022). This “*rally-round-the-flag*” effect (Onuch & Sasse, 2022; Rating, 2023a; Kutsenko, 2025b) was evident in soaring public trust in the leadership — President Zelensky’s approval spiked to around 90% in March 2022 (KIIS, 2025) — and an overarching national unity where personal survival became entwined with defending the country’s existence.

Psychologically, the invasion reframed Ukrainians' worldviews overnight. War was no longer a *distant concern* but an immediate existential threat, and this clarity of purpose galvanized a powerful collective identity. Initial terror and confusion quickly gave way to anger, patriotism, and an almost euphoric unity in resistance (Golovakha, 2022; Kuzio, 2022; Golovakha et al., 2023; KIIS, 2024). Even formerly ambivalent or Russian-leaning citizens overwhelmingly rejected the invader. By summer 2022, only 3% of Ukrainians still held positive views of Russia, compared to 34% before the war, reflecting a dramatic hardening of national sentiment (Hrushetskyi, 2022). Many who had once felt linguistic or regional divides were now united under the blue-and-yellow flag, as the narrative of a fight for national survival took root. Notably, early expectations leaned toward swift victory — in April 2022, 82% expected the war to end by the end of the year, while a mere 4% thought it would “last for years” (Hrushetskyi, 2022). This optimism, born of adrenaline and the unexpected success in halting the Russian onslaught near Kyiv, fueled the mass mobilization but also underestimated the protracted struggle ahead.

Historical parallels underscore this phase of shock and mobilization. Britain's reaction in 1940 after the fall of France and the onset of the Blitz saw similar scenes of fear and steely defiance — the so-called “*Blitz spirit*” where ordinary Britons vowed to “keep calm and carry on” despite the nightly bombings (Mackay, 1998; Bent, 2025). Likewise, the Soviet Union's response in 1941 to Hitler's surprise invasion was initially chaotic panic followed by total mobilization; on June 29, 1941, Soviet authorities even issued orders to *shoot spreaders of panic* as they strove to rapidly stiffen public resolve amidst the shock (Glantz & House, 2015). Just as British volunteers readied for home defense and Soviet citizens rallied to the Red Army after the surprise attacks, Ukrainians in early 2022 exhibited a fierce upsurge of patriotic commitment. The immediacy of the threat forged a near-unanimous “*we shall fight on*” mentality, recalling how 97% of Americans approved going to war in the days after Pearl Harbor (Saad, 2016). In all cases, an initial period of dread and uncertainty gave way to an intense surge of unity and mobilization, with society convinced that through collective effort a swift victory or salvation was attainable. The “rally-around-the-flag” effect often boosts government approval.

**Phase 2.** The “*Shock Euphoria*” and counteroffensive period (summer — autumn 2022) — characterized by Ukraine's first major successful operations, most notably in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions, alongside increasing Western military assistance. By the summer of 2022, the initial shock had evolved into a gritty euphoria and determined endurance (Golovakha et al., 2022; Dembitskyi, 2023; Kostenko & Skokova, 2023). Having survived the war's first months and even won significant battles (like defending Kyiv and expelling Russian troops from northern Ukraine), society settled into a wartime rhythm. There was a palpable *psychological adaptation*: air-raid sirens, curfews, and checkpoints became part of daily life rather than sources of panic. Many displaced citizens returned home as soon as areas were secured — as early as April, millions of Ukrainians who had fled were already coming back to their cities and villages (Forced displacement, 2022), a testament to the population's resilience and attachment to their land. Throughout summer and fall, Ukrainians displayed remarkable endurance under hardship, from volunteering long hours to

rationing fuel and groceries, bolstered by the belief that every sacrifice counted toward eventual victory. War fatigue began to quietly surface — the adrenaline of February gave way to the grind of a long fight — yet morale remained high overall. Social cohesion and solidarity were actively maintained through cultural campaigns, community support for frontline regions, and symbols of unity. Notably, public trust in institutions and the war effort stayed very strong. For example, confidence in the Armed Forces and in President Zelensky remained at unprecedented levels: over 80–90% approval through late 2022 (Balakireva & Dmytruk, 2022; Rating, 2023a; Info Sapiens, 2024; KIIS, 2025), reflecting a continued rally effect and faith in the leadership's course.

