Who Follows the Autocrat? Evidence from a Panel Survey Spanning Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*

Timothy Frye

Henry Hale

Ora John Reuter

Bryn Rosenfeld †

This version: August 21, 2025

Word Count: 10,765

Abstract

Will citizens in autocracies follow their leader when policies contradict prior beliefs? This question is crucial in wartime, since public support lowers the costs of fighting. While attitudes about conflict have mostly been studied cross-sectionally and with survey experiments, we leverage a panel survey spanning Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and offer rare before-and-after evidence on public opinion shifts in response to an autocrat's policy reversal. We find that while Putin's personal popularity generated significant support for the invasion, economic costs curbed this effect—even among loyalists. To bolster support, the Kremlin linked the war to broadly popular values, especially traditional morality. Citizens predisposed to these messages were more likely to become war supporters. Our findings suggest that an autocrat's opinion leadership is not enough; unpopular policies require strategic framing to gain mass support. We contribute to research on autocratic public opinion, support for war, and how propaganda operates during crises.

*All quantitative data and related code necessary to produce the results in this paper will be made publicly available on the APSR Dataverse upon the paper's acceptance for publication.

†Timothy Frye is the Marshall D. Shulman Professor of Post-Soviet Foreign Policy, Columbia University, timothy.frye@columbia.edu; Henry Hale is Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University, hhale@gwu.edu; Ora John Reuter is Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, reutero@uwm.edu; Bryn Rosenfeld is Associate Professor of Government, Cornell University, brr59@cornell.edu (corresponding author).

1 Introduction

An important question for the study of public opinion in autocracies is whether citizens will follow the autocrat, even when a new policy is at odds with their previously held views. This question is particularly pointed when a policy directly affects citizens' welfare. In the case of war, citizens' willingness to support an autocrat's new policy course is vital, since a leader's ability to make an ex ante unpopular war popular greatly lowers the costs of mobilizing society that are necessary to sustain fighting. In this paper, we examine how public opinion in an autocracy comes to support the use of deadly military force.

With their control over state media, extensive polling operations, and propaganda campaigns, modern autocrats are thought to be highly effective at manipulating public opinion (Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Geddes and Zaller, 1989), including about war (Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*a*). This is especially true of low information issues like foreign policy or when citizens are unable to benchmark outcomes independently (Rozenas and Stukal, 2019). Yet other research suggests limits on the power of autocratic propaganda to secure citizens' support (Rosenfeld and Wallace, 2024), especially during a crisis (Yang and Zhu, 2025). These studies suggest that citizens in autocracies can behave like more sophisticated consumers who are hard to persuade, particularly when their own welfare is impacted by policy (Wedeen, 1998; Mickiewicz, 1988; Gehlbach, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2018). In addition, a long line of research suggests that changing mass opinion is challenging in any setting, because citizens seek information congenial to their views and interpret new information with biases rooted in experience, identity, and partisanship (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Arceneaux and Johnson, 2013; Adena et al., 2015; Robertson, 2017; Erlich and Garner, 2023). Hence, propaganda has been found to be most persuasive for voters whose political priors are aligned with the message but to fail, or even backfire, among those whose political priors conflict (Peisakhin and Rozenas, 2018).

Recent research thus proposes that propaganda's primary task is not to persuade but to reinforce an autocrat's existing support by affirming supporters' beliefs—implying that popular autocrats need only play to their base (Shirikov, 2024). However, this is not always the case; particularly during crises or when policies are individually costly to citizens, leaders must frequently also persuade non-supporters. Because they tend to rely more heavily on performance legitimacy than procedural legitimacy, the pocketbook costs of a policy loom particularly large for autocratic regimes (Magaloni, 2006; Guriev and Treisman, 2019).

In addition, because many modern autocracies seek to depoliticize society (e.g. Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Gerschewski, 2023), allegiance to the leader tends to be conditional and weak, rather than blind and ideological, which dampens the extent to which regime supporters will reflexively support the leader's policies, as might be the case in highly partisan

and polarized settings. Appealing to supporters on the basis of trust built up through belief affirmation is not enough; in difficult times, persuasion becomes necessary. Despite much research on the topic, we are still far from understanding large-scale public opinion change, especially in autocracies.

This is a significant gap in our understanding of autocratic politics, since autocrats not infrequently change their positions on major political issues, and crises often require a change of course. Indeed, personalist autocrats like Russia's Vladimir Putin are more likely than either democrats or other types of authoritarian leaders to go to war, a decision that often involves switching from disavowing plans to use military force to justifying them (Weeks, 2012). Yet few studies examine how citizens react when autocrats change their position on a major issue like the use of military force in the real world, beyond the international relations literature on whether autocrats face audience costs for backing down (e.g., Weeks, 2008; Li and Chen, 2021; Weiss and Dafoe, 2019).

A crucial challenge is that we usually lack the before-and-after evidence that is best suited to studying how autocrats' decisions affect public opinion. Consequently, most of what we know about the impact on public opinion of autocrats' decisions to go to war is based on survey experiments that offer hypothetical scenarios (Weiss and Dafoe, 2019; Li and Chen, 2021; Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*a*; Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024). Even in the broader literature on war support most studies are either cross-sectional or experimental (e.g. Feaver and Gelpi, 2004; Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2005; Berinsky, 2009; Tomz and Weeks, 2013; Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024).

By contrast, we leverage an original panel survey that spans the start of Russia's full- scale invasion of Ukraine. We present the most direct evidence to date on how citizens respond when an autocrat changes his position in the real world on an issue with direct bearing on citizens' welfare. Because we tracked opinions on the question of war, we are able to gauge what people thought about sending Russian troops into Ukraine both before and after the full-scale invasion. The fact that we have repeated observations of the same citizens—and not a repeated cross-section with different citizens—allows us to study individual-level opinion change. With cross-sectional data, it is impossible to rule out that any apparent change in opinions could simply reflect that different citizens select into the survey at different points in time—a concern magnified in wartime. Moreover, by measuring respondents' attitudes and predispositions toward the regime and regime messages prior to the war, we can guard against the possibility of reverse causation and spurious associations due to broader societal shifts in opinion after the invasion.

We argue that, alone, an autocrat's signal of support for an ex ante unpopular policy is insufficient to secure broad popular support, especially when a policy has adverse eco-

nomic consequences for ordinary citizens. Support instead comes from linking an unpopular policy to popular predispositions. To make this argument, we draw from the literature on autocratic politics and research on public support for war. Our findings center on how an autocrat's personal popularity, material interests, and respondent predispositions influence public opinion in an autocracy when a major policy change occurs.

First, in line with the literature on elite cues (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2009; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021), we find that Putin supporters were considerably more likely than regime opponents to shift from opposing the invasion to supporting it. Those who approved of Putin prior to February 2022, were about 15-17 percentage points more likely to support the war after it began. This finding is notable because it is on par with the effect sizes in experimental studies on public support for war with captive audiences exposed to a single piece of information (often in a hypothetical scenario) (e.g., Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*a*, p. 7). It is also similar to the size of the party cue effect in Slothuus and Bisgaard (2021) using a panel study of opinion change following a policy reversal in Denmark.

Second, we find that the war's economic consequences limited the persuasive power of Putin's cue even among his own base. Indeed, almost half of pre-war Putin-supporters declined to support the war's continuation after it began. Respondents who reported a substantial economic loss or decline in living standards after the launch of the full-scale invasion were significantly less likely to support the war—a result which holds among pre-war Putin supporters and opponents, alike. In short, our study finds that personal economic considerations loomed large in real-world evaluations of the war.

Third, we find evidence consistent with the power of strategic issue framing/linkage (i.e. bundling a policy initiative with other, more popular issues) to change opinion on policies that are, ex ante, unpopular. In particular, we find that those who held 'traditional' moral values prior to the full-scale invasion were more likely to become war supporters. Regime propaganda justified the war as a struggle to protect Russia's traditional moral values against Western influence. Our findings suggest that the regime's strategy of linking an ex ante unpopular war with a popular policy frame (social conservatism) was successful. Our results confirm the power of elites to sway opinion to the opposite side of a policy issue, and to do so among supporters and opponents alike.[1]

Last, to further probe the plausibility of our issue linkage argument, we consider who would have been most likely to receive messages about the policy change. We demonstrate, consistent with our argument, that opinion change is greatest among those who are politically interested and therefore most likely to have been paying attention to the pro-war messages the Kremlin deployed.

[1]See also Pan, Shao and Xu (2022).

We make several contributions to the existing literature. First, we add to the literature on policy change and public opinion in autocracies. A central question for this literature is whether and how autocrats can shape citizens' policy opinion when they change their policy position (Pan, Shao and Xu, 2022; Yang and Zhu, 2025). Our study's findings imply that an autocrat can lead public opinion, including among citizens who initially backed neither the autocrat nor the policy.

Second, we contribute to the literature on public opinion about war (c.f. Mueller, 1973; Berinsky, 2009; Tomz and Weeks, 2013; Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024) and on Russian domestic support for its war against Ukraine, specifically (c.f. Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*a*; Wollast et al., 2025; Tkachenko and Vyrskaia, 2025). We do so in at least two ways. First, we pay greater attention to the individual-level economic impact of conflict on support for war. This issue has largely been overlooked in the empirical literature on war support, which has focused on the US, where the impacts of war on economic well-being have been smaller and more diffuse. In settings where economic sanctions reduce living standards, the pocketbook costs of war may be greater, and more important. Our finding that economic considerations tempered the willingness of regime supporters (and others) to back continuing the war suggests, in line with recent research (Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024), that international countermeasures after foreign military aggression can sway domestic public opinion on the use of military force.

In addition, our findings advance research into the role of values, in particular moral values, in politics (Blakkisrud and Kolstø, 2025; McCann, 1997). The importance of traditional morality in Russians' support for the Ukraine war align with previous work showing that morality is a crucial determinate of attitudes toward the use of military force (Kertzer et al., 2014). Messages linking the war to traditional morality helped make the use of force moral and justifiable and may also have tapped aspects of right wing authoritarianism that boosted support (Wollast et al., 2025).[2]

Third, our findings speak to the literature on the effectiveness of propaganda and authoritarian regime messages during crises. Recent work concludes that traditional propaganda strategies are limited when crises occur (Rosenfeld and Wallace, 2024; Yang and Zhu, 2025). One reason is that changing course can harm a government's overall credibility if its new course appears to contradict previous messages. Indeed, as Yang and Zhu (2025) argue, the more persuasive new propaganda messages are, the more unreasonable they make previous policies seem. One implication of our findings is that governments will find it useful when confronting policy reversals to shift the terms of debate, reframing policies through new issue linkages. More broadly, much of the recent literature on propaganda and public opinion

[2]Among the dimensions captured by the concept of right wing authoritarianism are trust in established religious authorities and adherence to longstanding social conventions and norms.

during crises has focused on the Covid pandemic. Because features of a public health crisis, like the role of scientific evidence in justifying policy and policy reversal, are less salient in other types of crises, we need studies that examine a wider range of crises, including in the domain of foreign policy.

Finally, our research sheds light on an important dimension of Russian politics and cautions us not to overestimate the power of elite cues in autocracies. While many of the regime's pre-invasion supporters came to back the full-scale invasion after it was launched, this swing was not powerful enough to garner majority support for continuing the war—even though Putin supporters were a majority both before and after the invasion. Rather than uniformly rallying behind their leader's war, almost half (48%) of pre-invasion Putin supporters declined to back continuing the war after it began. This forced the regime to frame the war in a way that would appeal outside Putin's coalition. One way the Kremlin did this was to frame the war as a defense of "traditional values," which had wide appeal across the citizenry.

2 Theory and Hypotheses: Autocracy, Public Opinion, and War

Studies of public support for military conflict are drawn almost exclusively from democracies with special attention to the US case (Zaller, 1992, 2012; Baum and Groeling, 2009; Herrman, Tetlock and Visser, 1999; Mueller, 1973). We focus instead on war support in an autocratic setting with an eye to understanding citizens' rallying in support of war, using real-world evidence from a rare panel survey spanning Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In this section, we describe our theoretical expectations and how our study builds on research about policy change and public opinion in autocracies, including propaganda and regime messaging during crises, and studies of public opinion about war.

Like much of the literature on war support, we expect that citizens use heuristics to guide their evaluations of new policies (Popkin, 1991). One form of informational short-cut is elite cuing, that is, using "the position of a prominent elite as a reference point and deciding whether to support or oppose a policy based on that position" (Berinsky and Druckman, 2007).[3] This line of reasoning has been especially prominent in research on war support in democracies. For example, Berinsky (2009) studies public support for war in the US from World War II to the Second Iraq War and argues that: "To a significant degree citizens determine their positions on war by listening to trusted sources—those politicians who share their political predispositions." As the Second Iraq War came to be known as "Bush's War," Republicans increasingly embraced the war effort, while Democrats did not. Even though

[3]See also e.g., Zaller (1992) and (Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021).

Democratic elites were reluctant to criticize the President and did not provide a strong counter-message, Democratic voters could infer their preferred position based on President Bush's support for the war. By knowing which politicians back a particular policy, citizens can come to reasonable conclusions, despite the absence of more specific policy information.

There is good reason to expect this form of elite cuing to be powerful in autocracies (Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Pan, Shao and Xu, 2022). Media environments in autocracies are characterized by one-sided messaging in which state communications often feature the autocrat personally (Shirikov, 2024). In addition, rulers face little elite competition, making it difficult for rivals to generate powerful counter-messages. Their efforts to influence opinion may be especially successful in foreign policy where citizens can find it difficult to evaluate policy outcomes (Rozenas and Stukal, 2019). Despite the prominence of these arguments, most of what we know empirically comes from hypothetical scenarios embedded in survey experiments (e.g., Weiss and Dafoe, 2019; Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*a*; Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024).

