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The Limits of War for Hegemonic Influence: Responses to the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched the largest land war in Europe since the Second World War against its neighbor, Ukraine. While a fair amount of literature regarding the war has begun to emerge, the way in which traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors responded to the invasion has still largely gone overlooked. Moreover, this discourse is revealing of the effect that Russia's invasion had on its own political influence in Ukraine overall. In this research, discourse expressed by 12 traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors in response to the 2022 invasion is explored in the context of Russia's behavior as a global hegemonic actor. The responses of these political actors are categorized in consideration of their reconceptualizations of political identity, physical actions, and levels of potential opportunism. The results of this analysis offer compelling evidence indicative of a large reduction in Russian influence over its traditionally sympathetic partners in Ukraine as a result of its invasion, with the notable exception of having successfully established a loyal local political and administrative elite in some occupied regions of Ukraine. However, this suggests a dramatic decline in Russian influence in Ukraine overall, which may result in a firmer commitment by Russian policymakers to continue the war until reaching the perception of having secured their objectives.

Keywords: Hegemony, influence, Russian Invasion of Ukraine, discourse analysis, Ukrainian politics, Opposition Platform for Life (OPZZh), political sympathy, war

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1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by land, air, and sea. Following years of tensions between Moscow and Kyiv, including war in the Donbas, this attack dramatically increased the scope of hostility in the region and triggered a historic chain of events including an unprecedented number of sanctions against Russia and a planned expansion of NATO. Tens of thousands have lost their lives and over 6 million people have been forced to flee their homes, giving rise to the largest refugee surge in Europe since the Second World War. At the time of this writing, large parts of Ukraine remain under Russian occupation, and Russia has made extensive use of local collaborators to assist in governing these territories (“Kto pomogayet Kremlyu,” 2022). On the other hand, the attitude of citizens remaining under Kyiv’s control have only become more bitter toward Russia and Vladimir Putin’s government, to the point where even many of the most prominent figures previously characterized as being “pro-Russian” are now actively engaged in fighting against the invasion (Myroniuk, 2022).

Much has been made of labels, both during and before the invasion, but they often conceal a more complex network of power, influence, and discursive positioning. Conceptualizations of what is “pro-Russian” or Russia-sympathetic is linked with a larger competition for influence among global hegemonic systems, and movements that are understood as belonging to this community are often deeply dependent on Russian influence across Ukraine, such as through linguistic and cultural ties, energy dependence, and the prospect of economic integration (Feldhusen, 1999; Smith, 2006; Van de Graaf & Colgan, 2017). Given the tight links between Russia and this political community, discourse generated from these factions in Ukraine is particularly instrumental in making conclusions about Russia’s influence across Ukrainian society. From this perspective, Russia’s choice of war, which might be termed a ‘last-resort influence mechanism,’ is likely indicative of anxiety within the Kremlin of the potency of its influence in Ukraine. However, it is also a unique opportunity to analyze the effects of violence by a global hegemonic influencer upon a society with a relatively large number of political actors traditionally sympathetic to the aggressor.

As living discursive and political positions, Russia’s 2022 invasion has served as an irreversible multifurcation point in the evolution of the many narratives that defined Ukraine’s traditionally Russia-sympathetic movements. Examples of this include the

implosion of movements like Opposition Platform - For Life (OPZZh) and Opposition Bloc, which each having experienced internal dissension and a variety of responses to Russia's invasion, before both eventually facing suspension on March 20, 2022, by the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (Sauer, 2022). A splintered genesis of new positions among formerly unified political actors is a relatively rare event, and one that produces an environment in which identity is negotiated, responsibility and blame allocated, and memory concretized (Potter, 1996). For many traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine, Russia's 2022 invasion provoked arguments about loyalty and legitimacy, both as Ukrainians and as members of a political movement, as well as normative and value-based concerns for the future of their community ("OPZZh zayavila," 2022).