This period also saw war weariness begin to flicker at the edges of society. By autumn, the toll of continuous fighting and civilian losses was being felt, and a cautious realism set in that the war would not end as quickly as hoped. Still, a *pragmatic optimism* prevailed. Communities adapted — schools reopened in safer areas, businesses found ways to operate during air alerts, and people learned to cope with stress and trauma via humor, routine, and mutual support. Sociological surveys noted a slight uptick in those reporting exhaustion or anxiety, but also a robust sense of purpose that counteracted defeatism. Importantly, national unity remained intact: regardless of regional or linguistic background, an overwhelming majority of Ukrainians shared the goal of defending the country. An August 2022 polls showed 81% of Ukrainians had a negative view of Russians (up from 41% pre-invasion), illustrating how completely the invader had been recast as a national nemesis (Rating, 2022). The shared hardship and successful Ukrainian counteroffensives (such as the liberation of Kharkiv region in September) fueled a cautious euphoria — a sense that “*we can do this*” — even as casualties mounted. As one analytical piece observed, Ukraine's society by late 2022 was “*defiant, not ready to agree to a premature peace*”, willing to endure more if it meant a real victory (Vološevych, 2022; Kostenko & Skokova, 2023; Khelashvili et al., 2024).

Analogies from history can be drawn to this period of steadied resolve after the initial shock. The U.S. public after Pearl Harbor underwent a similar transition: once the shock of the attack passed, Americans in 1942 settled into sustained war footing with high morale, unified war messaging, and broad faith in eventual victory. Gallup polls from early 1942 showed near-total support for the war and a recognition that it would be a difficult fight (Saad, 2016). Ukrainians' unity and willingness to persevere mirrored that post-Pearl Harbor commitment, with society “all in” on the war effort and showing patience for a long haul. As war drags on, societies undergo either deeper militarization or war fatigue. Kaldor (Kaldor, 2013) and Malešević (Malešević, 2021) describe how nations either adapt to war as a long-term reality or begin questioning its sustainability. In Ukraine's case, the successful counterattacks in late 2022 served a comparable morale function — they reassured the public that unity and endurance were yielding results, even as the war stretched on. Thus, much like societies in WWII that learned to endure blitzes and invasions with stoic determination, Ukrainians by autumn 2022 had transitioned from initial shock to a phase of collective resolve, adaptive resilience, and guarded optimism, despite the war fatigue quietly growing under the surface.

**Phase 3: Moderate optimism & realization of a prolonged war (winter 2022 — spring 2023)** — defined by high-intensity battles such as Bakhmut, large-scale artillery engagements, and trench warfare, leading to a shift toward long-term endurance strategies (Galeotti, 2023). As the first war winter set in (late 2022 to early 2023), Ukrainians' perspective on the war evolved into one of *resilient yet sober optimism*. The heady euphoria of earlier victories was tempered by the grim reality of a long, attritional struggle ahead (Dembitskyi et al., 2024; 2025; Harmash & Balmforth, 2023). The population remained confident in ultimate victory — surveys throughout this period continued to find an overwhelming majority (often 85–90%) believing that Ukraine *will win the war* — but expectations for *when* victory would come grew more restrained (Summary, 2023; Info Sapiens, 2024; Rating, 2023a). The brutal winter months, marked by Russian missile attacks on infrastructure that caused widespread blackouts and cold, tested the nation's spirit. Ukrainians met these challenges with creativity and grit: cities set up “invincibility points” with heat and power for citizens, neighbors pooled resources to get through energy shortages, and repair crews worked round-the-clock to keep utilities running. Such societal resilience became a point of pride (Rating, 2023a; Slyusarevskyi & Chunikhina, 2024; Khelashvili, 2024; Kutsenko, 2025a). What's more, as the war persisted, Ukrainians increasingly embraced a distinct national identity separate from Russian influence (KIIS, 2024; Golovakha et al., 2023). This period saw heightened valorization of Ukrainian history and a rejection of Soviet-era narratives. For example, in 2023, 92% of Ukrainians viewed the Holodomor — a devastating famine in the 1930s — as an act of genocide, indicating a strong collective memory shaping current perceptions (Rating, 2023b).