Russian President Vladimir Putin would seem to have been in a strong position to gain the support of his own backers for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that he launched in February 2022. Indeed, his statement announcing it made crystal clear who was responsible: "I have made the decision to launch a special military operation in Ukraine." That is, he explicitly personalized the decision to go to war. Consequently, one widely-held interpretation of Russian support for the war in academic (Wollast et al., 2025) and journalistic accounts is that it reflects "broader support for the existing regime...a demonstration of loyalty to Vladimir Putin and his government" (Wollast et al., 2025, p. 1). In keeping with the power of elite cues, we expect those who approved of President Putin before the full-scale invasion to be especially likely to become supporters after the invasion.

- H1. Putin supporters should be more likely than others to rally in support of war.

At the same time, autocrats are ever more constrained in their ability to shore up genuine support for their policies. Elite cues, which primarily appeal to partisan supporters, are typically delivered through partisan media. However, both modern media consumption habits and weak political attachments place limits on their effectiveness. With regard to media, the decline of television viewership in modern autocracies threatens to deprive autocrats of their most potent propaganda platform. In Russia, for example, the share of the public saying that television is their main source of news has declined from 88 percent in 2008 to just 38 percent in 2024. Today, more Russians get their news from the internet and social media (43%) than from television. To be sure, in Russia and other autocracies, regimes can powerfully influence what people encounter on the internet (Cottiero et al., 2015). But the internet nevertheless expands opportunities for citizens to tune in and out of any one source,

and to seek out different sources of information—a tendency that may be exacerbated during crises (Yang and Zhu, 2025; Rosenfeld and Wallace, 2024).

Moreover, many contemporary autocracies choose to depoliticize the public sphere and sow political apathy rather than mobilize the citizenry around deep-rooted devotion to the leader and his policies (e.g. Linz, 1975; Gerschewski, 2023). Weak political attachments are one side effect. In settings where partisan identity is weak, individuals feel less psychological pressure to ensure that their policy preferences align with the politicians they support. Thus, in autocracies where levels of partisan attachment to the regime are low, the "yield rate" of regime cues (while still expected to be substantial) will be far short of 100 percent. Subpopulations that have strong countervailing interests that are readily perceived independently of regime-controlled information will be least likely to follow the leader (Rosenfeld, 2018).

With their ability to cue supporters' beliefs constrained, even dictators with majority backing will have strong incentives to appeal to non-supporters if they wish to garner majority support for their policies. Framing policy changes in ways that appeal to particular predispositions, we argue, is an underappreciated but powerful way autocrats accomplish this goal—in particular, by linking ex ante unpopular policies to ideas whose support transcends that of the regime. As noted above, because it is cognitively challenging to evaluate many policies, people commonly look for informational short-cuts to guide their thinking. Recognizing this need, politicians may try to connect pre-existing attitudes that are related to but different from a policy on which they would like to move public opinion, a pattern widely documented in the context of democracy (Popkin, 1991; Zaller, 1992).

For example, politicians in the US have framed immigration policy in terms of its impact on the economy to gain support from voters worried about their standard of living and as a security issue to win over those concerned about national defense (Lakoff and Ferguson, 2006). Similarly, politicians in democratic Europe have connected stances on the complex issue of European integration to a simple left-right dimension and thereby shifted public opinion in their favor (De Vries, 2007). Though less widely studied, autocrats do much the same. The fact that autocratic propaganda is most effective when its content accords with supporters' preexisting beliefs makes this kind of issue linkage a powerful strategy (Robertson, 2017; Peisakhin and Rozenas, 2018; Shirikov, 2024).

While the precise "broadly popular issues" autocrats might use to woo non-supporters will vary by context, here we examine a frame that Putin has used to gain support for his war in Russia and that other regimes in other contexts (ranging from Hungary to Uganda) have used, as well: traditional moral values. Traditional morality is an example of what political psychologists call *core political values*, or "overarching normative principles and belief assumptions about government, citizenship, and...society" that "facilitate position

taking in more concrete domains" (McCann, 1997, 565). As such, linking a decision (in this case war) to core values that people already hold can be a useful way to build support for a policy. To be sure, Putin has framed the war in many ways, but here we are interested in his efforts to link it to traditional morality, which Schwartz et al. (2014, 903) define as a core political value holding that "society should protect traditional religious, moral, and family values." Indeed, traditional morality has played a significant role in Kremlin messaging and in the strategies of right-wing populist leaders more generally (Blakkisrud and Kolstø, 2025; Brubaker, 2017). As we describe in more detail below, the Kremlin has appealed to citizens' traditional moral values by framing its full-scale invasion of Ukraine as an attempt by the West to impose its liberal values on Russia. This is a fairly subtle frame as the link between cultural values and the war in Ukraine is not immediately obvious, but the Kremlin has made this case repeatedly. As such, we expect those holding traditional moral values prior to the invasion to be especially likely to rally in support of the war once launched. We also expect this effect to be largely confined to those who are paying attention to politics.

- H2. Those who more strongly articulate traditional morality will be more likely to rally in support of war.

- H3. The impact of traditional morality on war support will be conditional on the level of political interest.

Citizens may be susceptible to elite cues and have predispositions vulnerable to strategic issue framing, but they also turn to their personal experiences when evaluating policy. Indeed, the question of whether citizens respond to costs and benefits or simply follow the leader is central to research on public opinion across many policy topics, from wind energy (Andrews et al., 2025) to war (Weiss and Dafoe, 2019; Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024). Though the economic impact of war has received scant attention in research on public opinion about war in democracies, where sanctions are employed against an aggressor-state, war can impose significant economic hardship on large segments of the population. The impacts on the economy can be direct, such as the shrinking of the labor force, but they can also be indirect, such as job loss as the government shifts spending from consumer industries to defense. Shortly after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many countries levied punishing sanctions on the Russian economy which, although designed to curb war-fighting efforts, have nevertheless induced certain hardships and shortages which citizens could directly observe. People who lost a job or whose firm lost foreign partners, for example, cannot be persuaded that this did not happen.

The regime's primary option when the economy declines is to try to shift blame (Rozenas and Stukal, 2019), but this can be difficult where the cause is as high-profile as the launching

of a war. Recognizing this challenge from the outset, the Kremlin worked hard to limit popular economic hardships caused by the war, with some success. Indeed, increases in war spending have boosted the economy, especially in defense-related sectors. What interests us here, though, is the constraint that economic hardships can place on autocrats' ability to generate support for an ex ante unpopular policy, particularly given the importance of performance legitimacy under autocracy (Linz, 1975; Nathan, 2003; Magaloni, 2006). We expect that respondents who either lost a job or saw a sharp decline in income during the war will be less likely to support the war, consistent with the argument that the public is more resistant to elite cues in areas that it deems important (e.g., on issues with a direct bearing on citizens' welfare as in Barber and Pope, 2024).

- H4. Those who experience economic losses will be less likely to rally in support of war.

Finally, we underscore the connection between strategic issue framing and economic hardships. When a shift in policy (such as Putin's decision to go to war) has a direct bearing on citizens' welfare, linking support for an unpopular policy with other, popular issues or core political values, may help to sway public opinion. In the case at hand, socially conservative messaging around the protection of traditional morality may have been especially attractive to the Kremlin given the war-induced economic hardships that some groups would face under sanctions. Indeed, the Kremlin may have anticipated needing a values-based message to blunt the impact of economic losses on citizens' support for the war. If such strategies work, we would expect respondents reporting traditional moral values to back the war effort even when they face financial hardship.

- H5. Among those who experience economic losses, respondents with more traditional moral values will be more likely to rally in support of war.

3 The Case: Russia's Full Scale Invasion of Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, sharply escalating a war that had begun in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and support for an insurgency in Ukraine's Donbas region that the Kremlin portrayed as Ukraine's domestic affair. While different theories exist as to Putin's precise motivations, the all-out invasion followed a period in which the insurgency had stalled and the Kremlin had lost hope that Ukraine could be subjugated through means short of brute military force (D'Anieri, 2023; Finkel, 2024; Onuch and Hale, 2022; Popova and Shevel, 2024).

A distinguishing feature of Russia's full-scale invasion is that it largely caught both Russians and Ukrainians by surprise. The US intelligence community leaked information that Russia was preparing to invade Ukraine in the Fall of 2021. But Russia's leaders

vociferously denied that they were planning to invade until the very day they did so, calling claims Russia would attack Ukraine everything from "hysteria" to "fairy tales" (Taylor, 2022). As such, there was no effort to prepare the public for the invasion, much less to mobilize support in advance. For most Russians, the invasion came as a complete shock, as many assumed that the build-up of forces on Ukraine's borders was simply posturing.[4] This distinguishes Russia's invasion of Ukraine from, for example, the well-studied US invasion of Iraq, where the White House laid the groundwork for public support well in advance of the war.[5]

Another crucial feature of the case is that a full-scale invasion was not something most Russians were calling for or even favored. On the eve of the invasion, in December 2021, our data show that only 8 percent of Russians backed sending troops to bolster the militants fighting against Kyiv in the Donbas region. The Kremlin knew, therefore, that it would have to justify its military actions in a way that convinced the public to accept its changed policy stance on sending Russian troops into Ukraine. This is reflected in how the Kremlin to this day describes the 2022 all-out invasion, referring to it as a "special military operation" that consisted of a limited, surgical incursion that would quickly "demilitarize" and "denazify" Ukraine (Hale and Lenton, 2024).

The Kremlin correctly calculated that Putin's personal popularity would generate significant support for the war, no matter what the justification. Still, on the eve of war, Putin's social base was ideologically broad, containing a range of policy views, including on foreign policy. For example, Putin's coalition was divided on how Russia should relate to the West, with 64 percent of Putin supporters favoring cordial relations and only 37 percent saying that Russia should treat the West as an enemy or rival. Such diversity reflected the catch-all appeals that the regime had traditionally used to build a broad base of support. Moreover, the regime had no reason to assume that all of those who registered in opinion polls as Putin's supporters were hardened loyalists who would back anything he did, having suffered significant waves of "defection" after previous unpopular policies were introduced.[6]

The Kremlin thus did not rely only on personalizing the policy as Putin's decision but additionally framed the war in relation to other ideas that appealed broadly to regime supporters and non-supporters alike. For example, the Kremlin has tried to mine deep-seated moral conservatism in Russia by describing the war against Ukraine in cultural terms, with Moscow serving as a defender of the traditional family, gender roles, and religion against

[4] A Levada center survey from December 2021 found that 53% of Russians thought that war was unlikely, while 37% thought it might happen. Only 3% believed that it was certain. https://www.levada.ru/2022/02/24/ukraina-i-donbass-2/

[5] See https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/03/14/a-look-back-at-how-fear-and-false-beliefs-bolstered-u-s-public-support-for-war-in-iraq/

[6] For example, support dipped after an unpopular 2018 pension reform and following blatant election falsification in the 2011 parliamentary contest.

the liberal West. As the New York Times noted in August 2023: "Vladimir V. Putin is increasingly using the war in Ukraine as justification for greater restrictions on LGBTQ life, portraying it as a consequence of deviant Western values."[7]

The Kremlin has also enlisted the Russian Orthodox Church to conduct "spiritual mobilization" and echo its calls to national sacrifice.[8] Patriarch Kirill endorsed the invasion by arguing:

> Donbas has fundamentally refused to accept the so-called values that are being offered by those aspiring for worldwide power. There is a specific test of loyalty to these powers, a requirement for being permitted into the happy world of excessive consuming and apparent freedom. This test is very straightforward and at the same time horrifying—the gay parade...It is about something different and much more important than politics. It is about human salvation, about on which side of God the Saviour humankind will end up.[9]

Similarly, in announcing the annexation of four Ukrainian regions into the Russian Federation seven months after the invasion, President Putin declared:

> The dictatorship of the Western elites is directed against all societies, including the peoples of the Western countries themselves. This is a challenge to all. This is a complete denial of humanity, the overthrow of faith and traditional values. Indeed, the suppression of freedom itself has taken on the features of a religion: outright Satanism.

This frame appears again in a November 2022 Presidential Decree, in which Putin "proclaimed Russia's mission as the bastion of 'traditional values' and a savior of mankind" that "must be defended as a national-security imperative by Russia's security services" and emphasized Russia's commitment to cracking down on "nontraditional sexual relations" and promoting patriotic, religious families with multiple children, under the guidance of the Orthodox Church. According to the Presidential Decree, the Kremlin's stance was made necessary by "the global crisis of civilization and values that leads to humankind losing traditional spiritual and ethical waypoints and moral principles."[10]

The traditional moral values frame was particularly useful to the Kremlin because, while Russian society was divided at the start of the war on attitudes toward the West, there was much more widespread support (including among Putin non-supporters) for socially conservative positions, in particular intolerance toward LGBTQ+ communities (Blakkisrud and Kolstø, 2025). Framing the invasion not as a battle against Ukraine, but as a struggle to defend Russia and to protect traditional morality, Putin seeks to connect this core political value to support for the war. As the next section shows, these efforts increased public backing for the SMO, but fell short of generating overwhelming support.

[7] https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/01/world/europe/russia-transgender-ban.html
[8] http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.html
[9] https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/17/russia-homophobia-and-battle-traditional-values
[10] https://www.wsj.com/articles/putins-new-strategy-laying-claim-to-traditional-values-11671253263

4 Research design

Between August 2021 and November 2024, we conducted four waves of a face-to-face panel survey in Russia with the help of the Levada Center, Russia's oldest and most respected independent pollster. The first of these surveys was conducted just prior to Russia's most recent parliamentary elections in September 2021. The second took place after the parliamentary elections and two months before Russia's full-scale invasion, in December 2021. A third post-invasion wave was fielded in September and October 2023, and the fourth—most recent—wave was conducted in November 2024. More details on the surveys, including sample sizes, are provided in the appendix.