While scholars have tackled many phenomena related to the current plight of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors, such as wartime collaboration, discursive political shifts, and the voice of political actors in exile, a comparative analysis of discourse generated from the ongoing war in Ukraine offers a fresh insight into the way these interrelated fields reflect developments in the evolution of Russian influence in Ukraine, Ukrainian political culture, and the impact of war in the 21st century (Hoffmann, S. 1968; Hoffmann, B. 2010; Pedersen, 2009). Moreover, scholarship related to international influence has largely failed to explain the large variance in responses to Russia's 2022 invasion by Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors, which this research aims to clarify through a deep analysis of rhetorical and physical responses to the invasion by Ukraine's most prominent political actors linked with the traditionally Russia-sympathetic community. Finally, in considering the nature of Russia-sympathetic discourse in Ukraine to be an important marker of Russia's influence in the country as a whole, this research contributes to past literature on the relationship between hegemonic influence and the discourse of sympathetic actors.

With this logic in mind, it may be understood that this study will answer the following research questions:

Central Research Question:

- How do the varied responses to Russia's 2022 invasion by Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors illustrate the limits of war as an influence mechanism?

Sub-Questions:

- How might varied responses to the 2022 Russian invasion by traditionally Russian-sympathetic actors be categorized?
- How is loyalty, legitimacy, responsibility, and identity reconceptualized in the responses to the 2022 Russian invasion by Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors?
- Is there a detectable cleavage between idealistic and opportunistic responses to the 2022 Russian invasion by Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors?

In terms of the structure of this research, the second chapter gives a summarization of existing literature that was deemed intellectually relevant and which assisted in the development of theoretical conceptualizations. The third chapter explains the methodological logic to the way data was collected and analyzed, as well as the significance and limits of this form of research. The fourth chapter reveals the results of this research through a categorized summary of the known rhetorical and physical responses to Russia's 2022 invasion given by prominent political actors associated with Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic community. Finally, the fifth chapter analyzes these responses in terms of various thematic perspectives, including shifts in conceptions of loyalty, legitimacy, and identity; allocation of blame and responsibility; cleavages in ideology and opportunism; and the overall effect of Russia's invasion on its position among traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainians and as a global hegemonic actor.

Ultimately, this research argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had a particularly negative effect on its influence among traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors overall. This includes the fact that Russia retained sympathy only among traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors located in Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine or among those who already held particularly strong ideological attachments to Russia or were connected to Russia's domestic political class. Moreover, Russia failed to maintain its influence among the most prestigious members of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community. However, this loss of influence may contribute to a firmer commitment by Russian policymakers to continue using military force in Ukraine until reaching the perception of having secured their objectives. This research also offers three main categories (*Exiles*, *Loyalists*, and *Collaborators*), along with five more precise subcategories, to group individuals based on their response to the invasion. Finally, this research argues that some relationships exist between an individual's personal background,

levels of opportunism in their response to the invasion, and the way their discourse reflected reconceptualizations of identity.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Hegemonic Actors and Influence Mechanisms

A large part of this analysis is predicated on existing theoretical assertions regarding the way that states and other international actors behave in the global system. Central to this is the core concept of “influence”, a broad phenomenon central to how states engage with the world around them and structure the nature of social relations with other actors (Hopf, 1998). Examples of this can be seen in definitions of China as a global “geoeconomic influencer” due to the weight of its economy, trade ties, and investments, which has “led to some political impact on the receiving countries” (Le Corre, 2018). Another example is the European Union, which, while not a state, has been argued by scholars as constituting a state-like international actor with a particularly strong material, ideational, and normative influence across its region and the world (Haukkala, 2015).

Study of the structure of international influence and influence transfer is deeply linked with the study of regional and global hegemony. This is due to the nature of hegemonic international actors, which tend to offer a unique model of political, socioeconomic, cultural, and commercial logic, and may include the aforementioned European Union and China, but also the United States, and historic polities like the British Empire or Ming Dynasty. In all hegemonic structures, influence is generated from a core and directed to a periphery, and scholars like Charles Kupchan have refined this understanding by demonstrating that, in addition to material preponderance, “a hegemonic position also always entails an ideational content in the norms, rules and practices propagated by the hegemon” (2014). Moreover, Kupchan argues that this material and ideational influence serves the interest of the core’s elite, as the expansion of social ideals “intimately intertwines with the material incentives in shaping hegemonic order” (2014). His logic is that if a state allocated its material resources through the use of a centrally planned economy, for example, elites of such a state should be expected to erect similar and compatible economic structures in peripheral regions, as only through compatible norms and practices can material expansion be realized. Normally, influence spreads from an international hegemonic actor as it rises in power, which is why Great Power conflicts have often been the site of major global structural change and normative competition as argued in Kupchan’s work:

“Hegemonic transitions entail competition over norms and rules as well as position and status. As a great power rises, it seeks to push outward to its expanding sphere of influence a set of ordering norms unique to its own cultural, socioeconomic, and political orientations. The defining characteristics of a particular hegemonic zone “bubble up” from the normative proclivities of the great power that establishes it. For this reason, hegemonic transitions are usually ideological contests...”

Kupchan (2014)

However, given conflict between rival hegemonic actors, what might give one state the edge over another in expanding a unique set of institutions into a new region? While war has often proven a reliable form of contest throughout history, open combat is not the only way to secure influence, especially in the Atomic Age. Looking at the European Union and its Eastern Partnership with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia offers a glimpse into a more peaceful method of norm and influence transfer. For one, the European Union has strong communication infrastructure with political networks and civil society in Eastern Europe, as well as support from various parts of the business sector interested in greater access to Europe’s powerful economy (Melnykovska & Schweickert, 2008; Noutcheva, 2018; Puglisi, 2008; Shyrokykh, 2018). It also benefits from the legitimacy attached to concepts like democracy, human rights, anti-corruption advocacy, and a monopoly on “Europeanness” (Blaney, 2001). The prospect of membership into the Union itself has also traditionally served as a powerful influence mechanism, lending increased legitimacy to demands that candidates to the Union accept a new normative agenda. Ultimately, the EU established the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in order to serve the function of retaining normative synthesis with its neighbors while remaining ambiguous toward genuine future enlargement of the Union (Haukkala, 2015).

However the nature of hegemonic actors and their influence mechanisms are often heterogeneous, as evidenced by the contemporary Russian Federation’s strategic distinction from the European Union. This is especially apparent in its behavior toward Ukraine, which has been labeled a “shared neighborhood” and a site of both historical and modern competition between Russia and the West (Averre, 2009). The Russian Federation, for its part, has a particularly acute understanding of spheres of influence, which does not translate well among the liberal internationalist institutions of the West (Tolstrup, 2014; Torbakov, 2004; Tsygankov, 2015). Russia’s democratic backsliding under Putin has also been instrumental in pushing forth a unique social, cultural, and political system demanding of its

own hegemony, which is often framed in the Western perspective as emergent authoritarian values in opposition to Western democracy (Makarychev, 2009; Noutcheva, 2018; Tolstrup, 2013). In terms of political competition, this is also expressed by Russia's open and aggressive contestation of both NATO and the EU's expansion into the former Soviet space, as well as the development of competing international political, economic, and security institutions like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union. Moscow ultimately elected to wield, initially covert and later explicit, military force to achieve its objectives as well (Haukkala, 2015). This followed attempts at leveraging cultural, historic, and linguistic ties, sectors of the economy linked to energy and natural gas, as well as non-transparent ties often associated with corruption (D'Anieri, 2012; Herpen, 2016; Putin, 2004; Smith, 2005).

Existing literature on the nature of geopolitical influence unto hegemonic peripheries offers a compelling framework to understand many of the macro-level processes occurring when analyzing developments in regions of interest for multiple hegemonic systems. This is particularly pertinent given this research's focus on matters regarding various Ukrainian political actors who became associated with the concept of hegemonic influence due to their discursive positions and ties to Russia. However, while Kupchan and others like him have gone to great lengths describing the interests of elites within hegemonic cores and the conflicts among hegemonic systems for influence, the perspective of societies described as "peripheral" are often overlooked.