At the same time, there was a dawning acceptance among the public that the war would not end quickly — hopes for a definitive triumph by spring 2023 began to fade. Polls captured this shift: whereas the vast majority had expected a resolution within 2022, by early 2023 increasing numbers of Ukrainians acknowledged the fight could last “*for years*” (Razumkov Centre, 2023; Rating, 2023c). The national conversation adjusted accordingly, with more emphasis on stamina, war economy measures, and caring for veterans and the displaced over the long term. The psychological trajectory here was one of overcoming initial illusions and mentally preparing for a protracted ordeal. People talked of “living in two realities” — planning their lives (jobs, education, family) as if the war might drag on, yet still nurturing hope that perhaps with one or two more offensives the tide could decisively turn in Ukraine's favor.

During this phase, expectations were recalibrated but resolve never crumbled. Military successes like the liberation of Kherson in November 2022 had bolstered optimism, yet by spring 2023 the front lines had largely stagnated during winter, and Russia showed no signs of capitulation. Ukrainians mostly interpreted this not as a failure, but as confirmation that they were in a marathon, not a sprint (Khelashvili et al., 2024). Government and media messaging reinforced a narrative of patient determination — the idea that “*however long it takes, we will keep fighting*” — and society largely embraced it. War fatigue was certainly more pronounced by now (families were separated for many months, some communities had suffered repeated shelling, and the economic strain was growing), but it manifested in a grim resolve rather than despair. Sociologists noted that while anxiety and exhaustion were

common, fatalism was not: most Ukrainians still categorically rejected conceding defeat or territory. Interestingly, support for “continuing the fight until victory” remained high but showed a slight dip compared to 2022 (Dembitskyi, 2023; Dembitskyi et al., 2024). One study found that whereas 73% of Ukrainians in 2022 insisted on fighting until winning, by mid-2023 that number had fallen to around 63%, with a modest rise in those favoring exploring a negotiated peace (Rating, 2023c; Summary, 2023; National Institute, 2024; Razumkov Centre, 2024; Vigers, 2024). This indicates that a segment of society, while not losing hope, began contemplating that the *path* to victory might be more complex and could eventually involve diplomacy or compromises. Overall, however, the national mood in early 2023 can be characterized as cautiously optimistic and steadfast. Ukraine had withstood the worst Russia could throw in winter, and as spring arrived with promises of new Western weapons and offensives, public morale picked up slightly — tempered by the lessons of the past year that over-optimism can lead to disappointment. A *new kind of wartime normalcy* set in: people married, babies were born, students graduated — life went on under the shadow of war, with citizens balancing hope for peace with preparation for a prolonged fight.

Historical precedent for this arc from initial optimism to protracted engagement is exemplified by the United States’ experience in the Vietnam War. In the mid-1960s, Americans largely supported the war effort with the expectation that superior power would secure a quick victory. However, as the conflict dragged on beyond predictions — and especially after events like the protracted fighting of 1966–1967 and the Tet Offensive in 1968 — public sentiment shifted from confident to war-weary (Hammond, 1998). What started with broad optimism devolved into an acceptance of a grueling, indeterminate struggle and growing doubts about easy success. Ukraine’s situation in early 2023 echoes this pattern: the early war optimism (buoyed by surprising wins in 2022) transitioned into a sober recognition that there would be no quick triumph, much as Americans realized Vietnam would not be a swift win. Yet an important distinction is that Ukrainians did not (and have not) turned against the war itself — unlike the U.S. public eventually did with Vietnam — because for Ukraine this war remained existential. Ukrainians’ morale in winter 2022–23 was bolstered by their own earlier successes and by international support, even as they steeled themselves for a prolonged campaign. In essence, this phase saw war perceptions mature — initial naïveté fell away, replaced by a hardened, realistic patriotism that combined confidence with patience.