A crucial advantage of our research design is thus that we were able to measure Russians' attitudes and dispositions on a variety of issues *before* the war and then follow the same individuals to see how their views on war changed. In the cross-sectional designs more typical in this literature, post-war attitudes and war support could be co-determined by unobserved factors that accompanied societal changes brought on by war. By using pre-war measures of attitudes and dispositions, we are able to allay some of the endogeneity concerns that arise when using measures of attitudes that are contemporaneous with measures of war support. In sum, our approach is to examine the association between these pre-war attitudes (from August and December 2021) and support for war after it began, accounting for individuals' pre-war views on the use of Russian military force in Ukraine.

Given the challenges of conducting public opinion surveys during wartime in an autocracy, several important notes on the data are in order. While concerns about survey nonresponse, item nonresponse, and misreporting can arise across many survey settings, these worries may be particularly acute in the present case if opponents of the regime and its policies do not feel free to participate in surveys or sincerely report their attitudes on sensitive political issues (Rosenfeld, 2023*b*). Existing evidence suggests, however, that the drivers of attrition (survey non-response) did not change appreciably before and after the full-scale invasion and that panel attrition rates in this setting are consistent with similar panel designs in other developing countries (Frye et al., 2024). Item non-response appears to be driven by respondent uncertainty rather than by fear, according to analyses of six post-war waves of the Chronicle survey.[11]. While Frye et al. (2024) find some preference falsification in direct questions about war support, it is fairly small and appears to have greater impact on estimates of opposition to the war than on support for it. An endorsement experiment, list experiment, and randomized response experiment question all yield estimates of war support that are not significantly different from that obtained using direct questioning. For

[11]See: https://www.extremescan.eu/post/14-the-first-phase-of-a-special-military-operation-in-the-minds-of-russians.

example, the list experiment suggests that (as of fall 2023) around 5 percent of those who say they support the war may be dissembling, though again this difference is not statistically significant. One study in summer 2022 estimates a higher rate of dissembling; Chapkovski and Schaub (2022), through an online survey in Russia, find a significant difference between mean responses to a list experiment and to a direct question about support for the "actions of the Armed Forces of Russia in Ukraine," but this gap is still only about 10 percentage points in a sample that is more educated and urban than the population.

Other researchers studying public opinion in Russia reach similar conclusions.[12] Scholars from the Russia Watcher project have conducted daily surveys using random device engagement of between 250 and 500 respondents since May of 2022 and conclude: "Because proving that preference falsification does not exist on our surveys involves proving a null hypothesis, it is difficult if not impossible to do so conclusively. However, the bulk of evidence described above suggests that if preference falsification is occurring, it is likely minimal and the estimates produced from the data are largely reliable."[13] Tkachenko and Vyrskaia (2025) find that regional estimates of war support drawn from Russian telephone surveys are strongly correlated with pre-war measures of regime support and protest activity. Finally, Russia's best independent polling company, the Levada Center, reviewed their research during the war using list experiments, focus groups, and analyses of non-response and broken interviews and writes: "All of the above allows us to say that public opinion surveys remain a reliable instrument for understanding public opinion." In a literature review on public opinion and war in Russia, Snegovaya concludes: "Altogether, various approaches suggest that one can generally trust Russian public opinion data, albeit with some reservations. Specific feelings that underlie the war support—such as resignation, acquiescence, or avoidance—might be up for debate."[14] To be sure, all public opinion data come with strengths and weaknesses and must be used with caution, however, we believe our dataset is of sufficient quality to shed new light on attitudes in Russia toward the war.[15]

4.1 Dependent Variable: Rallying to Support the War

Turning to our analysis of these data, we measure respondents' pre-war level of support for military intervention in Ukraine by asking in our December 2021 (Wave 2) survey: "What should Russia do in the war in Ukraine?" Respondents were permitted to choose multiple answers, among them, "send Russian armed forces to participate in battles in Ukraine on

[12] See Rosenfeld (2023*a*) for additional evidence from the Chronicles project and regarding data from ongoing surveys by other Russian pollsters, e.g. https://www.extremescan.eu/post/6-respondents-cooperation-in-surveys-on-military–operations.

[13] https://russiawatcher.com/methodology. For a more in depth analysis of the evidence behind these claims see DeSisto, Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2025)

[14] https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/russia-tomorrow/reluctant-consensus-war-and-russias-public-opinion/polls

[15] For a broader critique of survey research in Russia see Yudin (2022)

the side of Ukrainians fighting against Kyiv authorities," our baseline measure of support for a Russian invasion (see Appendix A2.1 for the full question wording). In the literature on war support, we note, it is extremely rare to have a lagged measure of this kind, prior to a conflict's initiation, not to mention prior to the state's campaign to build up support for it. The ability to incorporate a lagged dependent variable into our models captures the influence of past events on current support (e.g. Keele and Kelly, 2006), allowing us to better identify the impact of recent events and new frames versus those of a conflict with Ukraine that had been ongoing since 2014.

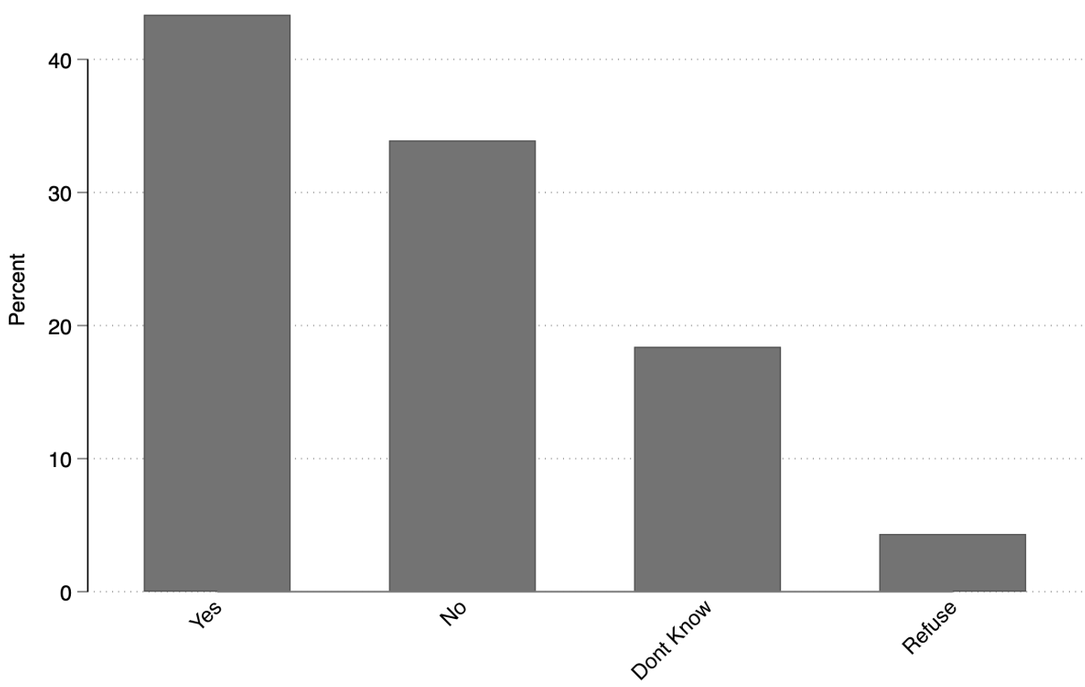
Across all respondents on the eve of the war, when given a list of options regarding Ukraine and asked to indicate their support for as many as they like, only 8 percent favored sending Russian armed forces to Ukraine.[16] In short, the full-scale invasion was ex ante unpopular. Support for war after February 2022 came overwhelmingly from Russians who had opposed sending the Russian military into Ukraine but rallied in support of war after the full-scale invasion was launched.

Since it did not make sense to ask this question verbatim in 2023 given changed facts on the ground, we formulated new measures of war support relevant to the post-invasion period in wave 3. Because the regime made it illegal to refer to the "special military operation" (SMO) as "war," our survey questions ask about support for the SMO. We nevertheless refer to "war support" throughout this article, by which we mean support pre-2022 for sending Russian troops into Ukraine and support after February 24, 2022, for continuation of the full-scale invasion. To begin, we asked the question: "Do you support or not support continuing Russia's special military operation in Ukraine," with two simple response options: "yes, I support" and "no, I do not support." Forty-three percent of respondents supported continuing the military operation, 34 percent did not support continuing the operation, and 22 percent either found it hard to say or refused to answer. From this question, we coded a dummy variable that equals 1 if the respondent supported continuing the war. This is our main dependent variable of interest.

We next presented war supporters (i.e. those answering "yes" on the prior question) with several possible reasons for supporting the continuation of the war and asked them to identify those they agreed with (multiple answers were allowed). This questions allows us to distinguish 'hardliners' from those whose support for war is better described as an extension of their support for their country, its leadership, or the troops—rather than an endorsement of the policy per se. The distribution of these responses is given in Figure 2. From this question, we code "hardline war supporters" as those who indicate that "in principle Russia

[16]In fact, only 9 percent backed the much more limited option of training and arming Ukrainians to fight against the government in Kyiv. Roughly one-third advocated sending humanitarian aid, another third wanted to provide moral support, and roughly 30 percent offered unprompted that Russia should not get involved at all. Seven percent responded "don't know" and one percent refused to answer the question.

Figure 1: Do You Support or Not Support the Continuation of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine?



is doing the right thing, but it should act more decisively" (57% of war supporters/22% of all respondents) or that "Russia is doing exactly what it should be doing" (42% of all war supporters/18% of all respondents). Taken together, 34 percent of all respondents (78% of war supporters) fall into the category of hardline war supporters.[17]

Our data suggest that the Kremlin's efforts to rally support were moderately successful. On one hand, support for war surged from just 8 percent on the eve of war to 43 percent in October 2023.[18] And various publicly available polls show that support for the war has remained relatively stable since the Spring of 2022.[19] On the other hand, 57 percent of respondents either openly opposed continuing the war (34%) or found it hard to answer (23%). Thus, even in the presence of unprecedented repression and a no-holds-barred propaganda campaign on state media, a majority felt comfortable to withhold their support when queried by a survey interviewer.[20]

Substantively, as Figures 1 and 2 show, Russians did not all respond to the exigencies of war by rallying in favor of the full-scale invasion. Some supported the Kremlin's policy of

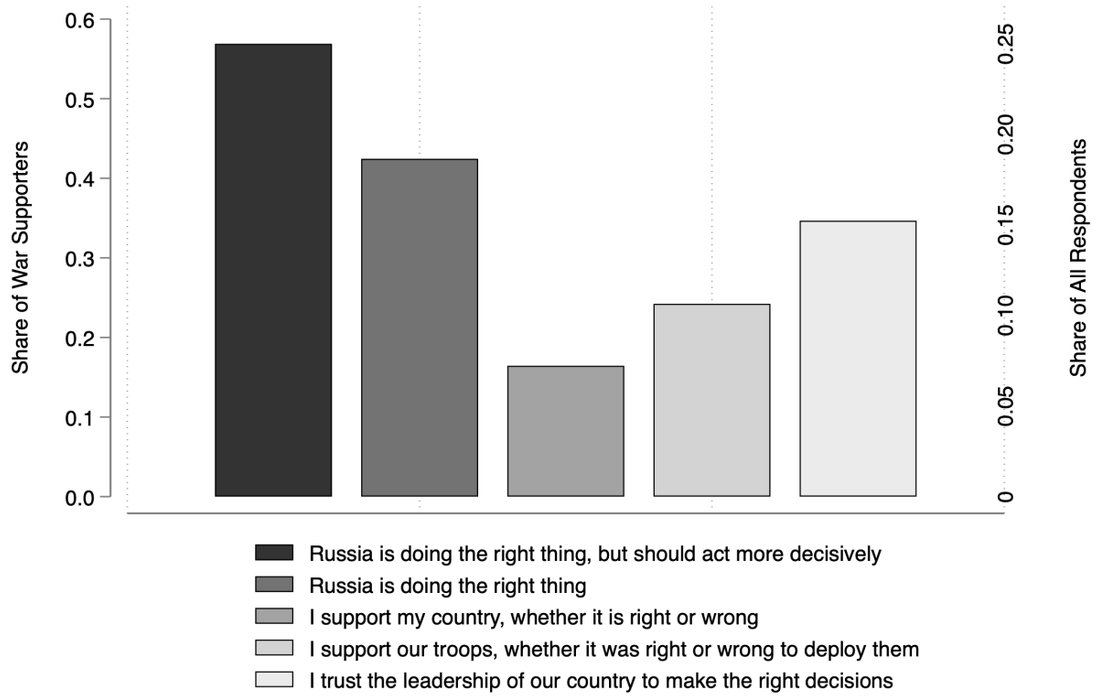
[17]In Appendix A16 we also explore our main models across three alternative measures of war support.

[18]Estimates of support for the war depend on the framing of the question. Our topline results are similar to results produced by question formulations by the Levada Center and Russian Field that pose the question as a choice between continuing the war or starting peace negotiations. The Levada Center also regularly fields another question on support for the war that asks about support for the Russian armed forces' "activities" in Ukraine. This question phrasing routinely yields much higher levels of support, but such a formulation likely conflates support for the war with support for the troops.

[19]See, for example, https://www.levada.ru/2025/01/13/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-v-dekabre-2024-goda-vnimanie-podderzhka-otnoshenie-k-peregovoram-emotsionalnyj-nastroj/

[20]Polls by the Levada Center show that, since October 2022, the share of Russians who favor peace negotiations has been consistently larger than the share who favor continuing the war, although support for peace negotiations declines if Russia is required to cede territory gained during the war.

