

What Are the Consequences of the Russian Invasion on Ukrainian Society? Individual-level Evidence from the European Social Survey (ESS)

Alexander Verdoes
University of Bergen
alexander.verdoes@uib.no

How the Russian invasion of Ukraine has influenced Ukrainian society is a central question for understanding how the war influenced Ukrainian society, postwar reconstruction, institution-building in Ukraine, and is a key question in conflict and war studies. In this research note, we explore how the Russian invasion has affected the attitudes and behaviors of people living in Ukraine. We use data from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 10, fielded in January–February 2022 (just before the invasion), and Round 11, fielded two years into the war (April–June 2024). On average, we find that after two years of war the daily lives of Ukrainians remain mostly unaffected, we observe clear rally-around-the-flag effects (greater emotional attachment to Ukraine, stronger perceived need for loyalty to political leaders, and lower partisanship), and we observe a decline in trust in the United Nations (UN) alongside increased attachment to Europe and support for European integration.

1 Data and Methods

To examine how the invasion has shaped attitudes and behaviors, we rely on data from the European Social Survey (ESS), a biennial survey conducted in most European countries since 2002. The ESS aims to map social structures and attitudes. Ukraine participated in ESS Round 10 as a “Related Study.” Fieldwork for Round 10 in Ukraine took place between January 18 and February 8, 2022, just before Russia’s invasion. Two years later, between April and June 2024, Round 11 was fielded in Ukraine. However, partly occupied and nongovernment-controlled areas, as well as government-controlled areas deemed unsafe, were excluded from Round 11.

To assess the effects of the invasion, we compare results from Round 10 with those from Round 11. In addition, we compare Ukraine with two reference

groups: Norway, and neighboring countries (Hungary and Slovakia, pooled). Poland switched from a self-completion mode in Round 10 to a face-to-face survey in Round 11, and as this mode switch co-occurred with the invasion of Ukraine, we did not include Poland in the reference group. The logic is straightforward: if we observe a significant change in Ukraine between Rounds 10 and 11, and this is not mirrored in the reference groups, we interpret this difference as an effect of the war. These effects may be direct (changes in individuals' attitudes or behaviors) or indirect (sorting, changes in (accessible) population composition, nonresponse bias, or social desirability).

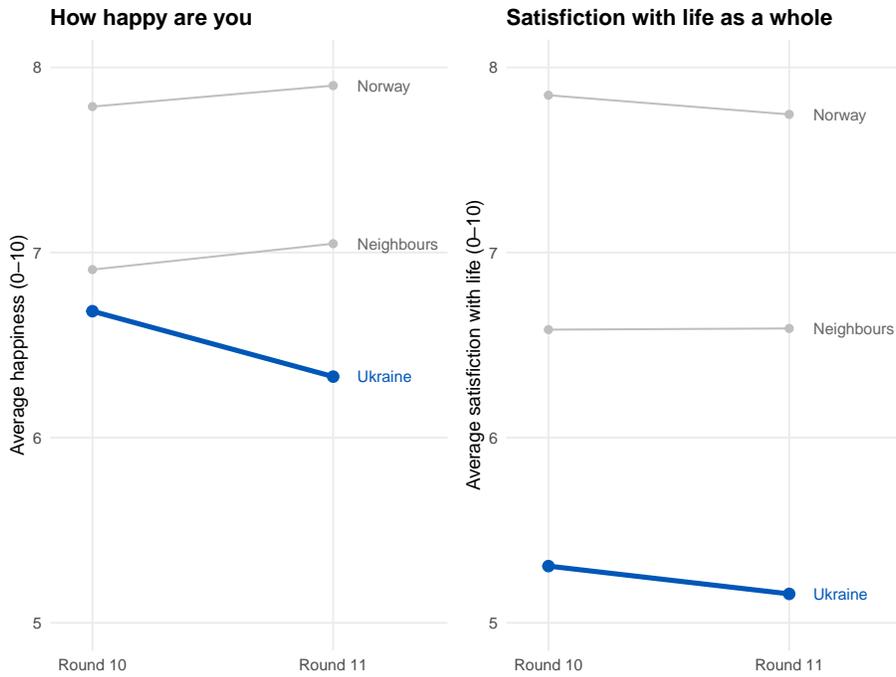
In our analysis, we include all attitudinal and behavioral items included in both rounds across all countries, and apply post-stratification weights. In this note, however, we focus on three themes: daily life, rally-around-the-flag effects, and attitudes toward international organizations. The variables are introduced below.