**Phase 4: Military fatigue and reflections on the future (summer — autumn 2023)** — marked by Ukraine’s attempt to break Russian defensive lines, slower-than-expected progress, and growing war fatigue among both populations and international partners (Gady & Kofman, 2024; Kofman et al., 2024). By the summer and autumn of 2023, signs of exhaustion — both at the front and on the home front — became increasingly visible in Ukrainian society. The much-anticipated summer counteroffensive of 2023, while making some progress, did not yield the dramatic breakthroughs many had hoped for. Intense fighting ground on in eastern and southern Ukraine with only gradual gains. This *stalemate* or slow *war of attrition* began to weigh down the public’s spirits. After roughly a year and a half of full-scale war, war-weariness set in more

deeply: families coped with the long absence of mobilized loved ones, daily life was burdened by economic hardship and constant air-raid alerts, and the initial unity was tested by natural frustrations. Psychologically, a degree of numbness mixed with frustration emerged (Golovakha & Dembitskyi, 2024; Dembitskyi et al., 2024). People continued to support the troops unwaveringly, but conversations increasingly acknowledged the heavy toll and asked difficult questions about the future. Topics that were once avoided — such as “*How long can we keep doing this?*” or “*What if victory takes many more years?*” — became common in private discourse. At the national level, there was critical reassessment of strategies: debate sharpened about how to break the stalemate on the battlefield and what end-state was realistic. In particular, these debates are reflected in numerous surveys and publications (Rating, 2024; National Institute, 2024; Razumkov Centre, 2024; Haller, 2024; Gady & Kofman, 2024; Onuch et al., 2025; etc.). Some strategists and opposition voices began suggesting that Ukraine might need to adjust its military approach or prioritize certain fronts, while others insisted that only total victory (including reclaiming Crimea) would justify the sacrifices already made. This healthy debate signaled a maturing war discourse, but it also reflected the wear-and-tear of prolonged conflict on society’s psyche.

Tangible indicators of military and societal fatigue emerged during this phase. Recruitment, which had been enthusiastic in 2022, became more challenging by late 2023 — the initial pools of volunteers were largely exhausted and authorities increasingly had to rely on regular drafts. A poignant example: whereas in March 2022 draft offices saw crowds of eager volunteers, by late 2023 those crowds had thinned to a trickle (Antipovich, 2024; Harmash & Balmforth, 2023). Frontline soldiers faced their second winter in trenches, and petitions from military families began to appear, pleading for rotation policies to allow long-serving troops some relief. Several electronic petitions on the Official Internet Representation of the President of Ukraine, signed each by over 25,000 Ukrainians, called for setting clear limits on service length, capturing a growing sentiment that “*we want Ukraine to win, but not solely through the sacrifice of the same people over and over*” (<https://petition.president.gov.ua/?status=processed>). Small-scale protests even occurred in Kyiv (dozens of people gathering despite martial law) urging the government to consider the strain on soldiers. Such public expressions of fatigue would have been unthinkable a year earlier when war fever was at its height (Harmash & Balmforth, 2023). Now, however, they pointed to the reality that the society cannot remain on extreme emergency footing indefinitely without adjustments. Still, it’s crucial to note that these were not anti-war protests in the traditional sense — they were pleas to manage the war better for the sake of those fighting it, indicating continued resolve but also genuine exhaustion. On the home front, war fatigue manifested in other ways: opinion polls in late 2023 recorded a softening in the once rock-solid confidence in leadership. Trust in President Zelensky and the government, while still a majority, dipped from its wartime peak (for instance, Zelensky’s trust rating fell from 84% in Dec 2022 to about 62% by Dec 2023 (KIIS, 2025; Rating, 2024). This decline doesn’t signal a loss of faith in the cause, but rather public discontent with war-related hardships and perhaps impatience for more decisive results. By autumn 2023, about half of Ukrainians still favored pressing the fight unconditionally, while the other half began to entertain prospects of *some form of*

*peace negotiation* in the future if the stalemate (Rating, 2024; National Institute, 2024; Dembitskyi et al., 2025; Golovakha, 2024; Onuch et al., 2025). Society had not lost its will to fight — far from it — but a collective fatigue and longing for an eventual conclusion was undeniably growing.