2.2 Sympathetic Actors

To get a more nuanced and comprehensive view of how external influence actually looks within societies considered peripheral to a hegemon, one must be made familiar with literature on the political landscape of such regions. The reality is that every society will experience their own unique way of encountering and responding to influence from a foreign source. Taking pre-2014 Ukraine as an example, a recognizable distinction emerged stemming from the clear difference in orientational clarity between those popularly labeled as "pro-Western" and "pro-Russian". For example, "pro-Western" political actors, such as Viktor Yushchenko's presidential administration (2005-2010), were always vocal in their support of EU membership and deeper integration into the Western world. In contrast, one

may consider Viktor Yanukovich's presidency (2010-2014), which has often been categorized as "pro-Russian" despite rhetorically pursuing an outwardly cautious political balancing act between Russia and the West (Åslund, 2013; NATO, 2014). This "multivector" policy ultimately came to an end only after a lengthy and strained final decision by Yanukovich to pursue integration with the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union instead of the European Union, leading to revolution in 2014 (Razumkov Centre, 2004).

This disparity in what signaled "pro-Western" and "pro-Russian" social and political compartmentalization is partly built from the diverging influence mechanisms utilized by Russian and Western societies within Ukraine. This includes negative responses in Ukraine induced by Russia's association with political corruption and democratic backsliding, as well as the weak pull of Russia from an economic standpoint compared to the West. For many, it is also due to the perception of a long history of oppression under Russian rule, and a resurgent patriotism among many in post-Cold War Ukraine, supportive of its existence as an independent culture from that of Russia (Kulyk, 2016).

Given this context, how might one go about defining the parameters of what constitutes "pro-Russian" in the Ukrainian context? In the post-2014 context, scholars have often used the legacy of former President Viktor Yanukovich's political party, the Party of Regions, as an axiom. This includes labeling parties like Opposition Platform - For Life and Opposition Bloc as "pro-Russian" due to their heritage and links with many of the same individuals and policies that defined the Party of Regions (D'anieri, 2022). Others have simply justified their categorizations through sweeping compartmentalizations of parties that "call for closer relations with Russia" (Peisakhin & Rozenas, 2018). While this is somewhere to start from, it fails to capture the full nuance of Ukrainian politics, as seen in examples of Yanukovich's past willingness to integrate into the West. In 2019, many political rivals also labeled Zelenskyy as "pro-Russian" due to his interest in implementing the Steinmeier Formula, a proposed solution to the war in Donbas, which was framed as a victory for Moscow and led to mass protests across the country (Gigitashvili & Osadchuk, 2020).

To unravel this concept further, some semantic clarification is in order. While a great deal of previous literature and popular rhetoric uses the phrases "pro-Western" and "pro-Russian," this language may be overly reflective of hegemony-centric understandings of the global order. This is due to the implicit generalization embedded in the term, as it merges a large range of different political loyalties together. In the Ukrainian context, those who have the strongest claim to the label of "pro-Russian" would be those who view the national interests of the Russian people and state as that of their own, who feel loyal to a sense of

Russian identity, and who prioritize the interests of this identity beyond that of their own citizenship. However, in many cases, the popular use of the term “pro-Russian” also tends to encompass many political actors who do not go this far, including amongst political organizations like Opposition Platform - For Life and Opposition Bloc. As Ukrainian politicians and citizens, many members of these parties ultimately still defend the existence of a unique Ukrainian identity and a Ukrainian state, and it is thus not entirely accurate to refer to them as completely “pro-Russian,” despite their intentions of closer ties to Moscow. With this in mind, the term *Russia-sympathetic* will be used in this research to establish a larger label that can include both true “pro-Russians” and other Ukrainian political actors, and to clarify a more nuanced understanding of how foreign influence plays a role in the agency of Ukrainian political movements. The term “pro-Russian,” with quotation marks, will still be used within this research in reference to how the term has been used in previous contexts, and without quotation marks when reflecting the genuine perspective of identifying oneself as being Russian or of prioritizing the interests of the Russian state above that of the Ukrainian state.