2 Results

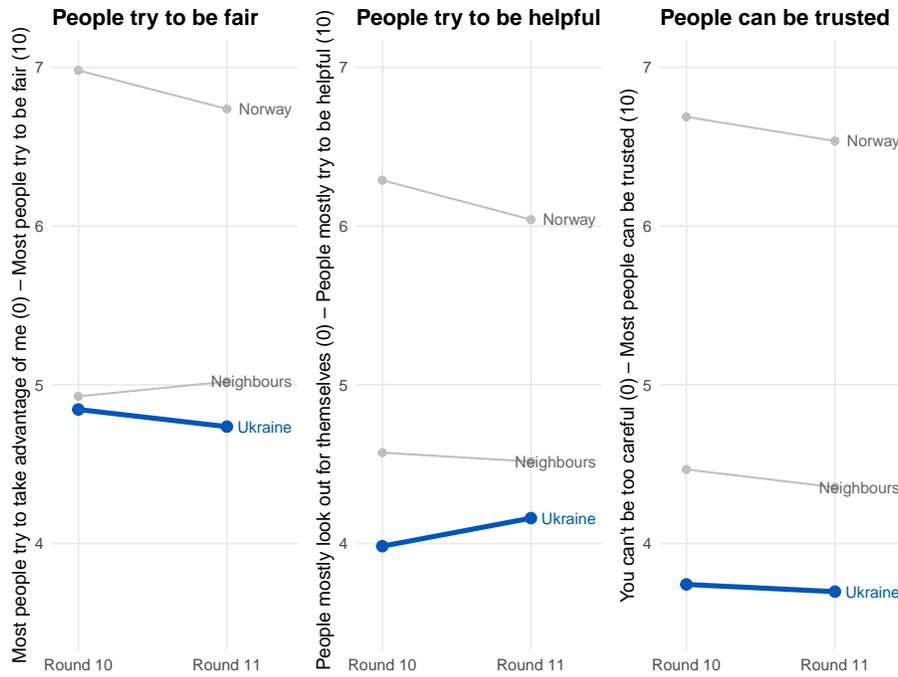
2.1 Daily life

The most straightforward question one can ask is how the war in Ukraine has influenced the day-to-day life of most residents. Existing research that assesses the effects of *exposure to violence* finds both detrimental effects, such as traumatized individuals who withdraw from social life and more exclusionary attitudes, and, on the other hand, "post-traumatic growth" can lead to increases in civic engagement, pro-social attitudes, higher levels of altruism, and increased social cohesion, especially towards one's in-group (Davenport et al. 2019). We do not have a variable that measures exposure to violence, but we can assess the impact of the war on Ukrainian society at large by considering variables such as subjective well-being, measured through two questions: "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?" and "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?" Personal trust is measured through three statements: "Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair," "Most of the time people are helpful or mostly looking out for themselves," "Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful," and engagement in social life is measured through "How often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues."