Figure 2: Reasons War Supporters Give for Supporting the War (Among War Supporters)



Note: This question was only posed to those who supported the continuation of the war (multiple answers possible)

continuing the war, but others remained skeptical. This is the variation we seek to explain.

The main sample that we analyze includes all panel respondents from Wave 3 of our survey (i.e the first post-war wave, conducted in October 2023) and in each of our analyses we control for whether the respondent supported sending troops in December 2021. Since only 8% of these respondents supported sending troops to Ukraine in December 2021, the vast majority of war supporters in October 2023 had rallied to support the war after it began. The category of war supporters and ralliers are thus largely overlapping. By treating post-2022 war support as our dependent variable while controlling for pre-2022 war support, therefore, we avoid any risk of selection bias that can arise when focusing solely on respondents who rallied to support the war.[21] We discuss our modeling choices in further detail below.

4.2 Independent Variables

First, to measure prior attitudes toward the regime, we code respondents who expressed pre-war approval of Putin as 1 and others as 0. We expect Putin supporters to be especially likely to use Vladimir Putin's position on the war to guide their thinking on the issue. In our sample from December 2021, 60% of Russians approved of Putin's performance as President.

Second, we measure the extent to which respondents hold traditional moral values by ask-

[21]Nonetheless, our main results are robust to dropping the 8 percent of respondents who already supported the war on its eve and analyzing patterns of change only among the subsample of respondents who did not support sending troops in December 2021.

ing their agreement with the statement: "The government should do everything to support traditional values, such as families, morality, and marriage." Again, crucially, this four-category variable is measured prior to the full-scale invasion. In testament to the popularity of this message, seventy-five percent of respondents strongly agreed with this statement.

Third, we measure the extent to which respondents experienced economic hardship as a result of the war by asking whether they had lost jobs or a business or whether their material situation had deteriorated since March 2022. Forty-three percent of respondents reported experiencing such a hardship. We also measure economic evaluations in other ways below. By necessity, some of these economic variables are measured after the start of the war, and we cannot rule out endogeneity bias in analyses of these particular factors. However, in other analyses, we capture the change in reported living standards measured before and after the launch of the full-scale invasion. All results remain the same.

While we focus on receptiveness to elite cues, value predispositions, and economic concerns, we also control for leading alternative explanations of war support, including exposure to state media and the costs/benefits of having a close friend or relative mobilized into the military. We measure use of state media prior to the war by asking respondents: "Which of the following information sources is your main source of news: television, radio, newspapers, internet sites and social media, or friends and family?" We create a dummy variable for those who answered that television is their main source of news. Since all television news in Russia is state-run or state-controlled, this is a good proxy for getting news from state media.[22] We also code a dummy variable capturing the 17 percent of respondents who indicate exposure (through a close friend or relative) to military mobilization.

Finally, existing accounts of Russians' war support have paid special attention to anti-Westernism and patriotic sentiment, often overlooking the role of traditional moral values (Smeltz et al., 2023; Volkov and Kolesnikov, 2023). To measure anti-Westernism, we asked respondents: "There are various opinions about what relations there should be between Russia and the West. What do you think, how should Russia relate to the West?" Answer options in this four-point ordinal scale were: ally, partner, rival, and enemy. We also asked respondents whether they agreed with the statement: "I am prepared to make significant personal sacrifices to fulfill my duty to the Russian government." This measure of willingness to sacrifice taps alternative explanations rooted in Russian patriotism and sense of duty toward the state. While Putin support, traditional morality, anti-Westernism, and willingness to sacrifice—all measured prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine—are positively correlated, they represent distinct dispositions. As Appendix Figure A1 shows, most of these attitudes are positively correlated, but none higher than ρ=0.27, and most less than ρ=0.1.

[22]Results are similar using a measure that asks respondents how often they watch state television.

In addition to the explanatory variables just mentioned, all models also include a basic set of demographic controls, including age, gender, education, town size, reported economic standing, and dummy variables for self-reporting as Russian and as Orthodox. All models also control for whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops to Ukraine when asked in Wave 2 (December 2021).

5 Results

We begin in Table 1 by testing our arguments about susceptibility to elite cues and issue frames. Except where stated otherwise, we estimate linear probability models that allow for easy interpretation of the coefficients of interest as average marginal effects. In all analyses, we report robust standard errors, which are calculated via Taylor linearization. In column 1, the dependent variable is support for continuing the war, while in column 2 the dependent variable is hardline support for war.[23] The first thing to note is that, consistent with the elite cue argument, those who supported Putin in December 2021 were about 16 percentage points more likely to rally in favor of continuing the war and 15 percentage points more likely to take a hardline position on the war than were Putin non-supporters. These results confirm prior research, which suggests that many citizens follow the cues of trusted or co-partisan leaders.

That said, nearly half (48%) of all Putin supporters in December 2021 declined to support continuing the war in 2023—suggesting limits on the power of elite cues to mobilize even regime backers in an increasingly repressive autocracy. As hypothesized above, we next show that one countervailing factor was the economy. The second row of Table 1 indicates that citizens who suffered the war's economic impacts tended to withhold their support for continuing the war and were less likely to take a hardline position. This finding demonstrates that the economic impacts of a leader's decision to go to war shape citizens' support for the policy, even in an autocracy. By necessity we measure economic harms post-invasion and these results could be subject to post-treatment bias or endogenous to war support. In Appendix A13, however, we use several other measures of economic hardship, including a differenced measure of the respondent's economic standing before the invasion and after. Again, we find that respondents whose economic standing worsened were far more likely to oppose the war.

We next present results consistent with our expectation that issue linkage allowed the Kremlin to gain support for its war among citizens with particular value predispositions, including those who initially opposed both the leader and the use of military force. As a reminder, we have argued that given limits on the power of elite cues and the war's potentially

[23]The full results, including demographic controls, for this table and all other tables can be found in Appendix A3.

Table 1: Main Specifications

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.143**	0.126**
	(0.042)	(0.040)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.131**	-0.110**
	(0.034)	(0.034)
Traditional Values	0.065**	0.051**
	(0.025)	(0.024)
Anti-West	0.088**	0.037
	(0.023)	(0.023)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.014	0.014
	(0.017)	(0.017)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.047	-0.022
	(0.036)	(0.040)
Constant	-0.095	-0.007
	(0.131)	(0.119)
Observations	923	923
R-squared	0.166	0.115
Demographics	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

negative impact on citizens' economic well-being, the Kremlin needed to elicit support from beyond the pre-war Putin coalition to obtain broad popular support for its war. Accordingly, Row 3 indicates that respondents who reported advocating for traditional moral values were significantly more likely to support continuing the war in Ukraine. They were also more likely to take a hardline stance on the war as reported in Column 2. Importantly, these results hold even controlling for respondents' approval of Putin, attitudes toward the West, their reported willingness to sacrifice on behalf of their country, and their personal exposure to military mobilization.

Moreover, because traditional morality was measured prior to the war, it cannot be the product of either war support or broader societal opinion change following the full-scale invasion. In Appendix Tables A11 and A12, we replicate these results using seven alternative measures of moral conservatism from waves 3 and 4 of the survey. Results are consistent across most measures, especially in models that predict hardline war support. These results are consistent with the claim that by linking the war to a broadly popular social issue, the Kremlin has been able to boost support for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Notably, and in keeping with our argument about the role of 'novel' issue linkage as a strategy to sway public opinion after a policy reversal, respondents holding more traditional moral views were *not* more likely to support sending troops to Ukraine *prior* to February

2022 (see Appendix A5 Table A8). This result suggests that the Kremlin managed to rally moral conservatives to back the war by framing the conflict as a struggle to defend traditional values.

We further investigate how elite cues and economic conditions shaped war support in Table 2. Here we focus on how pre-war Putin supporters responded to the invasion. Why did some in Putin's support coalition come to reject the regime's flagship project? We find that among this group, those who suffered economic hardship were about 13 percentage points less likely to support continuing the war and were about 10 percentage points less likely to take a hardline position on the war. As shown in Appendix Table A14, these results also hold among Putin supporters using several other measures of economic hardship.

In sum, these findings suggest that the results in Table 1 are not driven only by regime opponents, who may have been more likely to view the war's economic impact negatively through the lens of their broader opposition to regime policies. The war's negative economic consequences reduced support also among the regime's own loyalists. The Kremlin thus could not rely on Putin's popularity alone, assuming that his supporters would follow the leader, but needed to build support for the war among people who were initially unsupportive of the regime, as well.

Table 2: Main Specifications: Among Putin Supporters

	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	War Support	Hard War Support
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.130**	-0.098**
	(0.042)	(0.042)
Traditional Values	0.085**	0.072*
	(0.039)	(0.039)
Anti-West	0.109**	0.022
	(0.028)	(0.029)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.004	-0.004
	(0.018)	(0.020)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.004	-0.009
	(0.041)	(0.047)
Constant	-0.084	0.055
	(0.180)	(0.166)
Observations	570	570
R-squared	0.154	0.080
Demographics	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

As we argued above, one way for a leader to gather new supporters for a policy is to use strategic issue linkage. By tying a more popular policy to a less popular policy, politicians may be able to increase public support for the latter. This is especially likely if the former reflects a core political value of the type political psychologists have found tend to structure more specific preferences, such as traditional morality (Schwartz et al., 2014).

Table 3 explores these arguments in more depth. Strategic issue linkage requires that citizens be exposed to a leader's message, and this is much more likely to occur among citizens who regularly follow politics. In other words, we expect that respondents who report greater political interest will be more susceptible to strategic issue framing. We test this notion in columns 1 and 2, where we interact our measure of traditional moral values with the respondent's level of political awareness. The latter is measured on a four-point scale ranging from never to all the time. Here we find that among respondents who regularly follow politics, the effect of traditional morality on war support is much higher. Among those who do not follow politics, there is no effect. Figure 3 shows this graphically.

In Columns 3 and 4, we explore this argument further by restricting our sample only to those who did not support President Putin in our 2021 survey. Despite having a sample of only 221 respondents, we find that among Putin non-supporters who follow politics, moral conservatism was strongly associated with war support.

Taken together, the results in Table 3 indicate that the Kremlin managed to increase support for the war by reaching beyond its base of supporters using appeals to traditional morality. Those who prior to the full-scale invasion held a predisposition on an issue congenial to Kremlin framing and who were more politically aware were especially likely to support the war.

Table 3: Traditional Moral Values and Political Awareness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Hard		Hard
VARIABLES	War Support	War Support	War Support	War Support
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.146**	-0.122**	-0.164**	-0.194**
	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.063)	(0.056)
Traditional Values	-0.121	-0.134*	0.100**	0.053
	(0.075)	(0.073)	(0.042)	(0.041)
Anti-West	0.095**	0.043*	0.090**	0.088**
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.042)	(0.038)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.022	0.020	-0.006	0.013
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.030)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.036	-0.013	-0.189**	-0.161**
	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.074)	(0.076)
Political Awareness	-0.265**	-0.267**		
	(0.092)	(0.090)		
Political Awareness X Traditional Values	0.073**	0.073**		
	(0.025)	(0.024)		
Constant	0.588*	0.680**	-0.203	-0.043
	(0.301)	(0.281)	(0.312)	(0.264)
Observations	921	921	206	206
R-squared	0.159	0.111	0.167	0.179
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. . Models 3 and 4 are subset to politically aware Putin non-supporters. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Figure 3: How Political Awareness Conditions the Effect of Traditional Morality on War Support

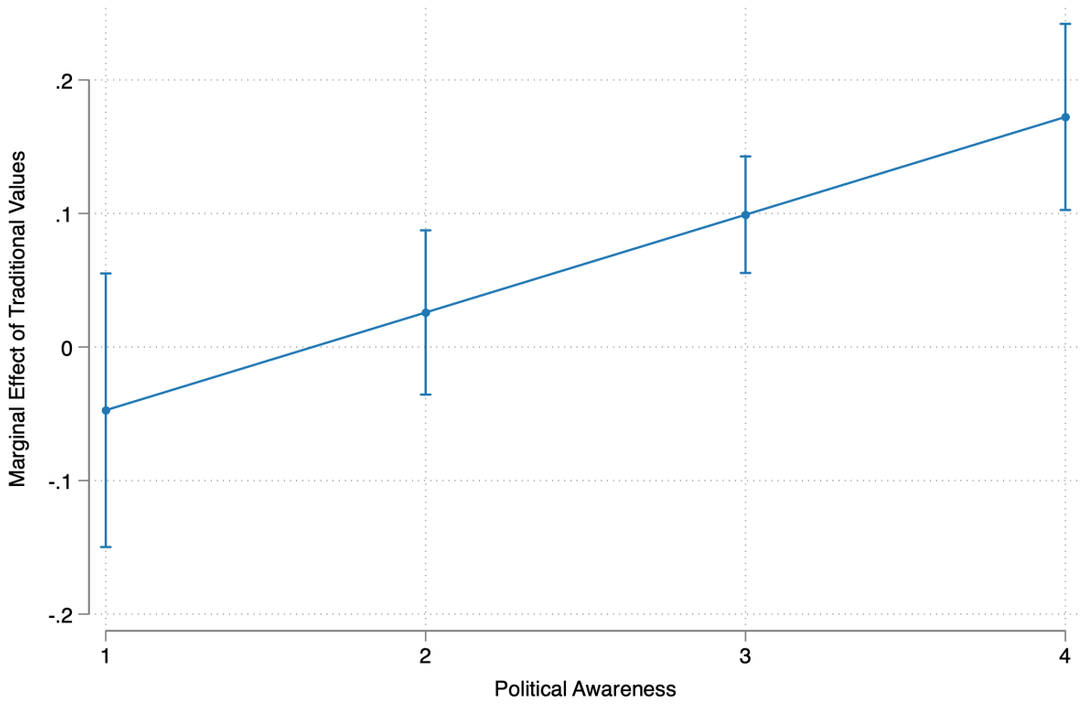


Table 4: Support for War Among those who Experienced Economic Harms

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.144**	0.144**
	(0.051)	(0.049)
Traditional Values	0.108**	0.078**
	(0.030)	(0.027)
Anti-West	0.064**	0.016
	(0.030)	(0.027)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.017	0.013
	(0.022)	(0.024)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.067	-0.007
	(0.058)	(0.058)
Constant	-0.368**	-0.273**
	(0.166)	(0.134)
Observations	413	413
R-squared	0.156	0.125
Demographics	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Moral conservatism is associated with greater war support among those who follow politics, but can it also help to offset the negative economic effects of war? We argued that respondents with traditional moral values would be more likely to back the war even in the face of economic hardship. In Table 4, we test this hypothesis by restricting the sample

to those who reported experiencing economic hardship after the full-scale invasion. Among this group, respondents who expressed traditional morality were significantly more likely to support continuing the war and to take a hardline position. This suggests that traditional values are associated with greater support for the war even among those whose finances declined. Moral conservatism has thus been a powerful means to shore up war support.