To conceptualize this Russia-sympathetic label, at least compared to much of the previous literature on “pro-Russian” labels, it must instead be viewed as a discursive position within a wider and more complex landscape of relativistic rhetoric. Instead of constituting a singular policy platform, being Russia-sympathetic in the Ukrainian context often instead reflects positions that offer alternatives to narratives in favor of direct Western integration, as well as discourse that echoes the dominant chains of logic found in Russian political discourse. Such an understanding would fit more cleanly with prior literature on discourse analysis, as many scholars in the field advise looking at actors through “the expected outcome of their attempts to influence objects” through both direct and indirect rhetorical approaches, as well as interpretations of discourse analysis ultimately as a “study of rationality” (Pedersen, 2009). In order to assess the underlying conditions for a statement to be interpreted as meaningful and rational, assertions of Russian sympathy certainly need to be seen within their wider contexts. As such, the conceptualization of Ukraine’s Russia-sympathetic political scene as a living system that evolves within a fluid ecosystem of political perceptions offers a more holistic approach as to what might constitute the reality of the receiving end of a hegemonic’s system’s influence mechanisms. Although continuously evolving and utilizing a variety of rhetorical strategies, there remains a distinct pattern and structure to the aims this grouping hopes to achieve, especially relative to those around it. As such, this conceptualization reflects prior scholarship taken to enrich discourse analysis with

the main tenets of complexity theory, as outlined by constructivist researcher Esperanza Morales-López:

“... in a living system, the components change continuously because within it there is growth, development and evolution. This is the third component necessary for a complete description of the nature of life: the process of evolution. These three criteria (pattern, structure and process) are completely interdependent, so that the pattern of organization can only be recognized if it is embodied in a physical structure; in living beings it is in turn a continuous process.”

Morales-López (2019)

So how does this compare with reality? To answer this question, we may look back to the example of Zelenskyy being labeled “pro-Russian” by critics in 2019, which catapulted the “No To Capitulation” national protests against the implementation of the Steinmeier Formula. At this time, the public began to perceive him as potentially giving in to Russian demands to negotiate directly with the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR), as a way to initiate internationally recognized elections in these territories (Gigitashvili & Osadchuk, 2020). The far reaching nature of these protests and accusations, despite Zelenskyy never straying from the ultimate goal of European integration, demonstrates the flexibility and evolution-prone nature of the relative sense of what a “pro-Russian” position might entail. With time, the popular conception of what constituted “pro-Russian” eventually excluded Zelenskyy once again, notably after the failure of the Ukrainian and Russian sides of the conflict to agree on a common interpretation of what the Steinmeier Formula entailed.

While the perception and caution toward the specter of “pro-Russianness” is demonstrated as evolutionary in this case, there are also certain elements that might give Russia-sympathetic actors a more patterned and structured definition as a cohesive phenomenon. Examples of this include a general tendency of Russia-sympathetic actors to view Russophone Ukrainians as their primary target audience, reflected in Opposition Platform - For Life’s 2019 party election program’s explicit hostility toward linguistic Ukrainization (“PREDVYBORNAYA PROGRAMMA”, 2022). Another broader example of this was the general preference for economic integration with Russia and other former Soviet states as opposed to the EU, due to the potential economic benefits this would bring for eastern Ukraine, which is largely Russophone (Giuliano, 2018; Zhukov, 2016). Domestically,

Russia-sympathetic actors have tended to favor a constitutional amendment that would give more power to the country's regions, as opposed to the central government in Kyiv, allowing largely Russophone regions to have a stronger say in the direction of the country's development. Romanticization and celebration of the legacy of the Soviet Union has also long served as a traditional marker of Russia-sympathetic actors, with examples of this reflected in speeches like one by Vadim Rabinovich, a former key actor in Opposition Platform - For Life, at a 2020 conciliation council among leaders of Ukrainian parliamentary factions in which he urged the sending of a Ukrainian delegation to participate in the 9 May victory parade in Moscow and sang part of the Soviet song "The Sacred War" ("Rabinovich vklyuchil," 2022). Finally, concerning foreign policy, many Russia-sympathetic actors have advocated for a neutral status for Ukraine as opposed to joining NATO, as well as entering into direct negotiations with separatists in Donbas ("PREDVYBORNAYA PROGRAMMA", 2022).

2.3 The Effects of War

Given the existence of Russia-sympathetic political actors and their audience in Ukraine, we can also make certain inferences regarding them. One is that, as they are closely linked with influence generated from Russia itself, disruptions toward this network of influence mechanisms may also have consequences for the sympathetic community attached to them. An example of this may be witnessed through the effect of the 2014 War in Donbas, which marked a dramatic decline in sympathy for Russia among the Ukrainian population despite not officially serving as an armed conflict between the Russian and Ukrainian militaries (D'anieri, 2022). While some scholars suggest that the medium-term effect of this might have been less dramatic than anticipated given voting patterns in the 2019 Ukrainian elections, there is reason to believe that decreased sympathy for Russia prevailed more widely among younger generations (D'anieri, 2022).