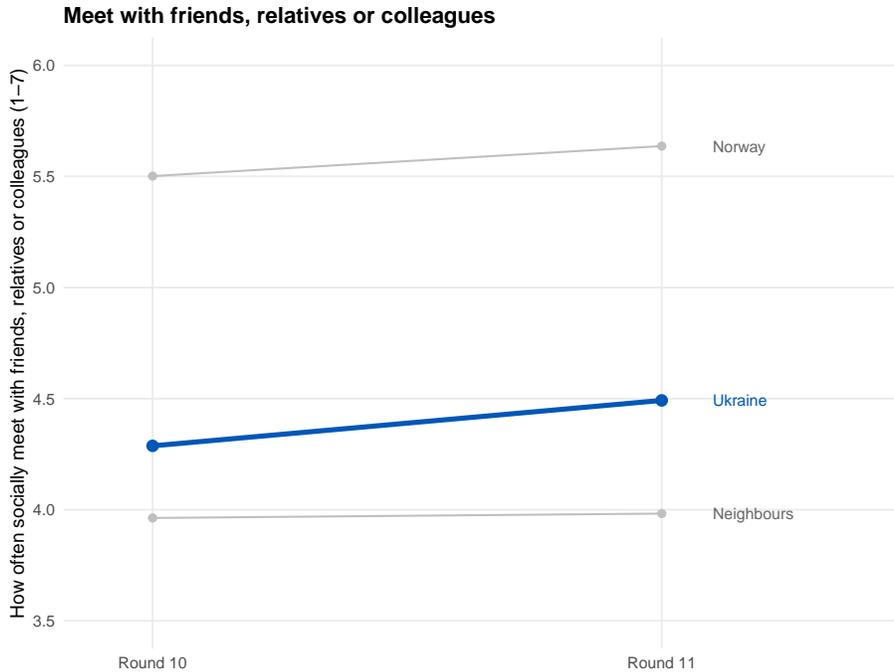
Before the war, average subjective well-being in Ukraine was lower than in the comparison countries. Since the war, average happiness has decreased slightly but significantly (0.4 points) in Ukraine, while in the reference groups happiness increased slightly but not significantly. Life satisfaction decreased by 0.1 points in Ukraine, but this decrease is small and not statistically significant.



In addition to subjective well-being, the war may also have changed the way Ukrainians perceive and interact with other people. Surprisingly, two years of war did not significantly affect average levels of personal trust in Ukraine, which remain the lowest among the reference groups. While on average people are more likely to think that “other people take advantage of me,” there is also an increase in the share of people who think people try to be helpful. However, these differences are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.



Finally, Ukrainians report meeting friends, relatives, or colleagues slightly, but significantly, more frequently since the beginning of the war (+0.2 on a seven-point scale), whereas the small increase observed in Norway is not significant. Thus, on average, Ukrainians appear to have become slightly more socially active.

