JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY
2026, VOL. 33, NO. 5, 1257–1285
https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2463640

War, solidarity and welfare attitudes: Survey evidence from the war in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

How does interstate war affect social policy preferences? Historical research has emphasised war-induced surges in demand for social protection, solidarity and fairness norms as central factors behind welfare expansion. Yet evidence for demand-side shifts remains unsystematic and restricted to a handful of Western countries. The outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine has undoubtedly led to substantial shifts in popular attitudes. Based on original survey evidence from post-invasion Ukraine, matched with geolocated conflict data, this article seeks to elucidate the role of warfare in shaping welfare attitudes and prosocial preferences. We distinguish between two types of war impacts – proximate exposure to war violence and war-related financial deterioration – and show that these affect welfare-related attitudes differently. Whereas proximate exposure to conflict promotes national-level solidarity, war-related material victimisation is associated with higher support for social spending. Only weak support is found for an effect on fairness norms. While indicating that the historical link between warfare and demand for social policy has wider applicability, the results also underscore the variated impact of war and the resulting individual-level heterogeneity in attitudes. Finally, with the war ongoing, the Ukrainian case highlights the question of under which circumstances welfare demand may translate into policy change.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 6 August 2024; Accepted 2 February 2025

KEYWORDS Solidarity; welfare; social policy; Ukraine; war; preferences

Introduction

Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 brought industrialised mass warfare back to Europe. While wars cause immeasurable human suffering,

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Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2463640.

they are also seen as pacesetters and turning points in the development of advanced welfare states (Obinger et al., 2018; Obinger & Schmitt, 2018, 2020; Porter, 1994; Titmuss, 1950). But how did this growing state interference in social affairs come about? Two major explanations are offered in the literature which, however, must be considered complementary rather than competing. One argues that interstate wars lead to major transformations in politics such as centralisation, enhanced state and fiscal capacities, democratisation and related shifts in power resources which, in consequence, facilitate social policy expansion (Besley & Persson, 2009; Petersen et al., 2023; Scheve & Stasavage, 2010; Tilly, 1975). The key argument of the second explanation is that the horrors and uncertainties of war not only create tremendous social need and thus a demand for social protection, but also change individual behaviour and preferences towards solidarity and higher support for the welfare state. In contrast to the rich empirical literature in line with the first explanation focusing on the macro level, we know much less about the impact of interstate wars on welfare attitudes and preferences. What we know to date on the nexus between warfare and individual welfare preferences in countries of the Global North[1] is mainly based on natural experiments related to past wars (Erikson & Stoker, 2011; Heldring et al., 2022; Walter & Emmenegger, 2022). There are also studies relying on surveys which, however, in the case of interstate wars were conducted decades after the end of the Second World War (e.g., Grosjean, 2014). When it comes to measuring war impact, most existing studies investigating the influence of warfare on individual preferences and attitudes focus on exposure to violence. Other important aspects of warfare such as the repercussions of military conflict on people's economic situation are widely neglected (Price & Yaylaci, 2021). Furthermore, the extant literature typically does not differentiate between various micro-level explanations but rather focuses on a single causal mechanism linking warfare and welfare.

We use a survey conducted one year after Russia's attack on Ukraine to address these research desiderata. Existing Ukrainian surveys show that there is a noticeable shift in individual preferences towards greater support for social policy since the onset of the war. For instance, in July 2021, only 42% of Ukrainian citizens agreed that the state should be responsible for the welfare of every citizen. By August 2023, this proportion had risen to 58%, with the majority now endorsing state responsibility for citizens' welfare (Gradus Research Company, 2023).

Was this change in attitudes towards social policy a result of the war? Based on a probability-based telephone survey conducted in Ukraine in March 2023, this paper examines whether and how war has affected welfare-related attitudes.

To account for different dimensions of war exposure, we use two indicators to measure war impact on individual welfare attitudes, namely (i)

exposure to war violence and (ii) war-induced financial deterioration. Additionally, we take account of the fact that several different mechanisms might exist linking warfare and individual attitudes. Specifically, we analyse three different types of attitudes that individually or in combination can lead to welfare state expansion: (i) preferences for social spending (relative to other public policies), (ii) national solidarity (measured by the readiness to give money to non-locals) and (iii) preferences about fairness and equality when it comes to the distribution of war costs and burdens.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section, we present theoretical considerations and the state of the art on the relationship between war and welfare attitudes. Subsequently, we offer some background information on the Ukrainian political and economic context as well as on the Ukrainian welfare state. Afterwards, we describe our empirical strategy as well as key variables used in the regression analyses, before presenting the results. A final section concludes.

Theoretical considerations and state of the art

One main channel through which large-scale wars affect welfare state expansion refers to war impacts on preferences and attitudes towards social policy. Three closely related arguments on micro-level effects of warfare can be found in the extant literature: it is argued that wars (i) lead to high risk exposure and uncertainty and thus change individual preferences towards higher support for public social protection (i.e., risk pooling). Additionally, war is believed to (ii) increase solidarity in response to external threat and (iii) raises issues of fairness when it comes to the distribution of the costs and burdens of warfare.

The risk-pooling argument was pioneered by Dryzek and Goodin (1986) who argue that large-scale military conflicts generate profound and pervasive uncertainty which 'led to new popular demand for risk-spreading and broke down old barriers to it […]' (Dryzek & Goodin, 1986, p. 11). Since large segments of the population are exposed to the horrors of mass warfare and are uncertain about what the future will hold for them, it is in people's self-interest to support risk pooling (i.e., collective insurance) and thus welfare state expansion. Dryzek and Goodin (1986) provide evidence for this argument for Britain during the Second World War and they also find a significant impact of war intensity on social spending for a broader sample of countries. Building on Dryzek and Goodin (1986), Rehm (2016) offers a more general but similar explanation how national emergencies affect individual support for the welfare state. The key point is that risk exposure and social policy attitudes are correlated. Emergencies can be conceptualised as sudden shocks to risk pools which increase risk homogeneity in society. However, only major emergencies such as a deep economic crisis or large-scale wars

increase support for risk pooling (i.e., social insurance) as large segments of the population are exposed to high risks and uncertainty. Rehm (2016) provides empirical evidence for the USA and a larger sample of countries that emergencies made the adoption of welfare programmes or welfare state expansion more likely. Other studies analysing the impact of war exposure on social policy preferences rely on natural experiments. Natural experiments typically compare the impact of wars waged in the distant past (notably the Second World War) on people's social policy preferences by comparing a subpopulation with a randomly assigned war exposure with a similar group that was not affected by acts of war. Differences in welfare state attitudes between these subpopulations are causally attributed to differences in the extent of their war exposure. For example, Walter and Emmenegger (2022) investigate how the Second World War affected voting behaviour in social policy and tax referendums held in Switzerland shortly after the end of the war. They show that people in Swiss municipalities that were accidentally bombed in wartime by the Allied air forces supported the introduction of unemployment insurance and full employment policies to a greater extent than voters in municipalities with no war exposure. Heldring et al. (2022) use a similar research design to examine the effects of the Second World War on wealth inequality in Britain. Following Titmuss (1950), the authors argue that the massive bombings of British cities by the German Luftwaffe stimulated the demand for a new, i.e., more egalitarian, social contract (p. 139). Erikson and Stoker (2011) also provide evidence that war exposure alters individual preferences towards left-leaning policy views using the 1969 Vietnam war draft lottery as a natural experiment.