Acknowledging the negative effects that armed conflict can have for the influence of a hegemonic actor, a question arises as to why such an actor would elect to pursue an all-encompassing and overt war as Russia has done in 2022. In attempting to answer this, we might refer back to the work of Charles A. Kupchan, who modeled his understanding of hegemonic competition through the structure of Thucydides' Trap, an older theory popularized by American political scientist Graham T. Allison referring to the classical age

Peloponnesian War (Allison, 2018). In the words of Kupchan, this model of competition occurs because “as the gap between reigning hegemon and rising challenger closes, the order derived from hierarchy ultimately gives way to competition over position and status. Order is again established when a new hierarchy emerges” (2014). Scholars like Michael Beckley and Hal Brands have also built upon this theory further, arguing that aggression is often pursued by the rising challenger especially after they experience what appears to be a peak in their relative global power, and time is perceived to be a liability (2022).

From this perspective, it could be argued that post-Cold War Russian officials perceived themselves as having experienced a peak in relative power and influence in Ukraine around 2014, and the use of force became the only way to maintain a favorable position for a gradually weakening Moscow. This logic entails that Russian elites may have expected Ukraine to Westernize and potentially develop economically and militarily in ways that would have proven detrimental to future Russian influence in Ukraine. Moreover, Putin’s regime likely did not view its influence mechanisms in Ukraine as functioning sufficiently by 2022, which also served as a cause for anxiety regarding the stability of Russia itself (D’anieri, 2022). From this point of view, cutting Russian society off from the West through unprecedented sanctions and restriction from Western media spaces may have been an intended feature of Putin’s use of military force. This state of affairs would hamper the potential for influence within Russia from the West, which Putin views as “degenerate,” “morally repugnant,” and hostile to his model of governance (Haukkala, 2016; Rodkiewicz and Rogoża, 2015; Putin, 2013).

The use of an overt war as a last-resort influence mechanism, however, has serious repercussions for populations of sympathetic political actors within the targeted state. If taking the “Russia-sympathetic” label as a living discursive position, then open war between the nation of these citizens against their hegemonic influencers is certain to produce something close to what constructivist scholars call a “bifurcation point,” which splits a discursive position into two separate evolutionary structures during “periods of instability, in which new forms of disorder can arise spontaneously” (Morales-López, 2019). However, in the case of Ukraine’s Russia-sympathetic political actors in 2022, a more accurate description of this phenomenon would be *multifurcation*, given the richer variety of responses beyond only two different evolutionary paths.

One of these paths might be conceptualized as *collaboration*, which is unique in that it serves as a discursive outcome that can only exist in regions that have witnessed military success by Russia. While overt military force by Russia has proven its potential to be

detrimental to Russia-sympathetic attitudes overall in Ukraine, the logic of the use of military force by a hegemonic actor is predicated on the fact that success is one of the surest ways to consolidate stable influence when outright control over a region is successfully achieved. Collaboration is an important part of this, and scholarship has shown that cooperation between local populations and representatives of a victorious invader is highest in areas with large deployments of the invader's troops (Kalyvas, 2008). Existing literature also makes a further distinction between collaboration and *collaborationism*, with the latter referring to voluntary or ideological service to an foreign force which is seen as a "champion of desirable domestic transformations" (Hoffmann, 1968). For many traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine, Russia may fit that description, although the large presence of Russian troops and the necessity to cooperate with occupying forces to acquire resources requires a more detailed analysis to determine the nature of collaboration in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