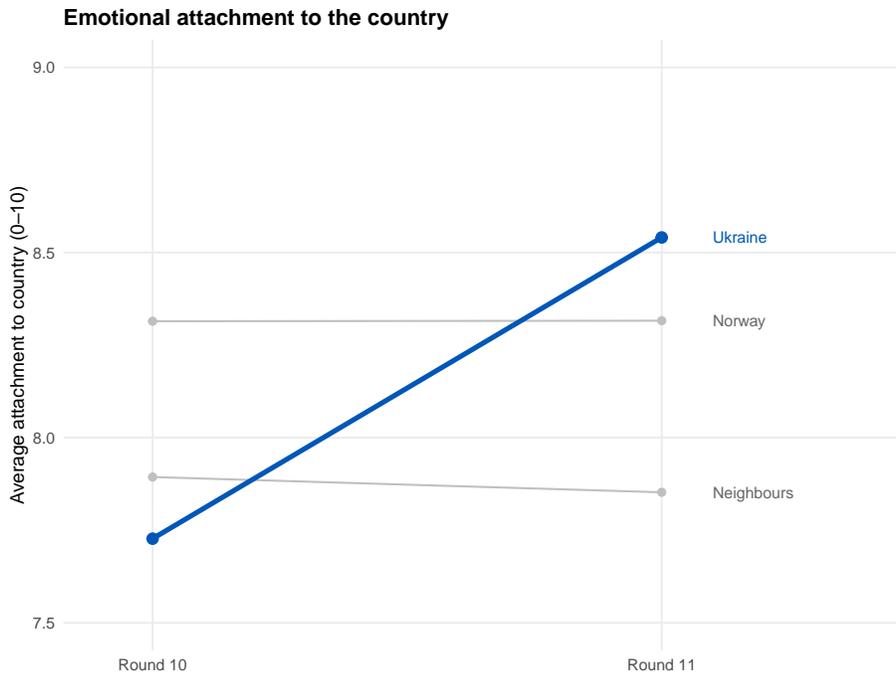


2.2 Rally-around-the-flag effects

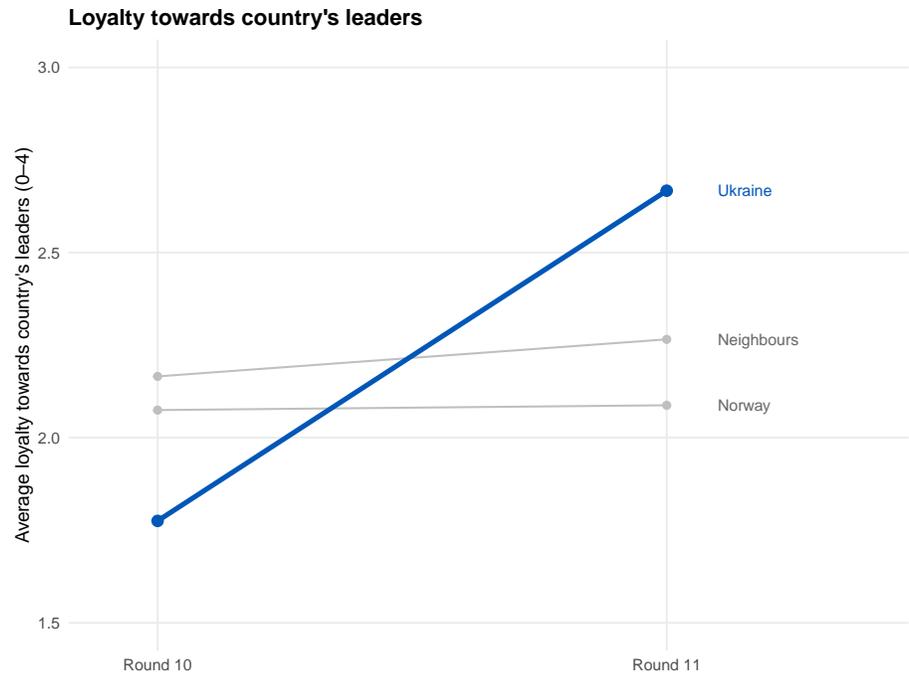
The idea of rally-around-the-flag effects is that during external threats individuals become more favorable toward political leaders. This effect can be explained by socio-psychological mechanisms (increased support for the in-group, a heightened need for security that leads individuals to follow their leaders, or stronger emotions such as anger and anxiety), or by communication dynamics during crises (greater visibility of incumbents and reduced partisan conflicts) (Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata 2021).

Although the ESS does not include direct measures of leader approval, it includes items that capture the underlying mechanisms for rally-around-the-flag effects. These questions are: “How emotionally attached to [country]?”, “Country needs most loyalty towards its leaders?”, and “Feel closer to a particular party than all other parties?”