The situation Ukraine faced in 2023 has strong echoes in the stalemate on the Western Front during World War I. By 1916–1917, European societies embroiled in WWI had endured years of bloody stalemate, and war-weariness hit both soldiers and civilians. The immense casualties at battles like the Somme and Verdun caused morale on the home front to fray, even as everyone continued to *endure* out of duty. In France, for example, the strain of unending trench warfare led to army mutinies in 1917 and widespread fatigue among the populace, who famously sighed, “*surely this war must end sometime*” (Beckett, 1985). Similarly, in Ukraine by the end of 2023, after many months of grinding, positional warfare, the public sentiment shifted from early-war fervor to a dogged “*we must endure this*” attitude tempered with “*how much longer?*” questions — much like civilians in 1917 reading casualty lists began to question their leaders (yet still hoping for victory). Another parallel can be drawn to World War I’s impact on civilian morale: historians note that by the later years of WWI, propaganda had to work overtime to keep public spirits up, as hardship and loss accumulated (Beckett, 1985). Ukraine in 2023–2024 likewise ramped up information campaigns to remind people what they were fighting for and to maintain unity despite creeping fatigue. We can also compare Ukraine’s 2023 experience to the later years of other protracted wars, such as the Soviet war in Afghanistan or the U.S. war in Iraq — conflicts where initial public support gave way to fatigue when quick victory proved elusive. However, a key difference in Ukraine’s case is the existential nature of the war: whereas distant foreign wars lose public support when they bog down, Ukraine’s fight is for national survival, which has sustained a higher baseline of public commitment. Indeed, even amid fatigue, 91% of Ukrainians in late 2023 still believed Ukraine would ultimately win the war (though many expected a longer timeline) (Info Sapiens, 2024; KIIS, 2024). In summary, Phase 4 in Ukraine is characterized by a weary but unbroken society — grappling openly with the war’s costs and future path, much as societies did in long, hard wars of the past, yet fundamentally determined to keep going until a just peace could be secured.

**Phase 5: Routinization of emergency and long-term resistance (late 2023 — 2024 onward)** — war becomes institutionalized within Ukraine’s governance and economy, and discussions shift towards strategic endurance, the sustainability of military aid, and potential long-term scenarios for resolution (Kofman et al., 2024; Haller, 2024; etc.). Entering late 2023 and into 2024–2025, the war in Ukraine became, in many respects, the “*new normal*” for society. This phase has been defined by the routinization of emergency conditions — a situation where an entire country learns to live in a state of protracted conflict and make life as livable as possible under those constraints. Daily existence in Ukraine now balances on a strange equilibrium: schools conduct classes in air-raid shelters or hybrid formats, businesses in non-combat zones operate amid periodic power outages and drone alerts, cultural events have resumed (with adjustments for curfews), and people have adapted to constant uncertainty. There is an ingrained *long-term resistance strategy* evident at both the state and civilian levels.

Strategically, Ukraine shifted to a war of attrition and endurance — focusing on securing steady Western military aid, ramping up domestic arms production, training new brigades for the long haul, and fortifying its defensive positions. Politically, Kyiv worked on sustaining international support while also planning for scenarios where the war might stretch into multiple years. For ordinary Ukrainians, this period brought a mix of weary acceptance and unwavering determination. Many speak of “*living in war, but living nonetheless*”, as communities find ways to celebrate holidays, start new jobs or university programs, and even rebuild cities, all under the shadow of conflict. The collective psyche has adjusted to treat *the abnormal as normal*: the sight of sandbags and tank traps in city squares, soldiers on leave walking the streets, and families separated by evacuation or military service have all become part of the social landscape. This *normalization of wartime life* does not mean people no longer feel stress or longing for peace — they certainly do — but it means society has found a degree of stability within the instability. Psychologically, many Ukrainians have moved from the volatile swings of hope and fear of early war to a steadier, if sober, mindset of “*we can hold out as long as needed*” (Hrushetskyi, 2025a; 2025b; Dembitskyi et al., 2025). National identity during this phase has further consolidated around the values of resistance and resilience. Heroes and martyrs of the war are venerated in public memory, the Ukrainian language and cultural revival have accelerated (as part of distancing from Russia), and the idea of Ukraine as a distinct, sovereign nation standing up to imperial aggression is deeply embedded across all regions of society (Razumkov Centre, 2024). As history attests, the aftermath of war creates long-term shifts in national identity, with narratives of victory, loss, or betrayal shaping future generations. Japan’s post-WWII pacifism (Dower, 1999) and Russia’s glorification of WWII (Kangaspuro et al., 2017) illustrate how historical memory solidifies public attitudes toward future conflicts.