A second body of literature argues that war fosters prosocial attitudes in society. In this view, war affects how individuals act vis-à-vis others or what Scharpf (1997, p. 84) calls 'interaction orientation of actors'. Already in 1950, Richard Titmuss contended that war exposure increases solidarity in society as people become less egoistic and care more about the well-being of others in wartime. He summarised the British experience during World War II as follows: 'The mood of the people changed and, in sympathetic response, values changed as well. If dangers were to be shared then resources should also be shared' (Titmuss, 1950, p. 508). In a similar vein, scholars such as Peter Turchin and Samuel Bowles argue with regard to the history of mankind that wars contributed to 'ultrasocial' norms and institutions (Turchin et al., 2013) and 'parochial altruism' (Bowles, 2008), i.e., intra-group solidarity but hostility towards outsiders. There are several theoretical explanations in the social sciences and psychology why war exposure might enhance cooperation. On the one hand, rationalist explanations propose that increasing insecurity about property rights and personal security makes people 'more dependent on local informal systems of risk-sharing and insurance, especially among *kin and neighbours*, thus increasing the

return to investments in social capital' (Bauer et al., 2016, p. 266, our emphasis). Social identity theory, on the other hand, and aligning with early sociological accounts of conflict and group cohesion (Simmel, 1904), emphasises the deep-rooted psycho-social reactions to threat. In the presence of severe and perceptively external threat, identification with whatever in-group is salient from the current situation will be strengthened – be it an arbitrarily assigned team, family members, or, as is typically the case in interstate wars: *the nation*. Beyond identification, threat will enhance cooperation and altruism vis-à-vis in-group members (Bowles, 2008).

There is a growing empirical literature which confirms that war exposure enhances solidarity. Bauer et al. (2016), providing a meta-analysis of recent studies focusing on civil war and its impact on social behaviour and attitudes, conclude that there is strong evidence for a positive and persistent effect on altruism and cooperation (see also Price & Yaylaci, 2021). Indeed, in a recent study, Bearcelo (2021) argues that the effect of war on cooperation lasts decades after the end of the war. Based on bombing data from the Vietnam war and using a representative public opinion survey conducted in 2001, he shows that having been involved in the Vietnam war pushed cooperation in the form of civic engagement almost three decades later.

While solidaristic behaviour is mainly oriented towards in-group members, war at the same time tends to shape and re-order the salience of existing group identities, effectively altering or strengthening the importance of the relevant in-group to which solidarity applies (Barrie, 2021). In particular, both historically-oriented (Holsti, 1996; Smith, 1981) and quantitative studies (Gibler et al., 2012) have concluded that interstate wars, and the threat they pose to a nationally defined group (Stein, 1976), strengthen *national*, as opposed to local or transnational identity attachment. Yet the effect is hardly unconditional. Notably, if the national community offers little psychological comfort or safety (Gorman & Seguin, 2018), or if pre-war identification is completely lacking (Barrie, 2021), war is unlikely to bridge the gap. Accordingly, as shown by Sasse and Lackner (2018) with regard to Ukraine, linguistic cleavages and wartime dynamics, including displacement and shifting territorial control, may lead to heterogeneous outcomes. To the extent that group identity structures solidarity, then, whether war increases *national* solidarity, rather than its local or cosmopolitan forms, is not a foregone conclusion.

However, there are also studies which find negative and long-term impacts of violent conflicts on attitudes towards other people. Most importantly, there is empirical evidence that both civil wars (Price & Yaylaci, 2021) and interstate wars such as the Second World War (Conzo and Salustri, 2019) have a negative impact on social trust.

A third body of literature argues that people are increasingly concerned with issues of fairness in wartime. The key question at stake is how the

burdens and costs of warfare are shared in a fair manner in society or as Wilensky (1975, p. 71) famously put it: 'Why should some profiteer and others die?' In fact, wars impose high costs on young men and vulnerable groups, while others might even benefit economically from war. It is the pressure for more equality and a fair burden sharing that gives rise to a new and more redistributive social contract.

Governments have to respond to this demand not to endanger the overall war effort. A fair burden sharing of the costs of war or what Wilensky (1975, p. 71) calls 'equality of sacrifice' can be achieved by compensating those bearing the burdens of war service and/or by penalising those who are exempted from military service or profit from military conflict. This might include the expansion of social and political rights to the deserving, or inversely, the imposition of new taxes targeting the rich and those expropriating war profits. To date, this fairness argument has only been empirically examined for taxation. The first example for the relevance of this fairness logic is the introduction of military taxes for young men who were exempted from or deemed unfit for military service once conscription was introduced (Thierl, 1892). More recently, Scheve and Stasavage (2010) demonstrate that the logic of equal sacrifice is also important for explaining the massive increase in tax progressivity of income and inheritance taxation during the two world wars.

In sum, there is empirical evidence that large-scale interstate wars alter individual attitudes and behaviour in ways which favour welfare state expansion. However, besides their important contribution to the state of the art, existing empirical studies also have some weaknesses. First, most of the studies investigating the influence of contemporary (civil) wars on attitudes relevant for social policy focus on the influence of direct, personal victimisation. Other, equally important and much more general aspects such as the threat experienced by nearby battles or bombings, or the loss of income and savings due to war-induced disruption are largely neglected. This study aims to fill part of this gap by taking both geographical proximity to fighting and individual financial impact into account. Naturally, these aspects do not exhaust the ways in which war may influence individuals' attitudes. Notably, war is a collective phenomenon, to a large extent experienced through the prism of group-belonging; and as such can have a profound impact on people who only experience it second-hand (Young, 1976). Nonetheless, focusing on two salient individual pathways, moving beyond direct victimisation, is a large step ahead towards understanding the heterogeneous impact of war.

Second, recent studies employing natural experiments have contributed with stronger causal evidence – including by leveraging contextual war exposure – of shifts in revealed attitudes. However, a downside of natural experiments is that, in lieu of conveniently spaced and fortunately designed

opinion polls, attitudes can only be gauged through whatever proxies happen to be available. Purposefully developing and executing a national survey focusing on welfare attitudes in Ukraine in March 2023, one year after the full-scale Russian invasion, this study is able to more directly and comprehensively measure individual welfare and solidarity attitudes; and by linking it to our two forms of war exposure, evaluate each of the three above-mentioned micro-level explanations of the warfare–welfare nexus. We hypothesise that physical exposure to war and financial deterioration due to the war increase support for state intervention in social policy, strengthen national solidarity, and push demand for a fair burden sharing of the costs of war.

Contextualising the war in Ukraine

As discussed in the preceding sections, prevailing research indicates that industrialised mass warfare tends to increase the demand for social protection, strengthen national solidarity, and foster attitudes supporting the equitable distribution of war-related costs. In this section, we provide a brief overview of the welfare state, economy and public opinion in Ukraine to contextualise the impact of the war on national solidarity and welfare attitudes.