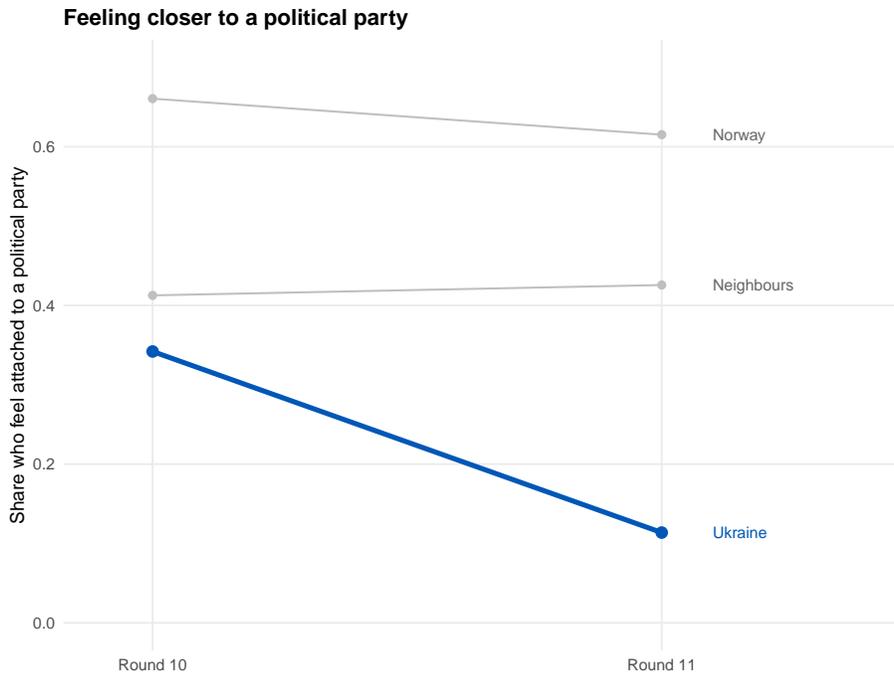
First, emotional attachment to Ukraine increased by 0.8 points (on an 11-point scale), while attachment remained stable in Norway and in Hungary/Slovakia. Two years after the invasion, we can thus see a clear, modest increase in attachment to Ukraine.



Second, we also see a clear increase in the share of people who agree with the statement that “Country needs most loyalty towards its leaders.” Before the invasion in 2022, Ukrainians disagreed most with this statement. Two years later, agreement with this statement has increased by almost one point, and Ukrainians are now the most favorable toward, and on average also agreeing with this statement. Changes in the reference countries are negligible.



Third, the share of Ukrainians who feel close to a political party decreased sharply: from 34% in 2022 to just 11% in 2024 (23 percentage points). This suggests that the ongoing war has weakened, if not largely suspended, partisan attachments.



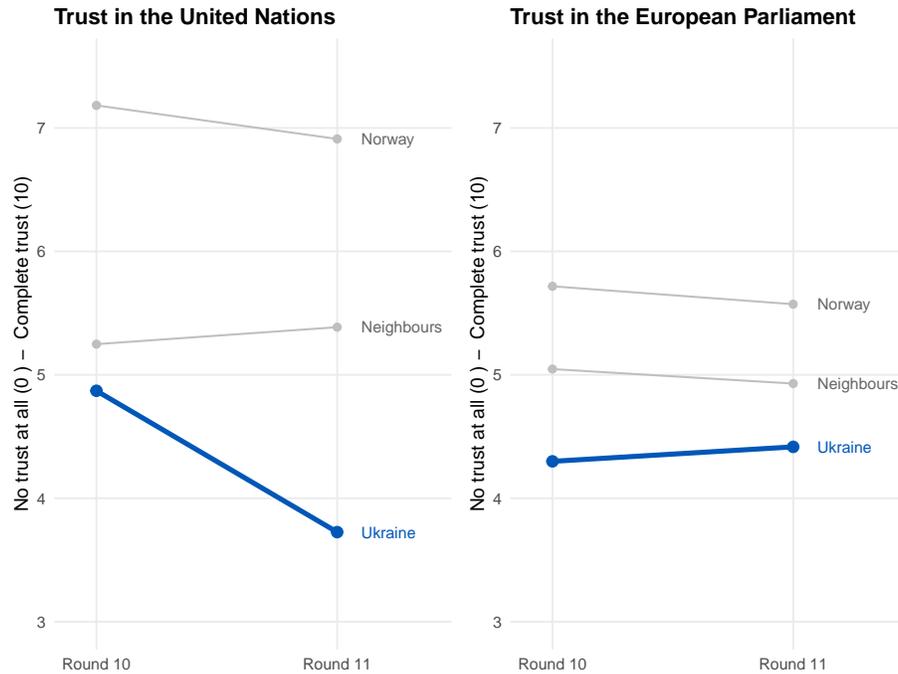
2.3 Support for international organizations