6 Threats to Inference

Our main empirical focus has been on explaining why some Russians rallied to support the war in Ukraine, while others did not. One objection to our findings could be that the attitudes we measure are associated with a latent, unobserved disposition to support military aggression. The fact that 92% of respondents in our sample declined to support sending troops to Ukraine in December 2021 weighs against this interpretation. Further, we control for this pre-invasion war support in all our models above.

Another concern is that the relationship we find between traditional morality and war support may be spurious if other pre-war attitudes that the Kremlin did not employ in framing the war are also associated with pro-war opinions. In Table 5 we conduct a series of falsification tests to explore this possibility. We do so by investigating whether attitudes and values that the Kremlin did not use to justify the war are nonetheless correlated with war support.

Table 5: Falsification Tests

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) War Support	(3) War Support	(4) War Support	(5) War Support	(6) War Support
Putin Approval	0.173**	0.177**	0.178**	0.166**	0.176**	0.172**
	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.037)
Gets News from State TV	0.083**	0.073**	0.075**	0.070*	0.077**	0.087**
	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.036)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.021	-0.050	-0.038	-0.047	-0.039	-0.051
	(0.038)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.037)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.123**	-0.113**	-0.115**	-0.110**	-0.122**	-0.123**
	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Prefers Socialist Economy	0.020					
	(0.019)					
Supports Price Controls		0.017				
		(0.020)				
Govt Shoudld Increase Taxes			0.021			
			(0.018)			
Govt Should Mandate Vax				0.032*		
				(0.017)		
Govt Should Do More on Global Warming					0.024	
					(0.017)	
Anti-Migrant						0.022
						(0.016)
Constant	0.239**	0.235**	0.229**	0.245**	0.221**	0.256**
	(0.111)	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.104)	(0.094)	(0.103)
Observations	905	1,010	996	989	972	988
R-squared	0.135	0.139	0.137	0.151	0.149	0.151
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

We focus, specifically, on six attitudes: support for a socialist economy, price controls, tax increases, vaccine mandates, a more aggressive approach to global warming, and opposition to migrants. None of these has been used by the Kremlin in framing its reasons for the war; thus we would not expect these pre-war attitudes to be correlated with war support. Indeed, we find little relationship between these values and war support. Of the six attitudes, only support for a vaccine mandate is positively correlated with war support and this relationship

is only marginally significant. These findings give us greater confidence that the relationship between traditional values and support for the war is not a reflection of broader patterns in public opinion or omitted variables.

7 Robustness Checks and Extensions

In the appendix, we report a range of robustness checks and model extensions. In our foregoing analysis of war support, we used a binary dependent variable, coded one if the respondent supports the war and zero if the respondent does not openly support the war. That latter category includes both respondents who openly opposed the war and those who answered "hard to say" or refused to answer. To assess the grounds for combining open opposition and non-responses into a single category of "non-support," we also conduct an analysis that treats support, open opposition, and non-response as three categories of a trichotomous variable. We then estimate a multinomial probit model of responses across these three categories.[24] Table A15 replicates our main specifications from Table 1 using this multinomial approach, setting non-response as the base category. Almost none of the variables in this specification statistically distinguish "open opponents" from non-responders. By contrast, most of the factors that predicted war support in our main analyses are also significant predictors of supporting the war relative to non-response. In analyses not shown, we set war support as the base category and find that the factors that distinguish non-response from war support are broadly similar to the factors that distinguish open opposition from war support. This indicates that our main results are not due to our treatment of non-responses and provides justification for collapsing opposition and non-response into a single category of "non-support."

We also explore a range of alternative dependent variables in Appendix Table A16. The first is a 10-point feeling thermometer that asked respondents to report how warmly or coldly they related to opponents of the evasion. This measure may tap deep-seated, emotional reactions to the war that are not accessed by direct questions about war support. Using this variable (in Column 1) of Table A16 we find results similar to those in our main analyses. Second, in Column 2 we utilize a question that asked respondents to assess, retrospectively, whether they believed it was a good idea to start the war in February 2022. In Column 3, we use a 10-point scale of support for continuing the war that we deployed in Wave 4 (October 2024) of our panel survey. Results on the traditional values variable are weaker in this specification. In Column 4 we use a "harder" version of our "Hard War Support" variable that takes a value of one only if the respondent indicated that Russia should be acting more

[24]Multinomial probit is preferable over multinomial logit in this application because the former does not rely on the independence of irrelevant alternatives assumption (IIA), which is very likely violated in this instance.

decisively, zero otherwise, and thus captures only those who support *more* hawkish policies. Finally, in Column 5 we include an ordered version of our hard war support variable that is equal to [0] for war opponents, [1] for "soft" war supporters (those only supporting the war because they support the troops, trust the leadership, or support their country), [2] for those believing Russia is doing what it should be doing, and [3] for those who believe that Russia should be prosecuting the war more decisively. Results using these variables are similar to our main specifications.

In Appendix Table A18, we also explore a range of alternative explanations that have been suggested either in the literature or in popular accounts of the war. First, in Column 1, we include a variable that measures the salience of Russian ethnic identity to the respondent. The war in Ukraine has been accompanied by an increase in ethnonationalist and racist rhetoric on state media and the war has been embraced by most radical Russian nationalists. One might conjecture, therefore, that those who identify strongly as ethnic Russians would be more supportive of the war. However, we find no evidence of this in Column 1. Column 2 includes variables that tap the respondents' orientation toward various opposition parties in Russia. Conditional on regime support, attitudes toward the systemic opposition parties appear largely unrelated to war support. However, supporters of Yabloko, Russia's last remaining liberal party, and Communist supporters (who did not already approve of Putin) were less likely to rally to support the war. Next, in Column 3, we include a question item that asks respondents to assess the extent to which they think NATO poses a threat to Russia. Intriguingly, we find no correlation between this belief in 2021 and rallying to support the war. The fact that Anti-Western foreign policy views are positively associated with rallying to support the war, but fear of NATO is not may suggest that frames emphasizing Russia's cultural confrontation with the West were more potent than those emphasizing geopolitical rivalry.[25] In Column 4, we include a pre-war measure of respondents' attitudes toward China (whether the respondent believes that China should be treated as a friend, partner, rival or enemy). If our results are driven by an unobserved factor that predisposes respondents to take more hawkish foreign policy stances, then we might expect this variable to be significant and/or for it to reduce the coefficient sizes on our attitudinal covariates. Model 4 shows that this is not the case. Finally, in Column 5, we probe the possibility that our main attitudinal measures, including traditional values, could reflect latent opposition to the regime (that is not captured by Putin approval). As an alternative measure of regime opposition, we include a control for attitudes toward Alexei Navalny before the war. Here we find that prospective Navalny voters are no more or less likely to support the war. More importantly, the inclusion

[25] Also, because the Fear-of-NATO question asks respondents to assess the severity of the threat posed by NATO, it has the practical effect of combining two different considerations: 1) attitudes toward the US-led military alliance, and 2) subjective assessments of military threat. Being Anti-NATO is also unrelated to war support when anti-Westernism is dropped from the analysis.

of this variable does little to affect the coefficients on key attitudinal variables.

8 Conclusion

Will citizens follow the autocrat, even when a new policy is at odds with their previously held views? We have studied opinion change under autocracy on a critical issue—support for war—leveraging an original panel survey which spans Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This is a vital area of research for our understanding of autocratic politics, since autocrats frequently change their positions on major policy issues and crises often require a change of course. When autocrats go to war (and personalist autocrats are more likely to do so), they often must switch from disavowing plans to use military force to justifying them, as Vladimir Putin did following his invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Yet we usually lack the before-and-after evidence that is best suited to studying these questions in the real world. Most evidence to date on how public opinion reacts when an autocrat decides to go to war is based on hypothetical scenarios from survey experiments, focused primarily on whether autocrats face audience costs when they back down.[26] In the broader literature on war support, most of it in democracies, research has been overwhelmingly cross-sectional or experimental.[27] However, as Berinsky and Druckman (2007) warn, many cross-sectional studies of public opinion on support for military conflict likely suffer from endogeneity bias. By tracking individual citizens' opinions on the question of war, we present the most direct evidence to date on individual-level opinion change. By measuring respondents' views on the regime and its messages prior to the war, we can avoid the threat of reverse causation and spurious associations due to broader societal shifts in opinion after the invasion. We know of no other study with an equivalent panel research design.

Building on research on autocratic politics and war support, we find that when evaluating support for war, citizens in autocracies are susceptible to elite cues and strategic issue frames that match their predispositions (see also e.g., Berinsky, 2009; Herrman, Tetlock and Visser, 1999). In addition, citizens resist supporting the war when appeals to do so run up against their direct experience of associated policy consequences, such as economic loss (Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024; Barber and Pope, 2024).

Several more specific findings are worth underscoring. First, the approximate size of the elite cue effect that our findings imply among Putin's supporters is in line with the broader literature on elite cues and on par with with the effect sizes found in both experimental studies on support for war (Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*a*) and panel research on opinion change following a policy reversal in a partisan democracy (Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021).

[26] See e.g., Weeks (2012); Weiss and Dafoe (2019); Li and Chen (2021); Krishnarajan and Tolstrup (2023*a*); Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang (2024).

[27] See e.g., Feaver and Gelpi (2004); Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2005); Berinsky (2009); Tomz and Weeks (2013); Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang (2024).

We next show that the war's economic consequences limited the persuasive power of Putin's cue, among his supporters and opponents alike. Last, we demonstrate that strategic issue framing using appeals to traditional morality gave Russian elites the power to sway opinion to the opposite side of a policy issue, making an ex ante unpopular war more popular. That we show these predispositions mattered only among those who were paying sufficient attention to politics lends further credence to our interpretation of the results.

These findings advance existing literature in several ways. First, our results contribute to the study of public opinion under autocracy and the broader question of how citizens respond to major policy changes. As in the present case, where sending Russian troops into Ukraine was widely unpopular ex ante, such shifts in government policy often require that many citizens swing to the opposite side of an issue for the regime to secure majority support. Consistent with recent experimental work by Pan, Shao and Xu (2022), our findings imply that autocrats can lead public opinion, including among citizens who initially backed neither the autocrat nor the policy. We show that citizens shift their policy preferences when an autocrat expresses their support for a policy and frames it in a way that accords with individuals' prior dispositions (Greene and Robertson, 2017; Shirikov, 2024). However, in contrast to work showing that propaganda works best to reinforce the predispositions of regime supporters, our study shows how autocrats can also shift the policy preferences of regime opponents if policy change is framed to appeal to their core values.

Second, we contribute to a literature on war support that has been dominated by studies of the United States' wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Mueller, 1973; Herrman, Tetlock and Visser, 1999; Berinsky, 2009). In our setting, the individual economic consequences of conflict have much greater bearing on support for war. We expected regime efforts to persuade citizens for whom policy change is associated with consequences that are easy to benchmark, such as economic loss, to be less successful. And that is, in fact, what we found. Respondents who reported a substantial economic loss after the launch of the full-scale invasion were significantly less likely to become supporters of the war. Our findings suggest that material factors, including economic sanctions resulting from foreign military aggression that have a direct bearing on citizens' well-being, can sway domestic public opinion against the continuation of war (Aksoy, Enamorado and Yang, 2024). Beyond these material factors, our study also advances literature on the role of moral values in politics. Its findings from a prominent autocracy align with previous work showing that morality is an important driver of attitudes toward the use of military force in other contexts (Kertzer et al., 2014). Linking the full-scale invasion to the defense of traditional morality appears to have helped make it moral and justifiable in the eyes of many Russians (Wollast et al., 2025), including those who initially opposed it and the regime.

Third, our study has implications for the literature on authoritarian propaganda, particularly during crises and accompanying policy changes when regimes need support most. Recent work argues that, during crises, typical propaganda strategies are limited (Yang and Zhu, 2025). Hard propaganda may signal strength but also provoke backlash, while soft propaganda may appear contradictory, worsening public evaluations of government policy. Our findings imply that autocrats succeed when facing a policy reversal by shifting the terms of debate, strategically reframing policies by linking them in novel ways to popular predispositions.

For scholars of Russian public opinion and the literature on Russian domestic attitudes about the Ukraine war, specifically (Tkachenko and Vyrskaia, 2025; Wollast et al., 2025; Krishnarajan and Tolstrup, 2023*b*), these results remind us that the coalition in support of war is diverse. It includes many Russians who previously did not support Putin, social conservatives, and anti-Westernizers. At the same time, Putin's ability to manipulate public opinion is substantial, but also limited in important ways. Indeed, roughly half (48%) of Putin's pre-invasion supporters declined to back continuing the war after it began, a finding that cautions us against overestimating both the power of an autocrat's cue and the level of societal assent elicited by opinion surveys.