As a member of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine experienced a catastrophic economic decline and significant erosion of the welfare state during its transition from state socialism to a market economy (Cook, 2010). In the early years of this transformation, the country retained extensive social protection programmes inherited from the Soviet era (Kakwani, 1995). Despite attempts to further maintain these welfare levels (Adascalitei, 2012), the state's role in welfare provision eroded in subsequent stages of the transformation process (Morris & Polese, 2016). Declining state revenues, limited administrative capacity, and political blockages resulted in significant reform backlogs (Chorna et al., 2025). While retaining fringe benefits to bind workers to enterprises (Adascalitei, 2012), an increasingly dysfunctional state failed to ensure equal access to healthcare and higher education. This occurred against the backdrop of partial privatisation of the public sector, accompanied by an increase in informal and illegal payments within both private enterprises and public institutions (Morris & Polese, 2016). For decades, the transformation process had some positive effects but inflicted unprecedented levels of economic hardship and little gain, except for an elite few (Ghodsee & Orenstein, 2021, p. 9). A decade after the collapse of the socialist bloc, an estimated three-quarters of the population lived below the poverty line, and average wages were half of their 1989 levels (Dale, 2011).

The socio-economic situation did not improve with the escalation of Russian intervention in early 2014. Following the wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine (Euromaidan), Russia annexed Crimea and war

broke out in the Donbas region. The political and economic crises resulting from these events prompted austerity measures in response to a substantial decline in GDP per capita between 2014 and 2015 (IMF, 2023). In 2015, the Ukrainian government significantly cut expenditure on housing (−98%), healthcare (−71%), education (−3%) and social security (−2%), while defence spending surged by 166% (Kravchuk, 2016, p. 22). Although Ukraine has experienced consistent economic growth in the years following the onset of the war, by 2016, GDP per capita still remained below 1989 levels (Ghodsee & Orenstein, 2021, p. 9). Although some welfare system reforms took place due to the economic upturn, they were mainly confined to the healthcare sector and often supported by international aid (Chorna et al., 2025).

The period of economic growth was short lived. The Covid-19 pandemic imposed significant strains on Ukrainian economic growth and social policy (Chorna et al., 2025). The situation was further exacerbated by the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, leading to a subsequent 50% decline in GDP (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023). The estimated GDP losses in 2022 encompass disruption of economic activities through various channels: damage to productive assets and infrastructure, logistical challenges, loss of labour force, disrupted supply–demand chains, uncertainty, and increased risks (World Bank 2022).

Russian aggression, characterised by systematic shelling of civilian targets, plunged Ukraine into a humanitarian catastrophe in 2022. The war displaced millions, damaged people's assets, disrupted utility services, and caused significant loss of life and livelihoods (World Bank, 2023b). As of March 2023, the full-scale war had resulted in the loss of more than 8700 civilian lives, with over 14,100 individuals reported injured (OHCHR, 2023). In the same period, UCDP (2024) estimated the total number of war-related deaths to be 105,000, of which more than half were on the Ukrainian side. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence reported mobilising over 850,000 individuals by 2023, while the UNHCR documented nearly 6 million refugees from Ukraine scattered across Europe as of 31 December 2023 (UNHCR 2024). After one year of full-scale warfare, the estimated reconstruction costs amounted to USD 411 billion, or roughly twice the pre-invasion GDP (World Bank, 2023b).

The escalation of full-scale war and its economic consequences severely deteriorated the socio-economic well-being of Ukrainian citizens. Within 6 months of the war's onset, more than 5% of the population was homeless, 15% were internally displaced, nearly 20% lived in extreme poverty and a third were unemployed (Chorna et al., 2025). Displaced individuals and residents of war zones faced particularly challenging conditions, with half experiencing unemployment and many facing wage reductions despite remaining employed (Sociological Group 'Rating', 2023). As of early 2024, approximately

14.6 million people, or about 40% of Ukraine's population, required humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2024).

Although economic growth rebounded with substantial international financial aid by February 2023, GDP per capita reached USD 5220 in 2023, remaining nearly three times lower than the regional average in Eastern Europe (IMF, 2023). Concurrently, the budget deficit surged from 3.7% in 2021 to 29.5% in 2022, with a subsequent adjustment to 20.6% in 2023. Notably, defence expenditure saw a dramatic increase, rising fourfold from 2021 to 2022, while social welfare expenditure also rose, though by only 25%, largely due to increased demand for social protection amid the war (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, 2023). In relative terms, whereas expenditure on defence rose from 9% of total government spending in 2021 to 42% in 2022, expenditure on social policy decreased from 23% to 16% during the same period (Ukraine-Analysen, 2023). While Ukraine allocated all available funds during the war towards defence and critical infrastructure repair, including water, electricity and heating services, essential social policy objectives such as medical care and poverty reduction could only be partially addressed with the assistance of international organisations (Chorna et al., 2025).[2]

A decade of war in the Donbas region, and the full-scale Russian invasion in particular, has caused substantial changes in Ukrainian public opinion. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the challenges of the last decade have unified Ukrainians (Herron & Pelchar, 2024), with these transformations beginning even before Russia's invasion in 2022. Following the outset of the war in 2014, citizens who had previously identified primarily with their local place of residence began to identify above all as Ukrainians. For the first time, identification as Ukrainian citizens began to dominate in the southern and eastern regions of the country (Bekeshkina, 2017; but see also Sasse & Lackner, 2018, for notable heterogeneity). The escalation of the full-scale war in February 2022 significantly bolstered national self-identification and unified public opinion across Ukraine. Survey data from August 2022 indicate that an overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) identified as Ukrainian citizens,[3] marking a notable increase from 76% in 2021 (Melnyk et al., 2023). Another survey reveals a similar trend, showing that the percentage of respondents self-identifying as 'citizens of Ukraine'[4] has steadily risen, with some fluctuations, from 44.4% in 2005 to 64.6% in 2015, reaching 72.1% in August 2022 (Razumkov Centre, 2022). Confronted with an existential threat, traditional societal divides – such as foreign policy preferences and cultural identity markers – lost their polarising effect, contributing to a strong sense of national cohesion (Shapovalov, 2024, p. 20).

A radical change has also occurred in the support for democracy. Whereas before 2014, Ukrainians were counted among the least fervent supporters of democracy among European populations (ESS ERIC, 2023), subsequent surveys indicate that support has steeply increased in recent years, with a

particularly sharp jump following the invasion in 2022 (Onuch, 2022, pp. 37–38). Similarly, trust in public institutions experienced a strong boost. As in many post-socialist countries, Ukrainians have long perceived their country to be rife with corruption (Transparency International, 2021). Not incidentally, according to survey data from KIIS (2024), expressed trust in the parliament (12%) and government (16%) was abysmal before 2022. Yet during the first year of the war, those figures roughly tripled. Even more striking was the change for the President's office: whereas distrust had dominated for years, the share of people expressing trust in the president suddenly jumped from 27% at the end of 2021 to no less than 84% a year later.[5] Trust in the armed forces had increased steadily since the start of armed conflict in 2014, but nonetheless jumped from 72% on the eve of the full-scale invasion, to close-to unanimous trust (96%) in late 2022 and 2023.

Over two-thirds of the Ukrainian population generally trust the ordinary people around them, a trend that has remained relatively stable over time, yet with a slight increase after the 2022 invasion. Attitudes towards internally displaced persons (IDPs), numbering some 1.6 million already in 2015, and often coming from other regions, were initially hesitant. However, with the full-scale invasion, causing the number of IDPs to surge to over 6.5 million, expressed trust concomitantly increased by more than 10 percentage points to 52% (KIIS, 2024).