Support for international cooperation is commonly explained from two perspectives. First, there is the utilitarian perspective, whereby support is explained by the material benefits of cooperation. The ideational (or political) perspective explains support for international organizations because the organization aligns with one’s own ideas (Haverland, Veer, and Onderco 2022; Kiratli 2022). On the aggregate level it is difficult to distinguish these two mechanisms, but we can assess how attitudes toward specific international organizations changed since the start of the war. We focus on the UN (trust in the United Nations), and several attitudes toward Europe: “Trust in the European Parliament,” “European unification go further or gone too far,” “Would vote for [country] to remain (become) member of the European Union (or remain outside),” and “How emotionally attached to Europe?”

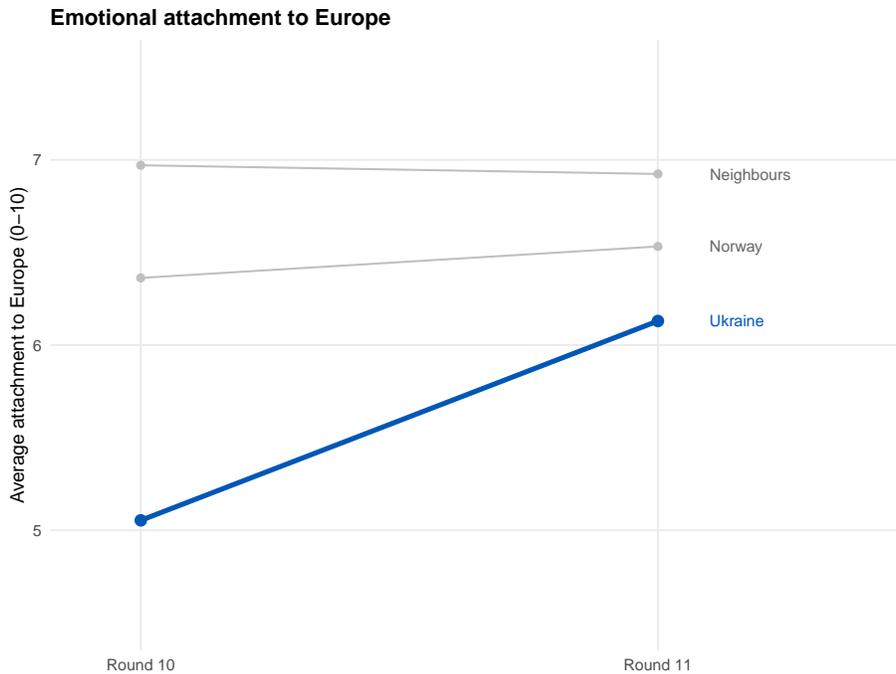
The UN General Assembly condemned Russia for the invasion, but the Security Council has been unable to take binding measures or provide military support for Ukraine. This lack of action is reflected in a full-point decline in average trust in the UN in Ukraine, while trust remained stable in the reference groups. This may indicate that many Ukrainians had different expectations from the UN.