We have studied public attitudes toward Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but have not explored whether these attitudes are associated with greater activism against the war. Our results indicate that even in Russia's repressive political environment, a majority of survey respondents are willing to withhold support for continuing the war when speaking to an unfamiliar interviewer, but this does not imply that they are willing to take costly action to oppose the war. We also make no claims that public opinion in Russia is shaping policy toward Ukraine. On one hand, the Kremlin has continued to pursue the war despite large and unexpected losses. On the other hand, the Kremlin has been attentive to public concerns about mobilizing Russians into the war. It has been reluctant to announce full-scale conscription of the war-age population or even to declare a partial mobilization. It has also been determined to minimize declines in living standards given the economic stresses of war, and to compensate families and businesses who have suffered the most direct forms of loss.

Finally, we have studied public support for a specific conflict in a specific context. Russia is a personalist autocracy, a former superpower that launched a full-scale invasion against a neighbor with whom it once shared a government. It has faced significant economic sanctions and has used massive repression to mute anti-war sentiment. Whether these results extend to single-party autocracies, such as Vietnam or China, to countries with smaller international footprints, or to countries with different threat environments should be topics for future research.

References

Adena, M., R Enikolopov, M Petrova, V Santarosa and Zhuravskaya E. 2015. "Radio and the rise of the Nazis in prewar Germany." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130(4):1885–939.

Aksoy, Deniz, Ted Enamorado and Tony Zirui Yang. 2024. "Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Chinese Public Support for War." *International Organization* 78(2):341–360.

Andrews, Talbot M., Carol Atkinson-Palombo, Oksan Bayulgen, Adam Gallaher and Lyle Scruggs. 2025. "The winds of change? Attitudes toward wind projects and their electoral implications in Texas." *Energy Policy* 202.

Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing minds or changing channels?: Partisan news in an age of choice*. University of Chicago Press.

Barber, Michael and Jeremy C. Pope. 2024. "Does issue importance attenuate partisan cue-taking?" *Political Science Research and Methods* 12(2):435–443.

Baum, Matthew A. and Tim Groeling. 2009. "Shot by the Messenger: Partisan Cues and Public Opinion Regarding National Security and War." *Political Behavior* 31(2):1.

Berinsky, Adam J. 2009. *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. University of Chicago Press.

Berinsky, Adam J. and Jamie Druckman. 2007. "Public Opinion Research and Support for the Iraq War." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 71(1):126–141.

Blakkisrud, Helge and Pål Kolstø, eds. 2025. *Political Legitimacy and Traditional Values in Putin's Russia*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2017. "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(8):1191–1226.

Chapkovski, Philip and Max Schaub. 2022. "Solid support or secret dissent? A list experiment on preference falsification during the Russian war against Ukraine." *Research and Politics* 9(2):1–6.

Cottiero, Christina, Katherine Kucharski, Evgenia Olimpieva and Robert W. Orttung. 2015. "War of words: the impact of Russian state television on the Russian Internet." *Nationalities Papers* 43(4):533–555.

D'Anieri, Paul. 2023. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Vries, Catherine E. 2007. "Sleeping giant: Fact or fairytale? How European integration affects national elections." *European Union Politics* 8(3):363–385.

DeSisto, Isabella, Grigore Pop-Eleches and Jacob Tucker. 2025. "The Threshold Effect: Preference Falsification versus Weak Preferences in Russian War Support." Unpublished manuscript. Princeton University.

Erlich, Aaron and C. Garner. 2023. "Is pro-Kremlin disinformation effective? Evidence from Ukraine." *International Journal of Press/Politics* 28(1):5–28.

Feaver, Peter D. and Christopher Gelpi. 2004. *Choosing Your Battles*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Finkel, Eugene. 2024. *Intent to Destroy: Russia's Two-Hundred-Year Quest to Dominate Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books.

Frye, Timothy, Henry Hale, Ora John Reuter and Bryn Rosenfeld. 2024. "Sensitivity Bias in Regime Support: Evidence from Panel Surveys in an Autocracy at War." Working paper. `https://socialsciences.cornell.edu/files/sensitivity_bias_in_regime_support.pdf`.

Geddes, Barbara and John Zaller. 1989. "Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 33(2):319–347.

Gehlbach, Scott. 2010. "Reflections on Putin and the Media." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26(1):77–87.

Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver and Jason Reifler. 2005. "Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq." *International Security* 30:7–46.

Gerschewski, Johannes. 2023. *The two logics of autocratic rule*. Cambridge University Press.

Greene, Samuel and Graeme Robertson. 2017. "Agreeable authoritarians: Personality and politics in contemporary Russia." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(13):1802–1834.

Guriev, Sergei and Daniel Treisman. 2019. "Informational Autocrats." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33(4):100–127.

Guriev, Sergei and Daniel Treisman. 2022. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press.

Hale, Henry E. and Adam C. Lenton. 2024. "Do Autocrats Need a Foreign Enemy? Evidence from Fortress Russia." *International Security* 49(1):9–50.

Herrman, Richard, Philip Tetlock and Penny Visser. 1999. "Mass Public Decisions on Go to War: A Cognitive Interactionist Framework." *American Political Science Review* 93(3):553–573.

Keele, Luke and Nathan J. Kelly. 2006. "Dynamic Models for Dynamic Theories: The Ins and Outs of Lagged Dependent Variables." *Political Analysis* 14(2):186–205.

Kertzer, Joshua D., Kathleen E. Powers, Brian C. Rathbun and Ravi Iyer. 2014. "Moral Support: How Moral Values Shape Foreign Policy Attitudes." *The Journal of Politics* 76(3):825–840.

Krishnarajan, Suthan and Jakob Tolstrup. 2023*a*. "Pre-war experimental evidence that Putin's propaganda elicited strong support for military invasion among Russians." *Science Advances* 9(45):eadg1199.

Krishnarajan, Suthan and Jakub Tolstrup. 2023*b*. "Pre-War Experimental Evidence that Putin's Propaganda Elicited Strong Support for Military Invasion among Russians." *Science Advances* 9(45).

Lakoff, George and Sam Ferguson. 2006. "The Framing of Immigration." *Rockridge Institute Paper* .
URL: *https://escholarship.org/content/qt0j89f85g/qt0j89f85g.pdf*

Li, Xiaojun and Dingding Chen. 2021. "Public opinion, international reputation, and audience costs in an authoritarian regime." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38(5):543–560.

Linz, Juan. 1975. Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes. In *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby. Addison Wesley pp. 191–357.

Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy*. Cambridge University Press.

McCann, James A. 1997. "Electoral choices and core value change: The 1992 presidential campaign." *American Journal of Political Science* 41(2):564–583.

Mickiewicz, E. 1988. *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union*. Oxford University Press.

Mueller, John E. 1973. *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Nathan, Andrew J. 2003. "China's changing of the guard: Authoritarian resilience." *Journal of democracy* 14(1):6–17.

Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. 2010. "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions." *Political Behavior* 32(2):303–330.

Onuch, Olga and Henry E. Hale. 2022. *The Zelensky Effect*. London: Hurst.

Pan, Jennifer, Zijie Shao and Yiqing Xu. 2022. "How government-controlled media shifts policy attitudes through framing." *Political Science Research and Methods* 10(2):317–332.

Peisakhin, Leonid and Arturas Rozenas. 2018. "Electoral effects of biased media: Russian television in Ukraine." *American journal of political science* 62(3):535–550.

Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*. University of Chicago Press.

Popova, Maria and Oxana Shevel. 2024. *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States*. Cambridge: Polity.

Robertson, Graeme. 2017. "Political orientation, information and perceptions of election fraud: Evidence from Russia." *British Journal of Political Science* 47(3):589–608.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. 2018. "The popularity costs of economic crisis under electoral authoritarianism: Evidence from Russia." *American journal of political science* 62(2):382–397.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. 2023*a*. "Curious What Russians Think about the War? Ask Yourself This before You Read the Polls." *Russian Analytical Digest* No. 292: The value of public opinion polls:4–7.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. 2023*b*. "Survey Research in Russia: in the Shadow of War." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39(1):38–48.

Rosenfeld, Bryn and Jeremy Wallace. 2024. "Information Politics and Propaganda in Authoritarian Societies." *Annual Review of Political Science* 27:263–281.

Rozenas, Arturas and Denis Stukal. 2019. "How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia's State-Controlled Television." *The Journal of Politics* 81(3):982–996.
URL: *https://doi.org/10.1086/703208*

Schwartz, Shalom H., Gian Vittorio Caprara, Michele Vecchione, Paul Bain, Gabriel Bianchi, Maria Giovanna Caprara, Jan Cieciuch, Hasan Kirmanoglu, Cem Baslevent, Jan-Erik Lönnqvist, Catalin Mamali, Jorge Manzi, Vassilis Pavlopoulos, Tetyana Posnova, Harald Schoen, Jo Silvester, Carmen Tabernero, Claudio Torres, Markku Verkasalo, Eva Vondráková, Christian Welzel and Zbigniew Zaleski. 2014. "Basic Personal Values Underlie and Give Coherence to Political Values: A Cross National Study in 15 Countries." *Political Behavior* 36(4):899–930.

Shirikov, Anton. 2024. "Rethinking propaganda: how state media build trust through belief affirmation." *The Journal of Politics* 86(4):1319–1332.

Slothuus, Rune and Martin Bisgaard. 2021. "How Political Parties Shape Public Opinion in the Real World." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(4):896–911.

Smeltz, Dina, Lily Wojtowicz, Denis Volkov and Stepan Goncharov. 2023. "Do Russians Fear the West?" The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. `https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/do-russians-fear-west`.

Taber, Charles S and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs." *American journal of political science* 50(3):755–769.

Taylor, Adam. 2022. "Russia's attack on Ukraine came after months of denials it would attack." *The Washington Post* .
URL: *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/24/ukraine-russia-denials/*

Tkachenko, Andrey and Marina Vyrskaia. 2025. "Public Opinion and Casualties in Wartime Censorhsip." Unpublished manuscript. Nazarbayev University.

Tomz, Michael R and Jessica LP Weeks. 2013. "Public opinion and the democratic peace." *American political science review* 107(4):849–865.

Volkov, Denis and Andrei Kolesnikov. 2023. "Alternate Reality: How Russian Society Learned to Stop Worrying About the War." Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center Working Paper. `https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/11/alternate-reality-how-russian-society-learned-to-stop-worrying-about-the-war?lang=en&center=europe`.

Wedeen, Lisa. 1998. "Acting "as if": symbolic politics and social control in Syria." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40(3):503–523.

Weeks, Jessica L. 2008. "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve." *International Organization* 62(1):35–64.

Weeks, Jessica L. 2012. "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict." *American Political Science Review* 106(2):326–347.

Weiss, Jessica Chen and Allan Dafoe. 2019. "Authoritarian Audiences, Rhetoric, and Propaganda in International Crises: Evidence from China." *International Studies Quarterly* 63(4):pp. 963–973.

Wollast, Robin, Joseph B. Phillips, Illia Yahiiaiev, Karine Malysheva, Olivier Klein and Nikhil K. Sengupta. 2025. "Russians' Attitudes Towards the War in Ukraine." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 55(1):119–135.

Yang, Tony Zirui and Hongshen Zhu. 2025. "Twisted Tongue: Limits of China's Propaganda during Crises and Policy Changes." *Accepted in Political Science Research and Methods* .

Yudin, Gregory. 2022. "The War in Ukraine: Do Russians Support Putin." *Journal of Democracy* 33(3):31–37.

Zaller, John. 2012. "What Nature and Origins Leaves Out." *Critical Review* 24(4):569–642. **URL:** *https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2012.807648*

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

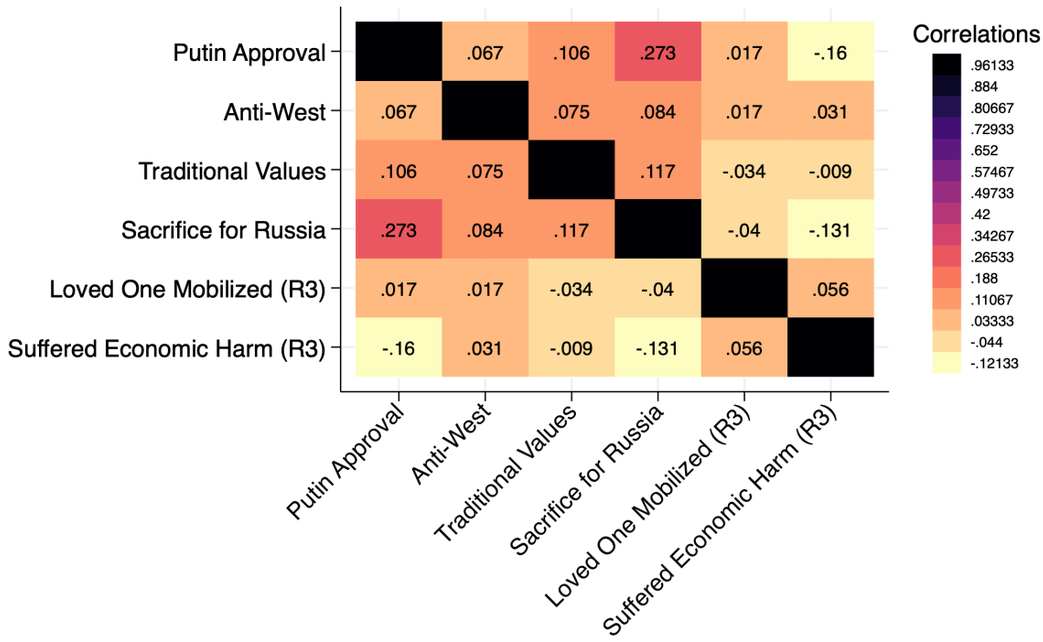
Appendix: "Who Follows the Autocrat? Evidence from a Panel Survey Spanning Russia's Invasion of Ukraine"