Empirical evidence suggests that changes in public opinion related to Russia's aggression have also affected the willingness to resist and fight in Ukraine (Bukkvoll & Steder, 2024). Before the outbreak of war in 2014, comparative European surveys indicated that Ukrainians were among the most reluctant to take up arms. In 2012, only 33% of the population responded 'yes' to the question 'Are you ready to take up arms to defend your country if a threat to its territorial integrity occurs?' (Sociological Group 'Rating', 2022). By 2017, this figure had risen to 54%, and it continued to increase to 59% in 2020. However, an even more significant change occurred after February 2022. By March 2022, the stated willingness to fight reached 80% and was strong across the country, regardless of gender and region. This increased willingness to fight and resist strongly correlates with the rise of civic nationalism, increased trust in Ukrainian political institutions (particularly the Ukrainian armed forces), and a growing sense of international solidarity (Bukkvoll & Steder, 2024).

Additionally, before the start of the war, Ukrainians held some of the most pro-egalitarian attitudes towards social redistribution and public welfare in Europe. According to ESS data collected in 2012, 84% of respondents agreed with the statement 'The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels' (ESS ERIC, 2023). However, with the onset of the war and particularly its escalation in 2022, there has been a shift in priorities towards increased military expenditure during wartime

(the guns-versus-butter trade-off). Data from August 2023 indicates that 77% of respondents supported reallocating local budgets from civilian projects, including infrastructure, to meet military requirements (Ukrainian Institute of the Future, 2023).

Regarding satisfaction with social services, the levels were quite low before the beginning of the war. For instance, in 2012, around two-thirds of the population evaluated the state of health services in Ukraine as bad (ESS ERIC, 2023). Survey data collected eight months after the escalation of the full-scale war (October 2022) reported that 34% of Ukrainians (and 50% of those whose homes were damaged) expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of government aid (CEDOS, 2022). However, the majority of respondents (58%) viewed the distribution of government aid to citizens as generally fair. Recent data collected in April–June 2023 show that pensions and social assistance constitute more than 70% of household income for the poorest 40% of people and around half of the total income of the Ukrainian population (World Bank, 2023a).

The review of the literature highlights that emergencies such as war profoundly reshape individual preferences – and the available evidence suggests that Ukraine is no exception. The significant scale and tragic consequences of warfare have inevitably influenced the daily experiences of Ukrainian citizens, exposing them to heightened risks and pervasive uncertainty. In the following section, we show, based on survey data collected in March 2023, how these dynamics extend to national solidarity and welfare attitudes among Ukrainians.

Empirical strategy and data

The national survey entitled 'Ukraine War and Welfare Survey – March 2023' was developed by the authors in collaboration with country experts, and translated and executed by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) around one year after the full-scale Russian invasion, in March 2023.[6] To reach respondents in war-affected areas, interviews ($N = 1001$) were conducted via telephone in either Ukrainian or Russian, depending on the respondent's preference. To maximise representativeness on key parameters, probability sampling was conducted using randomised mobile phone numbers. Individuals living in areas under Russian occupation could not be included. Accordingly, the survey population effectively includes all adults residing in government-controlled areas of Ukraine at the time of the survey. In addition to basic personal data, respondents were asked a range of questions pertaining to preferences in spending and tax policy; they were presented with items pertaining to political views, fairness, trust and altruism; asked how the war has affected their personal situation as well as the behaviour of others in relation to the war. With a wide range of questions,

we not only aimed to capture a broad image of wartime attitudes in Ukraine, in addition to our main outcomes of interest, but also to minimise the risk of inadvertently priming respondents toward certain issues. Interviews lasted on average 30 min (see Appendix Section A, pp. 2–3 for more details).

Independent variables

Following the theoretical discussion above, war can influence individuals' demand for social protection, their sense of national solidarity and fairness attitudes through several mechanisms. Here, we focus on two: physical threat and socio-economic impact.

To operationalise physical threat, we use a proxy, i.e., geolocated data on conflict events recorded by ACLED (2023) in the 12 months between the onset of war on 24 February 2022 and the start of the survey in March 2023. Each respondent was asked about the name of their current Oblast (highest administrative division) of residence and the name of the locality (city/town/village),[7] and was then assigned the coordinates corresponding to the centroid (central point) of their locality.[8]

In a second step, each locality (416 in total) is matched with all conflict fatalities having occurred within a specified distance during the 12 months subsequent to the Russian invasion. Conflict events that have a low spatial precision are dropped.[9] In constructing the final variable, three dimensions of the underlying causal process need to be considered: namely, the temporal, marginal and spatial rate of attrition. While the precise rate of attrition remains unknown, the direction is intuitive. The effect of contextual exposure to violence is likely to decline with time passed since the event, as exposure accumulates, and as geographical distance increases.

First, fatalities are weighted by the inverse square of time (days) since the event. The outer geographical limit within which conflict events are counted as exposure is set at a radius of 20 km. At a distance of up to 20 km not only will individuals likely be personally familiar with targeted localities, but may well directly perceive ongoing battles. For reference, the area thus covered (1250 km^2) is somewhat smaller than a median-sized U.S. County (1610 km^2). We believe that this size further strikes a balance between two methodological considerations; on the one hand, it is large enough to reduce noise in our measurement, given the reliability of the spatial coding of the underlying data; and on the other hand, small enough to avoid throwing out true and meaningful variation (introducing mean-reverting error). To account for a declining marginal effect of additional fatalities within the area of exposure, the cumulated, time-weighted fatality figures are transformed into their natural log. Finally, in line with the assumption of a gradual spatial attrition, fatalities are binned into three concentric areas, and linearly weighted, so that fatalities occurring within 5 km are multiplied

by a factor of three, and those occurring at a distance between 5 and 10 km are multiplied by 2. The War exposure variable is thus defined as the natural log of the time-weighted number of conflict fatalities recorded during the first year of the invasion within a radius of 20 km from the respondent's residence.

Given the lack of any strong theoretical basis for the precise form of attrition along its different dimensions, alternative operationalisations will be used as robustness checks. To validly capture physical exposure, individuals who resettled during the period of analysis are excluded from the main analysis.

Figure 1 displays the spatial distribution of the resultant war exposure variable normalised to range from 0 to 1, averaged across Oblasts. Clearly, geography structures much of the variation. Oblasts in Central Ukraine (excluding Kyiv) and the Western districts, in particular, exhibit no or low exposure to war violence. In contrast, the Oblasts in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, located on or close to the frontline, experienced the highest levels of physical threat. Yet even here, the calculated war exposure often ranges from zero to close to the maximum depending on precise locality.

In light of the known weaknesses of geolocated conflict data (Eck 2012) – which nonetheless should be moderate within a single, well-reported country – the results will also be replicated using data from UCDP (2024).[10] Though this does not eliminate all possible biases, the consistency of results increases our confidence that they are not driven by idiosyncrasies in the data gathering process.