While the UN did little to support Ukraine, the EU and European countries

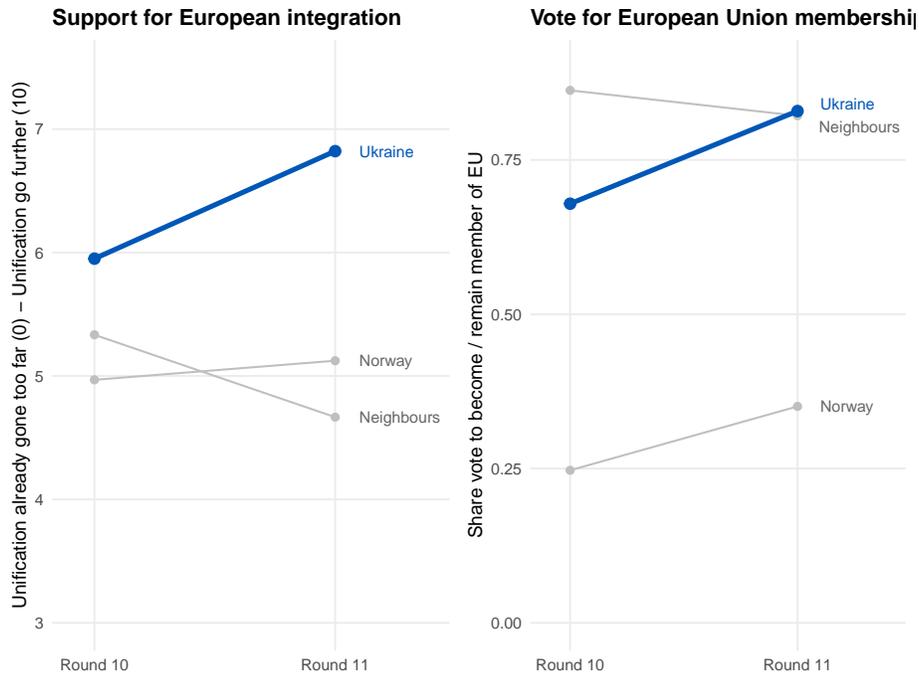
have expressed both strong ideational support and provided material support for Ukraine. This, however, did not significantly change trust in the European Parliament among Ukrainians.



However, Ukrainians became substantially more positive toward Europe overall. Emotional attachment to Europe increased by 1.2 points on an 11-point scale since the start of the war. Before the war, Ukrainians were indifferent, but after two years of war people have become more attached to Europe.



Support for further European integration also increased since the start of the war. Ukrainians were already the most pro-integration country before 2022, but this support increased further by 0.9 points, while support in Hungary/Slovakia significantly declined by 0.7 points. Support for European integration is also reflected in that Ukrainians are more likely to vote in favor of EU membership in the hypothetical case that a referendum would be held. While 68% would vote for Ukraine to become a member of the EU before February 2022, this has increased by 15 percentage points to 83% in 2024. In Slovakia and Hungary, support to remain in the EU has decreased by 4 percentage points to 82%. Meanwhile, a clear majority in Norway would still vote against membership, but since the war in Ukraine began, support has increased by 10 percentage points.



3 Conclusion

The fielding of ESS Round 10 just before Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, and Round 11 two years after the invasion, provides a unique opportunity to examine how the war has impacted the daily lives and attitudes of Ukrainians. While Ukrainians have become slightly less happy after two years of war, this effect is relatively small, and the war has not affected whether Ukrainians are satisfied with life in general, levels of personal trust, or the extent to which they engage in social activities. Moreover, we can observe some rally-around-the-flag effects as Ukrainians believe it is more important to be loyal to the leader of the country, are more emotionally attached to their country, and have largely dropped partisanship. Finally, the war has resulted in a clear drop in trust in the UN, while it increased support for European integration.

It must, however, be kept in mind that these results are average patterns. It may be the case that some people are differently affected by the war. People who were exposed to violence, have lost a person they were close to, or were forced to leave their home due to the war may have very different experiences from those who did not. In addition, the effects of war may also be perceived differently based on other background variables such as gender, age, or education. The questions in the survey were not tailored to Ukraine, which makes them comparable across time and countries, but at the same time a different framing of the question,

for example, on the personal trust questions with a clear in-group (Ukrainians) and out-group (Russians), may substantially change response patterns. Finally, fieldwork for Round 11 in Ukraine was finished in July 2024; 1.5 years of war later may have further changed attitudes and behaviors. It is thus important to continue monitoring how the war in Ukraine has changed its society.

References

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