A1 Descriptive Statistics

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD	N
Hard War Support	0	1	0.34	0.47	1038
Support War	0	1	0.43	0.50	1038
War Assessed as Success	0	1	0.71	0.45	1250
War Support (R4)	0	1	0.48	0.50	1513
Antipathy Toward War Opponents	0	10	4.67	3.08	855
Scale War Support (R4)	0	100	53.43	36.93	1346
Age	0	1	0.41	0.23	2501
Woman	0	1	0.56	0.50	2501
Education	1	8	5.27	1.20	2493
Community Size	1	5	2.68	1.31	2501
Russian	0	1	0.70	0.46	3010
Economic Status	1	7	3.34	1.23	2469
Putin Approval	0	1	0.62	0.49	2980
Gets News from State TV	0	1	0.52	0.50	2495
Anti-West	1	4	2.31	0.78	2810
Supports Traditional Values (4pt Scale) [W1]	1	4	3.69	0.63	2461
Sacrifice for Russia	1	5	2.58	1.30	2869
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	0	1	0.17	0.38	1038
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	0	1	0.44	0.50	1038
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0	1	0.08	0.27	2980
Arm Militants	0	1	0.08	0.26	2980
Humanitarian Assistance	0	1	0.33	0.47	2980
Moral Support	0	1	0.32	0.46	2980
Economy Worse: Egotropic	1	5	3.31	0.98	2478
Economy Worse: Egotropic(R3)	1	5	3.26	0.94	1027
Economy Worse: Sociotropic	1	5	3.58	1.06	2281
Economy Worse: Sociotropic(R3)	1	5	3.59	1.08	911
Own Economic Buying Power Worsened (Between Wave 1 and Wave 4)	-6	5	-0.18	1.39	963
Egotropic: Economy Worsened Between 2021 and 2023	-4	4	-0.11	1.16	1019
Sociotropic: Economy Worsened Between 2021 and 2023	-4	4	-0.08	1.31	857
Social Conservative Scale (R4)	4	16	12.29	2.36	945
Trad. Family(R4)	1	4	3.71	0.61	1490
Anti-Abortion(R4)	1	4	2.59	1.09	1326
Anti-LGBT(R4)	1	4	3.18	0.97	1316
Mystical Patriotism(R4)	1	4	2.85	1.06	1099
Religious	0	1	0.80	0.40	2494
Loved One Mobilized(R4)	0	1	0.05	0.22	4218
Fears NATO	0	1	0.70	0.46	2501
Friend/Loved One Casualty (R4)	0	1	0.35	0.48	1427
Russian Identity	0	1	0.51	0.50	2980
Scale of KPRF Support	0	10	4.49	2.71	2782
Scale of LDPR Support	0	10	4.08	2.74	2808
Scale of Just Russia Support	0	10	4.28	2.57	2652
Scale of Yabloko Support	0	10	2.60	2.24	2403
Prefers Socialist Economy	1	3	1.96	0.91	3275
Supports Price Controls	1	4	3.66	0.72	3658
Govt Shoudld Increase Taxes	1	4	3.47	0.85	3608
Govt Should Mandate Vax	1	4	2.05	1.15	3580
Govt Should Do More on Global Warming	1	4	3.29	0.90	3537
Anti-Migrant	1	4	2.99	1.06	3582
Favors Law on Protecting Religious Believers	1	4	3.16	1.01	2702
Favors Restrictions on LGBT+ Community	1	4	3.58	0.83	2875
Scale of Social Conservatism	3	12	10.44	1.82	2618
Would Vote for Navalny (2021)	0	1	0.05	0.22	3980
Antagonistic Toward China	1	4	1.96	0.72	2852

Figure A1: Correlations Among Key Variables



A2 Survey Methodology

Fieldwork for the nationally representative face-to-face panel survey was conducted by the reputable Russian polling organization the Levada Center. The initial surveys took place just before and after Russia's September 2021 parliamentary elections as part of a two-wave election panel. Respondents were selected using a multi-stage, stratified, probability-based design to be nationally representative of Russia's adult population. The achieved sample includes 2,501 respondents in the first wave. Data were collected August 26 - September 15, 2021. Informed consent was obtained from all participants along with consent to recontact respondents as panel subjects. Respondents were reminded of the risks of participation, in particular violation of their confidentiality, and were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could skip questions or terminate the interview at any time. The AAPOR-1 response rate for the survey was 46 percent. In December, following the election, we attempted to recontact all members of the panel and interviewed an additional 1,208 respondents from a fresh nationally representative refresh sample. The fieldwork for the panel recontacts took place from December 3–22. Interviews for the fresh cross-section were conducted December 7–22. The achieved re-contact rate among panelists in the second round was 70.9 percent. Respondents in both waves were offered an incentive payment. Interviews for the third (post-invasion) survey wave took place between September 14 and October 2, 2023. Only panel respondents to both the first and second waves were eligible to participate. In total, we re-interviewed 1,038 respondents, for a response rate in the third wave of 58 percent. The cooperation rate out of all respondents whom we were able to recontact in wave three was 68 percent (1,038 respondents were re-interviewed out of 1,524 who could be reached). As in the study's initial waves, respondents were offered an incentive payment of about 15 USD. The survey instrument and consent script for each wave of the survey was approved by the authors' Institutional Review Boards, which also provide ongoing oversight of this research. There were no known breaches of respondents' confidentiality, incidents of unauthorized disclosure of respondents' personal information, or reports of unintended harms. Waves 1 and 2 were funded by the National Science Foundation. Wave 4 was funded in part by the National Council for Russian and East European Research (NCEEER).

A2.1 Wording of 2021 survey question on attitudes toward war

"What should Russia do in the war in Ukraine? You may choose multiple answers."

1. send humanitarian aid
2. provide moral support to Ukrainians fighting against Kyiv authorities

3. train and arm Ukrainians fighting against Kyiv authorities

4. send Russian armed forces to participate in battles in Ukraine on the side of Ukrainians fighting against Kyiv authorities

5. [volunteered] Russia should stay out

6. [volunteered] Hard to say

7. [volunteered] Refuse to answer

A3 Full Model Specifications

Table A2: Table 1: Full Specification

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.143**	0.126**
	(0.042)	(0.040)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.131**	-0.110**
	(0.034)	(0.034)
Traditional Values	0.065**	0.051**
	(0.025)	(0.024)
Anti-West	0.088**	0.037
	(0.023)	(0.023)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.014	0.014
	(0.017)	(0.017)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.047	-0.022
	(0.036)	(0.040)
Gets News from State TV	0.065*	0.079**
	(0.036)	(0.039)
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.008	0.066
	(0.054)	(0.059)
Age	0.190**	0.105
	(0.090)	(0.088)
Woman	-0.211**	-0.186**
	(0.033)	(0.031)
Education	-0.005	0.002
	(0.015)	(0.013)
Community Size	0.022	0.011
	(0.014)	(0.013)
Russian	0.044	0.031
	(0.042)	(0.041)
Economic Status	-0.005	-0.008
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Constant	-0.095	-0.007
	(0.131)	(0.119)
Observations	923	923
R-squared	0.166	0.115

** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table A3: Table 2: Full Specification

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.130**	-0.098**
	(0.042)	(0.042)
Traditional Values	0.085**	0.072*
	(0.039)	(0.039)
Anti-West	0.109**	0.022
	(0.028)	(0.029)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.004	-0.004
	(0.018)	(0.020)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.004	-0.009
	(0.041)	(0.047)
Gets News from State TV	0.067	0.100**
	(0.046)	(0.049)
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.036	0.093
	(0.063)	(0.072)
Age	0.275**	0.156
	(0.112)	(0.110)
Woman	-0.202**	-0.180**
	(0.044)	(0.042)
Education	-0.017	0.001
	(0.018)	(0.016)
Community Size	0.026	0.015
	(0.018)	(0.018)
Russian	0.015	-0.001
	(0.056)	(0.055)
Economic Status	0.012	0.006
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Constant	-0.084	0.055
	(0.180)	(0.166)
Observations	570	570
R-squared	0.154	0.080

** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table A4: Table 3 Full Specification

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support	(3) War Support	(4) Hard War Support
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.146**	-0.122**	-0.164**	-0.194**
	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.063)	(0.056)
Traditional Values	-0.121	-0.134*	0.100**	0.053
	(0.075)	(0.073)	(0.042)	(0.041)
Anti-West	0.095**	0.043*	0.090**	0.088**
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.042)	(0.038)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.022	0.020	-0.006	0.013
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.030)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.036	-0.013	-0.189**	-0.161**
	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.074)	(0.076)
Gets News from State TV	0.083**	0.096**	-0.003	0.044
	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.079)	(0.074)
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.027	0.084	-0.217**	-0.106
	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.095)	(0.089)
Age	0.218**	0.137	0.138	0.078
	(0.092)	(0.088)	(0.195)	(0.174)
Woman	-0.195**	-0.173**	-0.202**	-0.229**
	(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.054)	(0.050)
Education	-0.006	0.002	-0.001	-0.004
	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.028)	(0.025)
Community Size	0.025*	0.014	0.025	0.017
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.026)	(0.024)
Russian	0.043	0.029	0.147**	0.100
	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.067)	(0.060)
Economic Status	-0.003	-0.006	-0.005	-0.008
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.028)	(0.023)
Political Awareness	-0.265**	-0.267**		
	(0.092)	(0.090)		
Political Awareness X Traditional Values	0.073**	0.073**		
	(0.025)	(0.024)		
Constant	0.588*	0.680**	-0.203	-0.043
	(0.301)	(0.281)	(0.312)	(0.264)
Observations	921	921	206	206
R-squared	0.159	0.111	0.167	0.179

** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.
Models 3 and 4 are subset to politically aware Putin non-supporters.

Table A5: Table 4: Full Specification

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.144**	0.144**
	(0.051)	(0.049)
Traditional Values	0.108**	0.078**
	(0.030)	(0.027)
Anti-West	0.064**	0.016
	(0.030)	(0.027)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.017	0.013
	(0.022)	(0.024)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.067	-0.007
	(0.058)	(0.058)
Gets News from State TV	-0.002	0.017
	(0.056)	(0.054)
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.007	0.078
	(0.067)	(0.072)
Age	0.310**	0.253**
	(0.128)	(0.104)
Woman	-0.208**	-0.185**
	(0.047)	(0.045)
Education	-0.004	0.017
	(0.018)	(0.017)
Community Size	0.013	-0.003
	(0.018)	(0.017)
Russian	0.058	0.069
	(0.055)	(0.051)
Economic Status	0.004	-0.009
	(0.021)	(0.019)
Constant	-0.368**	-0.273**
	(0.166)	(0.134)
Observations	413	413
R-squared	0.156	0.125

** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.
.

Table A6: Table 5: Full Specification

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) War Support	(3) War Support	(4) War Support	(5) War Support	(6) War Support
Age	0.245**	0.240**	0.221**	0.243**	0.272**	0.245**
	(0.092)	(0.085)	(0.088)	(0.087)	(0.088)	(0.081)
Woman	-0.215**	-0.237**	-0.232**	-0.233**	-0.244**	-0.255**
	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.033)
Education	0.002	-0.000	-0.003	0.000	-0.004	-0.003
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Community Size	0.033**	0.029**	0.029**	0.033**	0.033**	0.028**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Russian	0.011	0.026	0.033	0.032	0.040	0.041
	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Orthodox	0.043	0.036	0.036	0.029	0.035	0.039
	(0.035)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Economic Status	-0.010	-0.009	-0.006	-0.015	-0.011	-0.009
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Putin Approval	0.173**	0.177**	0.178**	0.166**	0.176**	0.172**
	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.037)
Gets News from State TV	0.083**	0.073**	0.075**	0.070*	0.077**	0.087**
	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.036)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.021	-0.050	-0.038	-0.047	-0.039	-0.051
	(0.038)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.037)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.123**	-0.113**	-0.115**	-0.110**	-0.122**	-0.123**
	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Support Sending Troops in 2021	-0.007	0.018	0.027	0.030	0.012	0.005
	(0.062)	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.058)	(0.058)
Prefers Socialist Economy	0.020					
	(0.019)					
Supports Price Controls		0.017				
		(0.020)				
Govt Shoudld Increase Taxes			0.021			
			(0.018)			
Govt Should Mandate Vax				0.032*		
				(0.017)		
Govt Should Do More on Global Warming					0.024	
					(0.017)	
Anti-Migrant						0.022
						(0.016)
Constant	0.239**	0.235**	0.229**	0.245**	0.221**	0.256**
	(0.111)	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.104)	(0.094)	(0.103)
Observations	905	1,010	996	989	972	988
R-squared	0.135	0.139	0.137	0.151	0.149	0.151

** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

A4 Demographic Correlates of War Support

Table A7: Demographic Correlates of Supporting War

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.038	0.084
	(0.058)	(0.059)
Age	0.422**	0.299**
	(0.084)	(0.075)
Woman	-0.221**	-0.187**
	(0.031)	(0.029)
Education	-0.007	-0.004
	(0.013)	(0.012)
Community Size	0.025*	0.013
	(0.014)	(0.013)
Russian	0.041	0.023
	(0.044)	(0.040)
Economic Status	0.003	0.003
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Constant	0.320**	0.275**
	(0.091)	(0.086)
Observations	1,028	1,028
R-squared	0.081	0.057

** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

A5 Support for Going to War in 2021

To better understand the baseline support for sending troops and for sending troops or arms in December 2021, we regressed support for continuing the war. Model 1 analyzes the determinants of support for sending in the troops in December 2021. Higher education and relying on state television for news are negatively correlated with support for sending in troops while having Anti-Western views is positively associated with this outcome. Other variables, including Putin support, economic status, and traditional values are unrelated to support for sending in troops. It is interesting how few variables of interest predict support for sending troops or sending troops/arms in December 2021.