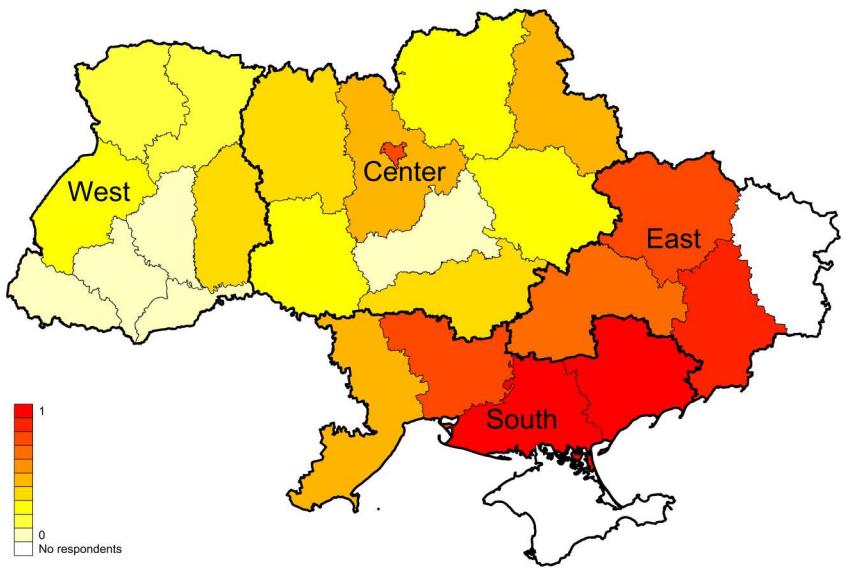

Figure 1. War exposure, province (Oblast) averages. Source: Ukraine War and Welfare Survey (2023) and ACLED (2023).

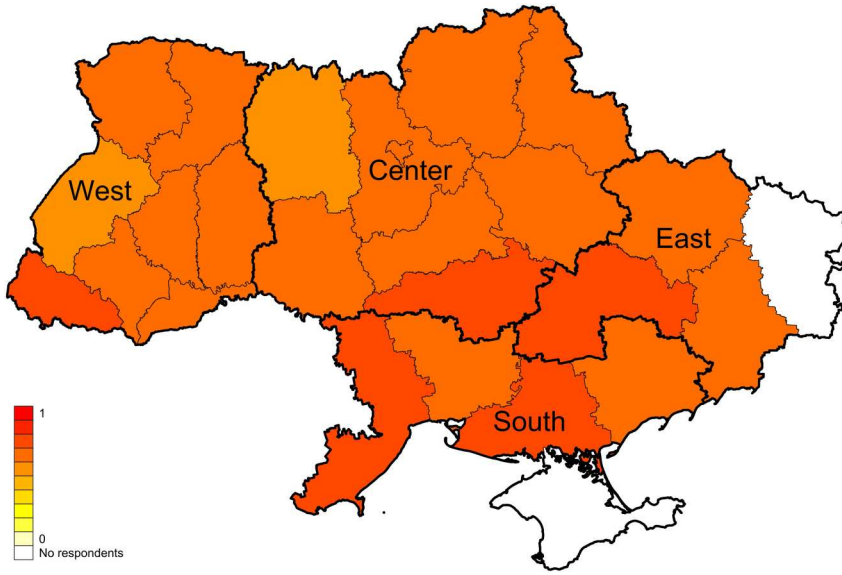

Figure 2. Financial impact, province (Oblast) averages. Source: Ukraine War and Welfare Survey (2023).

Our second independent variable, aiming to capture the socio-economic impact of the conflict, is considerably simpler. Respondents were asked to rate their current overall personal financial situation compared to the situation before the Russian invasion, on a scale from 0 (much worse) to 10 (much better). The final variable is inverted so that higher values represent a deterioration and again normalised to range from 0 to 1. To little surprise, only a small minority experienced improvement (12%), with the rest experiencing no change (29%) or varying degrees of deterioration (59%).

This observation is consistent with findings from another survey conducted in September 2023, indicating that 60% of Ukrainians reported a decline in their economic situation following the commencement of the full-scale war (Sociological Group 'Rating', 2023). Figure 2 depicts the spatial distribution of our financial impact variable. In contrast to the pattern observed for physical threat, financial impact is strikingly evenly distributed across the territory, with only a slightly more favourable situation in Lviv Oblast, located in the Western part of Ukraine, and Zhytomyr Oblast in Central Ukraine. Variation, contrasting the few financial winners with those negatively affected by the war, is instead found at the individual level.

Dependent variables

We examine three dependent variables. To probe respondents' demand for social protection, an item was developed by which respondents were first

asked to rate the importance of spending public money on nine distinct expenditure fields,[11] including the field of social policy and health. Respondents prioritise social spending highly, with only Defence and Infrastructure and Energy[12] receiving on average higher scores (see Table A1 for a breakdown). This aligns with other survey data from August 2023, in which 77% of respondents supported the reallocation of local budgets from civilian projects to military requirements (Ukrainian Institute of the Future, 2023). To remove differences arising from general attitudes to government expenditure (expansionary vs. conservative), the final variable is calculated as the difference between the average priority assigned across all policy fields, and that for our main item of interest: social policy and health. We thus end up with a variable capturing the relative priority given to social policy expenditure. Figure 3 presents the distribution of our Social Expenditure Priority variable, with positive values indicating priority for social policy and health over other policy domains.

The operationalisation of the second outcome of interest – National Solidarity – follows the same logic. Respondents were asked to imagine being approached by a trustworthy local volunteer asking for donations. They were then asked to rank how likely it was, on a scale from 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (very likely), that they would make a donation, if the intended beneficiaries were people in need from their own town, from their region, from other (unspecified) regions of Ukraine, or finally people living in very poor regions of the world. Since the Russian invasion, Ukrainians have manifested unity and

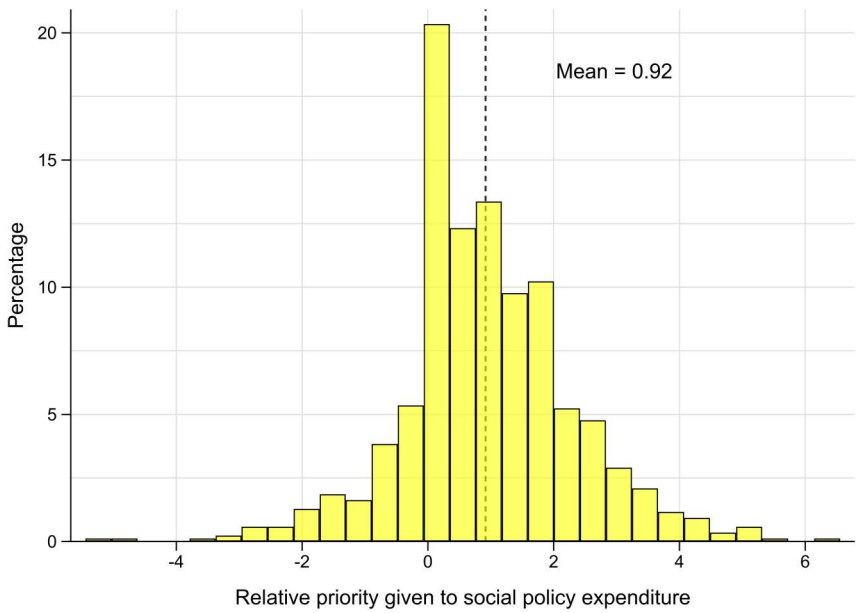

Figure 3. Distribution of social policy expenditure variable. Source: Ukraine War and Welfare Survey (2023).