A notable development in this period is the re-evaluation of end-game scenarios and Western support in public discourse. With the war now past its three-year mark, Ukrainians have candidly started discussing what a “*war termination*” might look like. Would it be a decisive military victory, a negotiated settlement, or some frozen conflict? These questions, once theoretical, gained urgency. Opinion polls in late 2024 revealed a significant shift: for the first time, a slight majority (52%) of Ukrainians expressed preference for negotiations to end the war rather than fighting indefinitely (Hrushetskyi, 2025a; 2025b; Rating, 2025; Sobczak, 2024; Razumkov Centre, 2024). This doesn’t equate to surrender — most of those favoring talks still demand Russian withdrawal from occupied territories — but it shows a pragmatic desire to eventually close this chapter if a fair peace is achievable. Meanwhile, those supporting continued fighting emphasize that any peace without reclaiming Ukraine’s sovereignty in full would be unacceptable. Thus, public opinion is now more nuanced: united in the goal of a free Ukraine, but split on how to get there as the conflict drags on. Correspondingly, faith in an imminent outright victory has dimmed; many Ukrainians now brace for the possibility of a “long war” extending into 2025 and beyond. A May 2024 survey found that 57% of Ukrainians believe the war will last a long time, with sizable fractions estimating it could take *years* more (Hrushetskyi, 2025a). This acknowledgment has further driven the routinization of war: if war is to be ongoing, then life must go on as

well. The Ukrainian state has extended martial law and adapted its institutions for protracted conflict governance, while civil society continues to innovate ways to support the war effort sustainably (from veteran reintegration programs to mental health services for a war-traumatized population).

Another key aspect of this phase is managing the relationship with Western allies. Ukrainians remain profoundly grateful for Western military and economic aid, but there is growing awareness that external support may wax and wane with donor politics. The U.S. and Europe have domestic debates about sustaining aid, and events like the 2024 U.S. elections or Middle East crises have at times diverted attention. Ukrainian society has responded by both advocating more strongly for international assistance — keeping the plight of Ukraine in global headlines — and by mentally preparing to shoulder more of the burden alone if necessary. There's a sense of *strategic perseverance*: a belief that Ukraine must cultivate the endurance to keep resisting even if the West's focus falters, much like a besieged city that must hold out until relief arrives, however long that takes. War fatigue is certainly present among Ukraine's allies, and Ukrainians themselves acutely feel the fatigue, but the overarching strategy is to outlast the aggressor.

The experiences of this phase find echoes in historical instances of protracted resistance. One parallel is the situation of occupied France and Yugoslavia during World War II, where despite years under enemy control, significant portions of the population never ceased resisting. In France, even as daily life under German occupation became routine (with shortages, curfews, and censorship becoming the norm), underground resistance networks kept the spirit of defiance alive until liberation (Wieviorka, 2016). In Yugoslavia, partisan fighters led by Tito maintained a grueling guerrilla war against the Nazis from 1941 to 1945, effectively creating a “state within a state” and persisting through years of hardship in the forests and mountains (Tomasevich, 1975). Ukrainians can relate to these examples: parts of Ukraine (like Crimea or Donbas areas under Russian occupation) have underground resistance cells sabotaging the occupiers, and the nation as a whole is effectively in a state of protracted siege, not unlike those WWII scenarios where whole societies devoted themselves to a future liberation. Another analogy is the Cold War era “long twilight struggle,” where adversaries girded themselves for a conflict without a clear end date. During the Cold War, especially in front-line states (West Berlin, South Korea, etc.), populations adjusted to living under constant threat for decades, all the while building prosperous lives and never giving up on eventual reunification or victory (Sharp, 1985). Ukraine at the 2025<sup>th</sup> shows shades of this: the country is simultaneously reconstructing towns, implementing reforms (even pursuing EU candidate requirements), and planning its post-war future — effectively *living under siege* but not putting life on pause. This is reminiscent of how Israelis have normalized life amid an ongoing conflict since the country's founding, or how South Koreans thrived economically even while technically at war with the North. The “*security nation-state*” mindset that emerged in 20th-century protracted conflicts is visible in Ukraine: a heavy emphasis on civil defense, unity, and vigilance as permanent features of society (Ermacora, 2015). Yet history also offers hope that such endurance can be rewarded. The fact that Ukraine has not only survived but adapted and persisted in the face of a much larger aggressor is itself a

strategic victory. Ukrainians increasingly see their struggle in these terms — as a long-term test of wills and societal strength. As of spring 2025, war perception in Ukraine is thus characterized by a kind of stoic resolve: the initial fires of passion have cooled into the steady glow of commitment (Rating, 2025). The society has essentially said, “*We have normalized the abnormal. We will fight on as long as we must. We have become a nation that can live with war — and that will ultimately outlast our enemy*”.