Table A8: Support for Sending in the Troops: December 2021

VARIABLES	(1) War Support
Age	0.017
	(0.065)
Woman	-0.038*
	(0.020)
Education	-0.015**
	(0.007)
Community Size	0.002
	(0.010)
Russian	-0.008
	(0.028)
Orthodox	-0.017
	(0.026)
Economic Status	0.017
	(0.011)
Putin Approval	0.034*
	(0.018)
Gets News from State TV	-0.045**
	(0.023)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.002
	(0.008)
Anti-West	0.014
	(0.016)
Traditional Values	0.017
	(0.017)
Constant	0.032
	(0.086)
Observations	923
R-squared	0.026

Standard errors in parentheses
** p<0.05, * p<0.1

A6 Positions on War in Ukraine in 2021

This model reports the baseline model on support for continuing the war, but includes all responses to the Ukraine war policy question from 2021. This examines how past policy positions predict future policy positions on the war. Those who favored sending Arms in 2021 were more likely to support continuing war in 2023, those who refused to answer in 2021 were less likely to support continuing the war in 2021, other variables are unrelated to the dependent variable. The excluded category is those who responded that Russia should not take part in the conflict.

Table A9: Effect of Pre-War Positions on Ukraine on Support for War in 2023

VARIABLES	(1) War Support
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.024
	(0.061)
Arm Militants	0.172**
	(0.056)
Humanitarian Assistance	0.012
	(0.039)
Moral Support	0.005
	(0.039)
Putin Approval	0.147**
	(0.042)
Anti-West	0.078**
	(0.023)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.011
	(0.016)
Traditional Values	0.062**
	(0.026)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.037
	(0.037)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.133**
	(0.034)
Constant	-0.070
	(0.143)
Observations	923
R-squared	0.186
Demographics	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A10: Rallying to Support the War: Sample Subset to Those Who Did Not Support Deploying Russian Troops in December 2021

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.141**	0.129**
	(0.043)	(0.041)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.137**	-0.116**
	(0.036)	(0.035)
Traditional Values	0.057**	0.041
	(0.026)	(0.025)
Anti-West	0.075**	0.018
	(0.024)	(0.023)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.007	0.007
	(0.018)	(0.018)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.045	-0.014
	(0.040)	(0.044)
Constant	0.022	0.099
	(0.140)	(0.130)
Observations	849	849
R-squared	0.156	0.106
Demographics	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

A7 Alternative Measurement Approaches

Table A11: Rallying to Support the War: Alternative Traditional Morality Measures in Wave 3

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
				Hard	Hard	Hard
	War	War	War	War	War	War
VARIABLES	Support	Support	Support	Support	Support	Support
Putin Approval	0.133**	0.100**	0.098**	0.111**	0.080*	0.077*
	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.046)	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.043)
Gets News from State TV	0.066*	0.058	0.043	0.079**	0.065	0.060
	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.041)
Anti-West	0.085**	0.092**	0.090**	0.033	0.035	0.032
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.011	0.016	0.015	0.009	0.014	0.011
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.050	-0.043	-0.059	-0.030	-0.031	-0.044
	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.046)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.135**	-0.123**	-0.118**	-0.104**	-0.104**	-0.099**
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Favors Restrictions on LGBT+ Community	0.014			0.041**		
	(0.021)			(0.020)		
Favors Law on Protecting Religious Believers		0.029			0.048**	
		(0.018)			(0.018)	
Scale of Social Conservatism			0.022**			0.033**
			(0.010)			(0.010)
Constant	0.094	-0.003	-0.099	0.054	0.022	-0.120
	(0.122)	(0.120)	(0.154)	(0.110)	(0.118)	(0.142)
Observations	910	851	825	910	851	825
R-squared	0.158	0.158	0.157	0.113	0.113	0.113
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A12: Rallying to Support the War: Traditional Morality in Wave 4

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) War Support	(3) War Support	(4) War Support	(5) Hard War Support	(6) Hard War Support	(7) Hard War Support	(8) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.050	0.060	0.038	0.055	0.090**	0.095**	0.094**	0.095**
	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.039)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.040**	0.031**	0.039**	0.040**	0.045**	0.037**	0.041**	0.033**
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.016)
Anti-West	0.066**	0.064**	0.054**	0.052**	0.058**	0.060**	0.061**	0.068**
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Gets News from State TV	0.091**	0.105**	0.105**	0.118**	0.077**	0.080**	0.097**	0.104**
	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.032)
Loved One Mobilized(R4)	-0.052	-0.082*	-0.036	-0.062	-0.095**	-0.109**	-0.100**	-0.125**
	(0.044)	(0.049)	(0.048)	(0.053)	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.055)
Suffered Economic Harm(R4)	-0.153**	-0.155**	-0.177**	-0.160**	-0.106**	-0.099**	-0.104**	-0.109**
	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.032)
Trad. Family(R4)	0.066**				0.060**			
	(0.019)				(0.021)			
Anti-LGBT(R4)		0.029				0.033		
		(0.018)				(0.023)		
Anti-Abortion(R4)			0.028				0.024	
			(0.017)				(0.017)	
Mystical Patriotism(R4)				0.062**				0.052**
				(0.019)				(0.016)
Constant	-0.230*	-0.033	-0.039	-0.108	-0.424**	-0.275**	-0.264**	-0.324**
	(0.119)	(0.113)	(0.125)	(0.152)	(0.112)	(0.102)	(0.122)	(0.132)
Observations	886	772	765	633	785	696	685	582
R-squared	0.161	0.169	0.164	0.193	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.180
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A13: Rallying to Support the War: Alternative Economic Indicators

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Putin Approval	0.072**	0.145**	0.153**	0.177**	0.162**
	(0.036)	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.041)
Anti-West	0.041*	0.094**	0.090**	0.092**	0.087**
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.027)	(0.023)
Traditional Values	0.033	0.060**	0.063**	0.057*	0.064**
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.026)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.036**	0.001	0.015	0.016	0.017
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Gets News from State TV	0.080**	0.032	0.057	0.066	0.063*
	(0.036)	(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.043)	(0.038)
Loved One Mobilized(R4)	-0.050				
	(0.046)				
Own Economic Buying Power Worsened (Between Wave 1 and Wave 4)	-0.058**				
	(0.015)				
Loved One Mobilized (R3)		-0.031	-0.046	-0.043	-0.047
		(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.042)	(0.038)
Economy Worse: Sociotropic(R3)		-0.100**			
		(0.017)			
Economy Worse: Egotropic(R3)			-0.047**		
			(0.018)		
Sociotropic: Economy Worsened Between 2021 and 2023				-0.044**	
				(0.014)	
Egotropic: Economy Worsened Between 2021 and 2023					-0.031**
					(0.015)
Constant	-0.238	0.232	-0.047	-0.148	-0.197
	(0.152)	(0.163)	(0.147)	(0.146)	(0.133)
Observations	864	821	917	779	913
R-squared	0.137	0.182	0.155	0.162	0.150
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A14: Rallying to Support the War: Alternative Economic Indicators (Among Putin Supporters)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Anti-West	0.052*	0.115**	0.104**	0.117**	0.102**
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.028)
Traditional Values	0.022	0.059	0.071*	0.050	0.067
	(0.035)	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.050**	-0.017	0.005	-0.002	0.006
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Gets News from State TV	0.075*	0.056	0.051	0.089*	0.061
	(0.044)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.052)	(0.046)
Loved One Mobilized(R4)	-0.010				
	(0.056)				
Own Economic Buying Power Worsened (Between Wave 1 and Wave 4)	-0.055**				
	(0.019)				
Loved One Mobilized (R3)		-0.016	0.002	-0.027	0.001
		(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.046)	(0.041)
Economy Worse: Sociotropic(R3)		-0.098**			
		(0.022)			
Economy Worse: Egotropic(R3)			-0.055**		
			(0.025)		
Sociotropic: Economy Worsened Between 2021 and 2023				-0.047**	
				(0.017)	
Egotropic: Economy Worsened Between 2021 and 2023					-0.033*
					(0.019)
Constant	-0.312	0.316	0.002	-0.027	-0.161
	(0.196)	(0.222)	(0.210)	(0.216)	(0.199)
Observations	554	511	567	482	567
R-squared	0.161	0.160	0.149	0.144	0.146
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Standard errors in parentheses
** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A15: Multinomial Probit: Support, Oppose, and Non-Response in War Support Question

	(1) (Opposition vs Non-Response)	(2) (Support vs Non-Response)
Age	0.040	0.993**
	(0.368)	(0.364)
Woman	-0.084	-0.865**
	(0.153)	(0.149)
Education	-0.027	-0.014
	(0.061)	(0.061)
Community Size	-0.040	0.067
	(0.057)	(0.056)
Russian	-0.033	0.208
	(0.194)	(0.199)
Orthodox	-0.235	-0.055
	(0.171)	(0.173)
Economic Status	0.022	0.005
	(0.063)	(0.063)
Putin Approval	-0.098	0.446**
	(0.152)	(0.153)
Gets News from State TV	0.134	0.284*
	(0.156)	(0.154)
Anti-West	0.077	0.340**
	(0.096)	(0.095)
Supports Traditional Values (4pt Scale) [W1]	-0.250**	0.080
	(0.114)	(0.122)
Sacrifice for Russia	-0.042	0.026
	(0.063)	(0.061)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.196	-0.228
	(0.188)	(0.187)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	0.212	-0.384**
	(0.143)	(0.143)
Support Sending Troops in 2021	0.133	0.191
	(0.276)	(0.271)
Constant	1.509**	-0.979
	(0.630)	(0.651)
Observations	923	923

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A16: Alternative Dependent Variables

VARIABLES	(1) Antipathy Toward War Opponents	(2) Good Idea To Start War	(3) Scale War Support in Wave 4	(4) Hardest War Support	(5) Depth of War Support
Putin Approval	0.744**	0.063*	5.115	0.060	0.340**
	(0.272)	(0.033)	(3.136)	(0.039)	(0.116)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-1.128**	-0.065**		-0.076**	-0.327**
	(0.215)	(0.029)		(0.031)	(0.091)
Traditional Values	0.420**	0.054**	3.379	0.055**	0.169**
	(0.175)	(0.018)	(2.058)	(0.020)	(0.064)
Anti-West	0.276*	0.067**	6.048**	0.035*	0.168**
	(0.143)	(0.020)	(1.742)	(0.020)	(0.062)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.170	0.032**	4.693**	0.013	0.038
	(0.105)	(0.014)	(1.114)	(0.017)	(0.048)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	0.044	0.045		-0.020	-0.080
	(0.275)	(0.043)		(0.043)	(0.107)
Loved One Mobilized(R4)			-3.239		
			(4.049)		
Suffered Economic Harm(R4)			-12.690**		
			(2.088)		
Constant	1.721*	-0.148	-4.356	-0.063	-0.214
	(0.986)	(0.111)	(10.755)	(0.106)	(0.319)
Observations	780	928	785	923	914
R-squared	0.165	0.094	0.198	0.090	0.146
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

Table A17: Effect of Traditional Values on War Support, Conditional on Level of Attention to War

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) Hard War Support
Putin Approval	0.110**	0.100**
	(0.044)	(0.042)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.147**	-0.120**
	(0.034)	(0.035)
Traditional Values	-0.103	-0.084
	(0.087)	(0.079)
Anti-West	0.075**	0.026
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.008	0.007
	(0.017)	(0.016)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.059	-0.032
	(0.036)	(0.039)
War Attention	-0.039	-0.025
	(0.088)	(0.082)
War_AttentionXTraditionalValues	0.047*	0.037
	(0.024)	(0.022)
Constant	0.217	0.233
	(0.324)	(0.293)
Observations	889	889
R-squared	0.213	0.151
Demographics	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.

A8 Alternative Explanations

Table A18: Alternative Explanations

VARIABLES	(1) War Support	(2) War Support	(3) War Support	(4) War Support	(5) War Support
Putin Approval	0.143**	0.100**	0.142**	0.144**	0.144**
	(0.042)	(0.047)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.045)
Gets News from State TV	0.065*	0.080**	0.064*	0.062*	0.081**
	(0.036)	(0.038)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.040)
Anti-West	0.088**	0.075**	0.087**	0.088**	0.083**
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.024)
Traditional Values	0.064**	0.075**	0.062**	0.065**	0.069**
	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.028)
Sacrifice for Russia	0.014	0.023	0.014	0.014	0.019
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Loved One Mobilized (R3)	-0.045	-0.055	-0.046	-0.044	-0.040
	(0.036)	(0.040)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Suffered Economic Harm (R3)	-0.131**	-0.137**	-0.131**	-0.135**	-0.123**
	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Scale of KPRF Support		-0.018**			
		(0.008)			
Scale of LDPR Support		0.010			
		(0.009)			
Scale of Just Russia Support		0.006			
		(0.011)			
Scale of Yabloko Support		-0.016*			
		(0.010)			
Russian Identity	0.021				
	(0.033)				
Fears NATO			0.025		
			(0.038)		
Antagonistic Toward China				0.007	
				(0.024)	
Would Vote for Navalny (2021)					0.019
					(0.075)
Constant	-0.089	-0.167	-0.098	-0.111	-0.148
	(0.131)	(0.147)	(0.131)	(0.133)	(0.133)
Observations	923	737	923	908	864
R-squared	0.166	0.203	0.166	0.165	0.163
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls include age, education, economic standing, state TV viewership, and whether the respondent supported sending Russian troops into Ukraine in late 2021.