Note: Values range from −5.4 to 6.6, with a mean of 0.92.

solidarity in many ways. For example, one-third of Ukrainians are estimated to have been involved in volunteering activities in mid-2023 (Ukrainian Institute of the Future, 2023). Our survey responses align with this observation. Specifically, on their accord, and in spite of financial and social hardship, most respondents are highly likely to donate money to people in need, across recipient categories (see Table A2). However, for the purpose of this analysis, we are not primarily interested in overall propensity to donate – which beyond individual idiosyncrasy may plausibly vary with current material circumstances – but the extent to which solidarity may be shifted specifically towards other members of the national community. The question relating to people in need from *other regions* is thus our main item of interest. It should be noted that 'regions' (Ukr: регіони; Rus: регионы) here refers to a largely informal division of Ukraine into four major geographical areas, characterised by distinct historical and cultural legacies, and traditionally structuring public opinions (Haran & Yakovlyev, 2017). Accordingly, it should reflect solidarity with people not only living far away, but often with partially different socio-cultural identities.[13] We therefore operationalise our final variable as the difference between the average professed likelihood of donating money to people in need and the response concerning people from other regions of Ukraine. The variable thus captures relative national solidarity. Figure 4 displays the distribution of our relative national solidarity variable. A score of 0 indicates equal willingness to contribute to individuals from other Ukrainian regions compared to one's town, region or impoverished global regions, whereas positive values indicate a relative preference to donate to fellow nationals in other regions.

Naturally, even expressed in relative terms, and notwithstanding our emphasis on *people in need,* it may be that inhabitants of regions modestly affected by the war perceive that objective need is comparatively higher in other regions, increasing their willingness to donate to those regions (and vice versa). While we cannot exclude that this mechanism is operating, if it is, it would work in the opposite direction to our hypothesised solidarity mechanisms, biasing any positive association downward. Nonetheless, as a complementary test, we construct an alternative and similarly constructed indicator pertaining to trust in different groups. Trust, notably, has the benefit of being theoretically independent of material circumstance.

Our last dependent variable, intended to capture the strength of fairness attitudes vis-à-vis the state, is straightforward: respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that the government should 'ensure a fair distribution of war burdens and war costs among the people'.[14] The untransformed responses, ranging from 0 (don't agree at all) to 10 (strongly agree), constitute our final Fairness Demand variable: Figure 5 shows its distribution. As is evident from the highly right-skewed distribution, Ukrainians, on average, express a robust expectation regarding the fair allocation of war burdens and costs, averaging 8.23 points. These findings align with alternative sources of survey data

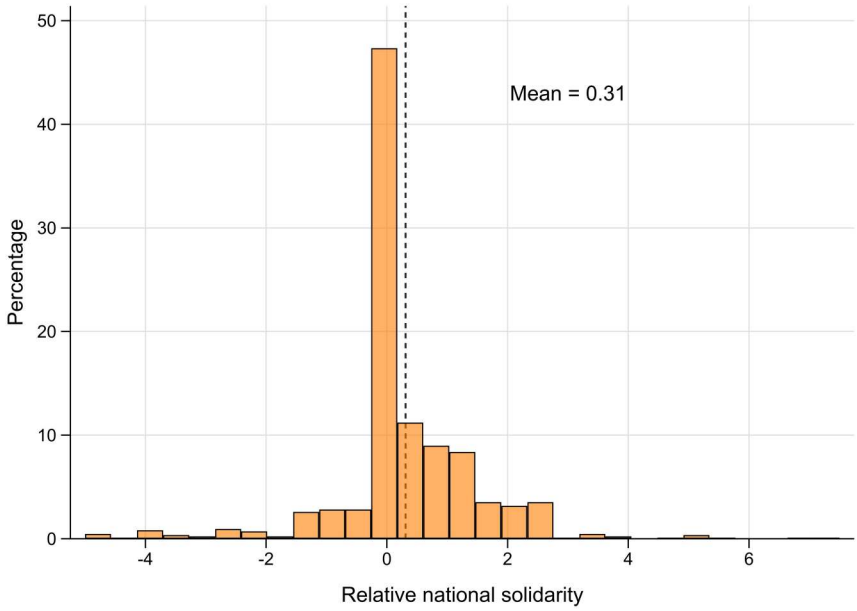

Figure 4. Distribution of relative national solidarity variable. Source: Ukraine War and Welfare Survey (2023).

Note: Values range from −5 to 7.5, with a mean of 0.31.

that indicate a rise in trust in the government since the commencement of the full-scale invasion (KIIS, 2023) and a prevailing belief in the fair distribution of government aid to citizens (CEDOS, 2022).[15]

Controls

To account for potential confounding factors, we further include a series of control variables drawn from the survey, including gender, age, education level and self-reported pre-invasion income level, in the baseline models. While these factors may affect both war exposure and attitudes, justifying their inclusion, they can reasonably not be affected by either, minimising the risk of post-treatment bias. In extended specifications, a set of additional controls are included, accounting for socio-economic factors (household size, retirement, employment status, disability), personal characteristics (military/veteran status, urban resident, Russian language speaker) and personal impact of war since 2014 (property damage, displacement).[16]

Empirical findings

We have argued that large-scale wars push support for social policy expenditure, enhance national solidarity and promote attitudes for a fair burden

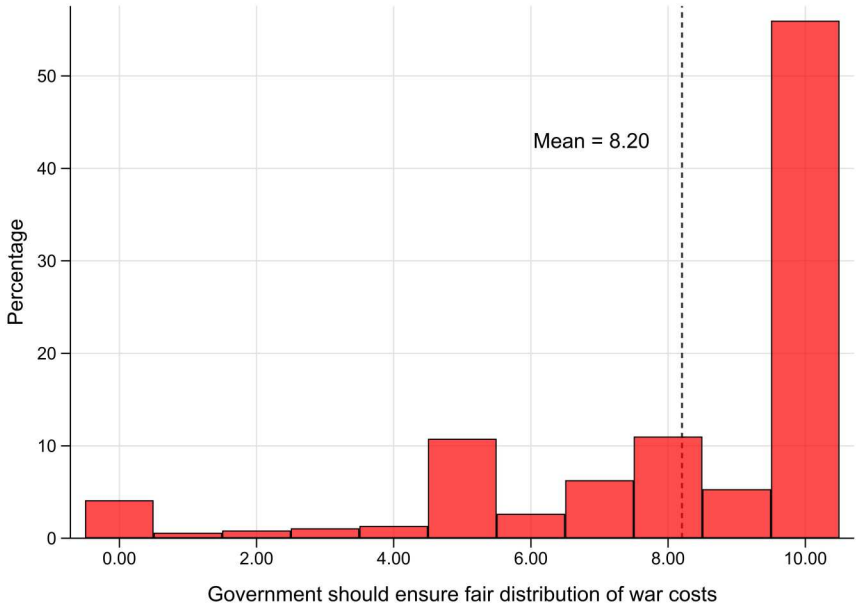

Figure 5. Distribution of fairness demand variable. Source: Ukraine War and Welfare Survey (2023).