This framework of war perception remains dynamic, as the course of the war continues to evolve, and new geopolitical or military developments could reshape both the perception of war and its strategic trajectory.

### ***Final thoughts and avenues for further exploration***

The evolution of war perception in Ukrainian society from early 2022 to 2025 follows a trajectory observed in numerous historical cases of prolonged defensive wars and anti-imperial struggles. Ukrainian society has moved from an initial phase of shock and mass mobilization to adaptive euphoria, followed by realism about the prolonged nature of the war, phases of war fatigue and critical reflection, and ultimately, the routinization of emergency conditions and long-term resistance. This trajectory not only aligns with established theories of war perception but also highlights the unique characteristics of Ukraine’s struggle as both an anti-imperial\anti-colonial and state-consolidating war.

A comparative perspective reveals striking parallels with postcolonial wars of liberation and other anti-imperial conflicts. The process of national identity consolidation in wartime Ukraine bears resemblance to the anti-colonial movements of the 20th century, such as Ireland’s struggle against British rule, and Vietnam’s resistance to colonial and imperial domination. In each case, war functioned as a catalyst for forging national unity, strengthening a distinct civic and cultural identity, and severing ties with the imperial metropole. Ukraine’s rejection of Russian influence, particularly through de-Russification efforts, re-evaluation of historical narratives, and a deepened commitment to European integration, aligns with similar decolonial processes observed in states that sought to dismantle the legacy of imperial domination.

Furthermore, this war has accelerated the process of nation-building, reinforcing Ukraine’s collective memory and shared historical consciousness. The veneration of war heroes and martyrs, the rise of civic patriotism, and the symbolic rejection of imperial narratives reflect patterns observed in societies emerging from colonial rule. Unlike many Western wars of the 20th and 21st centuries, where military engagement was often external and perceived as distant from domestic realities, Ukraine’s war represents an *existential struggle*, intertwining national survival with the very essence of statehood and identity formation. This resonates with the idea that defensive wars, especially those against imperial aggression, become pivotal moments of national self-definition, as seen in Finland’s resistance during the Winter War (1939–1940) and Israel’s state formation under conditions of prolonged conflict.

Ukraine’s case highlights the intersection of modern hybrid warfare with traditional resistance strategies seen in historical postimperial\postcolonial conflicts. At the same time, Ukraine’s experience demonstrates unique aspects of 21st-century warfare,

particularly the role of globalized information flows, information warfare, digital mobilization, and globalized civil society engagement in sustaining Ukraine's resistance. Unlike many 20th-century anti-imperial struggles where media coverage was limited, Ukraine's war is fought in an era of real-time digital documentation, influencing both domestic morale and international support. The rapid dissemination of war narratives through digital platforms has allowed Ukraine to sustain global attention, counter disinformation, and maintain international solidarity—mechanisms largely unavailable to earlier anti-colonial movements. These all present new dimensions to the study of war perception.

Despite the profound resilience demonstrated by Ukrainian society, significant challenges remain. War fatigue, socioeconomic strain, and shifting geopolitical dynamics necessitate continuous adaptation in both public perception and policy. The long-term impact of the war on Ukrainian political culture, civil-military relations, and post-war reconstruction will shape the trajectory of national development for generations to come. Addressing these dimensions requires further interdisciplinary research, drawing insights from post-war transitions, reconciliation processes, and the transformation of national identity in societies recovering from prolonged conflict.

Ultimately, Ukraine's case offers crucial insights into the sociology of war perception and nation-building in the context of defensive and anti-imperial wars. It confirms enduring patterns of wartime adaptation—such as the initial rally-around-the-flag effect, the psychological burden of protracted war, and the eventual normalization of conflict conditions—while simultaneously illustrating the unique conditions of contemporary warfare, where resilience, strategic communication, and global engagement redefine how societies perceive and sustain their struggles. In this sense, Ukraine's war is not merely a military confrontation but a defining moment in the reconfiguration of national identity, democratic consolidation, and geopolitical realignment in the 21st century. Future studies should critically assess the extent to which Ukraine's trajectory aligns with or diverges from historical precedents and how contemporary global conflict dynamics reshape the sociology of war perception in the 21st century.