Note: Values range from 0 to 10, with a mean of 8.2.

sharing of the costs of war. To test the alternative micro-level mechanism, we ran regressions analysing whether the exposure to war violence and war-induced financial deterioration influence individual attitudes relevant for social policy. Again, to ensure the validity of our war exposure measurement, and comparability across models, respondents who changed their place of residence are excluded from the main analysis.[17] For war exposure models, standard errors are clustered on locality. Considering the significant skewedness of the dependent variables, we complement the baseline OLS models with equivalent logit models. Figure 6 presents the coefficient estimates for both independent variables of interest across the models. The results of our six baseline OLS regressions, including a basic set of controls, are represented by black diamonds (95% confidence intervals); the estimates of the logit models, where the dependent variables have been dichotomised at their medians, are shown as grey diamonds and expressed in log odds. Full results are presented in the Appendix Section B (Tables 1–3).

With respect to our first dependent variable, relative social spending priority, the baseline estimations clearly show that respondents who suffered financial losses as a result of war prioritise social policy more than people without a war-induced financial burden. As we control for income level – and in the extended specifications a host of additional socio-economic characteristics – the association is independent of absolute material

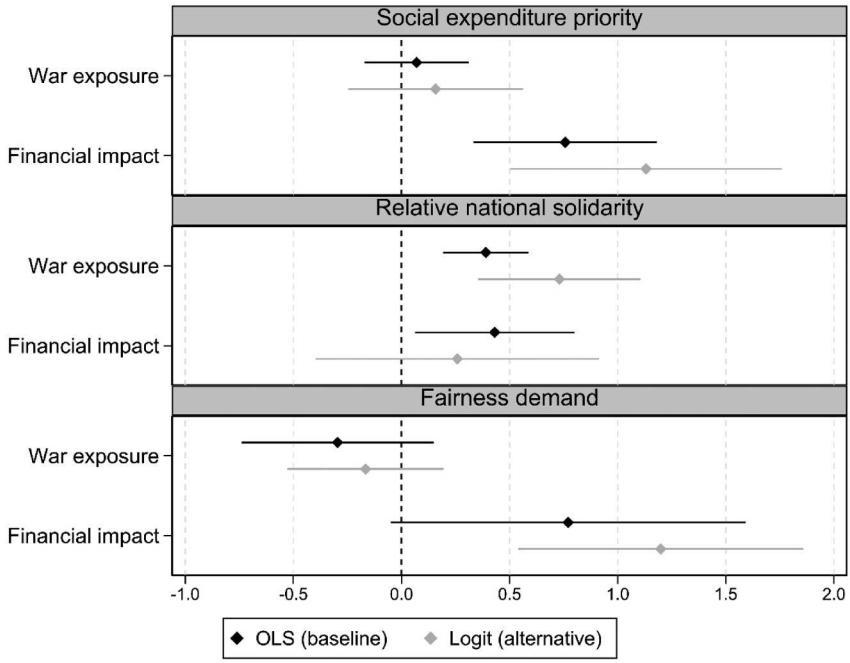

Figure 6. Summary results, OLS and Logit regressions.

Note: Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals. Black diamonds are based on OLS regressions with basic controls, full results are presented in models 2 and 5 of Appendix Tables B1–3 (pp. 8–10). Results shown as grey diamonds are based on equivalent logit models. For full results and details on dependent variable transformations, see Appendix Section A (pp. 3–7). Logit coefficients (grey diamonds) reported as log odds. Note that the coefficients for the OLS and logit regressions are not readily comparable.

conditions. In contrast, we find no statistically significant effect for exposure to war violence measured by fatalities in the immediate geographical proximity. The results are identical even after excluding the defence expenditure component from the dependent variable. Clearly, and in line with expectations, to the extent that war leads to higher demand for social policy, it does so largely through the deterioration of the private financial conditions of the majority.[18]

In contrast, with regard to national solidarity, it is rather proximity to war violence that appears as the factor of particular importance. The more geographically proximate war casualties are, the greater the relative willingness to donate to people in other regions of Ukraine.[19] This is in line with the threat mechanism: exposure to physical threat of warfare increases solidarity with the group rendered salient by that threat – in this case co-nationals.

In the baseline OLS regression, the coefficient for financial war impact is likewise positive and statistically significant. However, the result from the logit regression is weaker and far from statistical significance at the 95% level, indicating that the baseline results may be driven by outliers. In order

to further probe the robustness of the results, we replicate the models with an alternative and conceptually proximate dependent variable, relating to trust in different groups. The results are equally strong and positive for war exposure but insignificant for financial impact (see Tables B11 and B12). Taken together, the results not only align with the argument that war tends to increase national solidarity but also indicate that on the individual level, threat, as captured by proximity to fighting, is the central mechanism.

Finally, on the question of demand for the government to ensure a fair distribution of war burdens, the results are less than conclusive. In the OLS regressions, the coefficients have opposite directions. War exposure has a negative point estimate but is far from statistical significance at any conventional level. The estimated association with financial impact is, in contrast, positive and considerably larger, but again just short of statistical significance at the 95% level. One explanation is the overwhelming consensus among respondents, with a majority selecting the maximum score (10) on the fairness scale, which may suggest a social desirability bias. This ceiling effect reduces the variability in responses, limiting the capacity to detect statistically significant associations. Turning to the results of the logit models, effectively estimating the probability of an individual giving a fair distribution of war burdens highest (10) priority, the coefficient for financial impact turns significant. The positive association for financial impact holds also when replicating the model in an ordered beta regression, specifically intended to deal with bounded and highly skewed outcome variables, relying on a Bayesian logic (see Table B13 in the appendix). In sum, the point estimates are in line with the conjecture that war-induced fairness demands would be mainly driven by shifts in material circumstances – rather than exposure to warfare as such.

Our main models indicate that whereas the financial, individual-level impact of war is strongly positively associated with a higher relative priority given to social spending, proximity to war violence is associated with an increase in national solidarity. These results are not only consistent across models (OLS and logit) but also after the inclusion of additional individual-level controls and Oblast-specific intercepts (see Appendix Tables B1–3). With Oblast-fixed effects, the models adjust for geographically-specific factors which could be associated with both *X* and *Y*, potentially confounding the results. Effectively taking only Oblast-level variation into account, the results hold. Although we have little substantive reason to suspect the existence of serious unobserved confounders, beyond our included controls, we follow Cinelli and Hazlett (2020) in estimating the sensitivity of the results to omitted variable bias. The exercise shows that our two principal positive associations would hold even in the presence of omitted confounders of a strength equal to our four baseline controls taken together. We conclude that the risk of the estimates being driven by unobserved confounders is

minimal. We also reproduced all models substituting the ACLED data with geolocated conflict data from UCDP (2024), and using alternative, simplified operationalisations for the war exposure variable, with very similar results (Appendix Tables B14 and B15). Clearly, our findings are robust. Finally, the results are quite large, both in relation to the overall variation of the dependent variables and in relation to other covariates. Moving from an improved financial situation to maximal deterioration is associated with half a standard deviation increase in our social spending priority variable, whereas maximum geographical war exposure is associated with an increase in relative national solidarity to the order of one-third of a standard deviation. In comparison, only a couple of the other covariates included in the models show any statistically significant association, and mostly of a moderate magnitude.[20] Clearly, the individual-level impact of war matters for solidarity and welfare attitudes, but the effects differ depending not only on the severity, but also the form of exposure.