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## ОЛЬГА КУЦЕНКО

### Фреймування війни: еволюція соціального сприйняття війни в Україні

Дослідження аналізує еволюцію сприйняття війни в українському суспільстві у період з початку 2022 до 2025 року, простежуючи його трансформацію через п'ять ключових психологічних і соціополітичних фаз. Початковий шок та масова мобілізація поступово змінилися адаптивною ейфорією, за якою настали усвідомлення затяжного характеру війни, втома від неї, а згодом — рутинізація надзвичайних умов та довготривалий спротив. Дослідження базується на емпіричних даних провідних українських соціологічних центрів та простежує зміни в суспільних настроях, стратегічних очікуваннях і процесах формування національної ідентичності.

Результати показують, що українське суспільство продемонструвало виняткову психологічну адаптивність, перейшовши від єдності, що виникла у відповідь на загрозу, до більш прагматичного ставлення до довготривалого протистояння. Війна спричинила глибоку трансформацію національної ідентичності, зміцнивши демократичні цінності, громадянську активність та європейську орієнтацію України. Порівняльний аналіз історичних випадків оборонних і затяжних воєнних конфліктів, зокрема Першої та Другої світових війн, а також війни у В'єтнамі, засвідчує як загальні закономірності сприйняття війни — ефект національної консолідації, втому від війни, соціальну стійкість, так і специфічні особливості сучасного

конфлікту ХХІ століття, що формується під впливом глобалізованих інформаційних потоків, міжнародної допомоги та цифрового простору війни.

Попри отримані висновки, залишаються значні дослідницькі прогалини, зокрема щодо ролі цифрових медіа, порівняльних перспектив поза межами західного світу, довгострокового впливу військових наративів на політичну культуру, а також інтерсекційних відмінностей у сприйнятті війни. Усунення цих прогалин є критично важливим для розуміння механізмів суспільної стійкості, підтримки війни та можливих шляхів до її завершення. Досвід України забезпечує цінні інсайти для ширшого розуміння соціології війни, суспільної витривалості та адаптації до довготривалого конфлікту.

**Ключові слова:** рамки сприйняття війни; суспільна втома від війни; рутинізація надзвичайного стану; соціальний опір; захисна війна; російсько-українська війна

## OLGA KUTSENKO

### Framing war: The evolution of the social perception of war in Ukraine

*This study analyzes the evolution of war perception in Ukrainian society from early 2022 to 2025, tracing its transformation through five distinct psychological and sociopolitical phases. Initially characterized by shock and mass mobilization, social perception evolved into adaptive euphoria, followed by realism about the prolonged nature of the war, war fatigue, and, finally, the routinization of emergency conditions and long-term resistance. The research draws on empirical data from leading Ukrainian sociological research centers to track shifts in public sentiment, strategic expectations, and national identity formation.*

*The findings reveal that Ukrainian society has demonstrated remarkable psychological adaptability, transitioning from an initial unity-driven response to a more pragmatic endurance mindset. The war has reshaped national identity, reinforcing democratic values, civic engagement, and Ukraine's European orientation. Comparative analysis with historical defensive and long-term wars, including World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War, highlights both universal patterns of war perception — such as the rally-around-the-flag effect, war fatigue, and national resilience — and the unique dynamics of a 21st-century conflict, shaped by globalized information flows, international aid, and the digital battlefield.*

*Despite these insights, significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding the role of digital media, comparative perspectives on non-Western conflicts, the long-term impact of war narratives on political culture, and intersectional differences in war perception. Addressing these gaps is crucial for understanding the sustainability of public support, resilience mechanisms, and pathways to conflict resolution in protracted wars. Ultimately, Ukraine's experience offers valuable insights into the broader sociology of war perception, resilience, and long-term conflict adaptation.*

**Keywords:** war perception; public war fatigue; routinization of emergency; social resistance; defensive war; Russo-Ukrainian war