Conclusion

In the past, large-scale interstate wars such as the two world wars have served as a catalyst for profound social and political transformation that has reshaped policies, governance, and social norms. A growing literature demonstrates that there is a causal relationship between wars and welfare state development. One mechanism at the micro-level underlying this warfare–welfare nexus is the notion that the horrors and uncertainties of war alter individual attitudes towards support for risk pooling, solidarity and fairness. Often in combination with war-induced political and institutional transformations, these changes make the adoption of and support for welfare legislation more likely.

Based on a probabilistic population survey conducted one year after Russia's military attack on Ukraine, this paper examined whether industrialised mass warfare has changed individual welfare attitudes in these three dimensions. Specifically, we have analysed whether and to what extent a large-scale war pushes support for state intervention in social policy, enhances national solidarity, and promotes attitudes for a fair burden sharing of the costs of war. Additionally, we used two variables to measure different kinds of war impacts. The first captures individual exposure to war violence measured by the presence of acts of war in the immediate residential environment. The second variable reflects the impacts of war on the individual's financial situation.

Overall, we find that war affects individual attitudes in ways that make the demand for, and the acceptance of, public social policy stronger. We also show that it is important to distinguish between different forms of war exposure and their impact on a wider range of welfare-related attitudes.

Exposure to war violence promotes national solidarity, while war-induced financial losses (material victimisation) generate higher demand and support for social policy. The effects of war exposure on fairness attitudes are remain more uncertain. This discrepancy may be due to the distinct nature of the fairness question, which does not involve trade-offs or competing priorities as in the case of social spending preferences. Our study is nonetheless one step towards a better understanding of the complex mechanisms linking warfare and social policy attitudes and demonstrates that war impacts are sensitive to different ways of operationalising war exposure (cf. Yaylaci & Price, 2023).

However, as we only conducted one survey at one point in time, we were unable to directly take the temporal dimension into account. Moreover, at the time of writing the war is still ongoing. A central and promising avenue for further research would therefore be to examine the influence of war on attitudes towards social policy over time. It is plausible that the influence of war on individual attitudes changes over the course of a conflict. Moreover, there is little knowledge about the persistence of war impacts on welfare attitudes after the end of the war. What we do know from previous studies, and in particular on the two world wars, is that any persistent war-induced transformations would only translate into welfare legislation after conflict termination (Obinger & Schmitt, 2020). Both exorbitant military spending (the 'guns–butter trade-off') and the general exigencies of war typically preclude comprehensive welfare state expansion during wartime. Finally, war influences social policy not only via individual welfare-related attitudes but also via political attitudes and tax preferences. Our study should therefore also be seen as an impetus to further investigate the relationship between warfare and welfare at the individual level in a broader sense.

Notes

1. In terms of scope conditions, it is plausible to assume that wars, for several reasons, have a stronger effect on individual preferences towards welfare state expansion in economically advanced countries. In times of severe crisis, people in the Global North can rely less on the support of their extended family and have fewer opportunities to find alternative non-market mechanisms to secure their livelihood (e.g., through subsistence farming). Support for people in need is therefore primarily provided by the welfare state, which is also much more developed in the Global North. While war may also influence attitudes towards social policy in the Global South, the contextual factors there are fundamentally different. First and foremost, the level of economic development and, in consequence, existing social protection is lower. Less than 50 per cent of the population in the Global South is covered by at least one social protection benefit (ILO 2024).
2. Further information on Ukrainian budget data and on economic variables for Ukraine is publicly available via https://openbudget.gov.ua/ or https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/imf/.

3. The question asked was: 'To what extent do you feel that you are … on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "do not feel at all" and 10 means "absolutely feel"'. Response options included: 'A citizen of Ukraine', 'European' and 'A Soviet person'.
4. The question asked was: 'Who do you primarily consider yourself to be? (select one answer)'. Response options included: 'A resident of the village, district, or city where you live', 'A resident of your region (one or multiple regions)', 'A citizen of Ukraine', 'A representative of your ethnic group or nation', 'A citizen of the former Soviet Union', 'A citizen of Europe', 'A citizen of the world', 'Other' and 'Difficult to answer'. For further details, see https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/den-nezalezhnosti-ukrainy-serpen-2022p
5. The initial wave of institutional trust would soon abate, but trust in the President nonetheless remained at more than twice the pre-invasion levels (62%) at the end of 2023 (KIIS 2024).
6. The survey was reviewed and approved by the KIIS Review Board prior to execution (decision of 14 February 2023, id: 12022023). The data for the present analysis is available in anonymized form at the Harvard Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PZSUVW.
7. Due to a technical error, localities for respondents not living in cities (359) were not initially recorded. Thus a follow-up survey was conducted in July 2023 to collect location data on the rural respondents, with a success rate of 83%. In all, 936 respondents were successfully assigned to 416 different localities.
8. For this, UNOCHA's (2023) subnational administrative division data was used, including close to 30,000 Ukrainian localities (ADM4 level). Accordingly, there is an artificial clustering of respondents at the locality level. However, the noise introduced is not serious: with an average area of just above 2 km^2, the assignment error should typically be less than 1 km.
9. Specifically, only events with a precision classification of 1 or 2 (signifying at least precision to a small part of a region or vicinity of a town) are kept.
10. See Sundberg and Melander (2013).
11. The spending categories are based on the Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG).
12. During the winter, many Ukrainians were struggling to keep warm as a result of Russian attacks on power plants.
13. Note that we avoided explicitly referring to Ukrainians or co-nationals in order to avoid evoking prescribed norms of national solidarity.
14. Previous research has shown that social policies are typically implemented in the immediate aftermath of war, with the first one to two post-war years being particularly decisive (see, e.g., Obinger & Schmitt, 2020, 2024). Therefore, we argue that preferences about the fair distribution of burden during wartime are crucial (rather than the general preferences about fairness after the war).
15. More detailed statistics on the dependent variables and their components can be found in Appendix section A (pp. 3–7).
16. Although left-right ideology is often included in similar models, we opted not to use it here due to its limitations within the Ukrainian context. Research indicates that ideological self-placement on a left-right spectrum often fails to accurately capture political orientation in post-socialist countries where these identities do not align with Western ideological frameworks (Badescu and Sum, 2005). By focusing on identity factors more relevant to Ukraine's socio-political setting, we aim to present a more contextually accurate model.

17. It leaves us with a maximum N of 866. The restricted sample does not differ substantially from the full sample on any other key parameters (see Tables A4–5).
18. Disaggregating the spending priority indicator into its original components (Tables B7a–b) suggests that the association is a result of both a higher absolute priority for social spending and a negative association with assigned importance of other spending areas, although it is only statistically significant for some categories.
19. For alternative DV operationalizations, including individual components of the solidarity indicators, see Tables B8–B10 in Appendix.
20. Notably, young, urban, and highly educated people give less priority to social spending; high-income individuals tend to express relatively more solidarity with people from other regions; and older people and Ukrainian speakers give higher priority to a fair distribution of war burdens.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Tasha Lomonosova and Natalia Kharchenko for expertly advice in developing the survey, Nate Breznau, Sabrina Mayer, Heiko Pleines and numerous other colleagues for providing invaluable input for the analysis, and the three anonymous reviewers, whose comments helped us strengthen the final article. Errors and omissions remain our own.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This article is a product of the research conducted in the Collaborative Research Center 1342 'Global Dynamics of Social Policy'. The center is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – project number 374666841 – SFB 1342.

Data availability statement

The data and replication code that support the findings of this study are available via the Harvard Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PZSUVW.

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