Looking away from regions that have seen Russian military occupation, however, reveals other paths that traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors in Ukraine were likely to have scattered towards. One of these might be conceptualized as *exile*, which refers to the departure from one's home country due to political circumstances. This course of action might take place due the harassment or discredit of political actors traditionally sympathetic to the now-invading force, or agreement with the perspective of the invading power and the desire to flee their home country instead of defending it. Nonetheless, in Ukraine's case, in which many traditionally Russia-sympathetic political parties were banned following the invasion, individuals associated with these movements were certain to be met with "constrained legitimacy" as political actors, which scholars Laura Henry and Elizabeth Plantan define as a common catalyst for many political exiles to emigrate (2021). Existing literature on the subject largely derives from the work of Albert O. Hirschman, which postulated about the nature of the relationship between "exit, voice, and loyalty" (1970). Originally, his understanding was that exiles might either exit the political sphere of their home nation entirely through emigration, or voice their grievances to the state, depending on their loyalty to it. However, new generations of scholars have done much to modernize his ideas into a 21st century landscape of easily accessible internet media that has assisted political exiles in expressing their voice from abroad (Hoffman 2010; Ahmadov and Sasse 2016). In fact, scholarship has more often demonstrated that exiled "activists stay involved in domestic debates and channel politically relevant information to international audiences",

something that is reflected among many traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors who fled the country following the war (Michaelsen, 2016).

Finally, another path in the multifurcation of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors may be found in a reflection of the way the war has changed Ukrainian society as a whole. Defensive wars often contribute to dramatic increases in patriotic sentiment, and this may be especially true for societies highly influenced by Western norms and values, according to which conquest for territory is considered unjust and antiquated in the 21st century (Kupchan, 2014). This is accentuated by the fact that West-sympathetic discourse in Ukraine is mostly reflective of its desire to join the European Union, which arguably has an even larger emphasis toward territorial integrity, a rules-based international order, against territorial conquest than even the United States (Holsti, 1994). The effects of war on Ukrainian patriotism and increasing West-sympathetic public sentiment were already witnessed between 2014 and 2019, in which Ukrainian society experienced a large increase in identification with the Ukrainian state, including among many who lived in eastern Ukraine (D'anieri, 2022). This shift also impacted many of the leading political actors who still represented Russia-sympathetic discourse in Ukraine, and offers a theoretical understanding of those traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors who we might conceptualize as *loyalists* and who would join the fight against Russia in 2022 as Ukrainian patriotism swelled. While potentially only serving as a way to retain some form of political survival in Ukraine, this behavior may not be entirely opportunistic. Literature from Hirschman, postulating that political actors who identified more strongly with their state of origin would be the least likely to emigrate, would suggest loyalist responses may be less opportunistic than exile responses (1970).

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

The approach of this research can be defined as that of a qualitative case study, following both an instrumental and interpretive design, that examines Ukraine following the beginning of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. A case study approach is the most appropriate given the nature of this research's focus on the effects of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and that "case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomena through detailed contextual analysis of events or conditions and their relationships" (Yin, 2017). Moreover, Yosef Jabareen has argued that case studies are the most suitable form of research when working through a concept-driven framework. The previous section of this paper introduced overarching concepts and theoretical frameworks, including those concerning the relationship between systemic hegemonic competition and influence mechanisms, as well as some categorized responses of political actors during times of war. The qualitative aspect of this research structure is also particularly fitting, as "qualitative research does not seek to describe a particular norm, but rather to discover the richness and complexity of a situation which may be different from the norm resulting in contextually framed perspectives (Manning, 1992). The subject of this research is particularly focussed on capturing a plethora of experiences reflected in the divided discourse of traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors, something that can only be analyzed through the lens of a method that feeds on context and human experience. This is further reflected in the work of Flick, who argues that "in qualitative research, the researcher is part of the process of discovering meaning and so there is an appreciation of subjectivity and a need for reflexivity on the part of the researcher (2002). Furthermore, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by another state in the 21st century is a very unusual event, and given the extraordinary nature of this case, a detailed qualitative account will "help to explain the complexities of the phenomenon which may not be captured through experimental research" (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

This research may be considered both interpretive and instrumental, to the extent that this research addresses multiple research questions. The main question explored in this research pertains to the effects of war as an influence mechanism for hegemonic actors. In addressing this question, this research is best understood as being structured in such a way

that all the responses of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors collectively reveal information about the state of Russia's influence within Ukraine. Namely, the state of discourse in the traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community in Ukraine is considered an important marker of Russian influence in the country. Analysis of this discourse reveals how Russian influence fares in different regions of the country, how it differs among individuals with different classes of political prestige, and how this discourse is affected by Russia's foreign policy toward Ukraine. This structures the research within the definition of an instrumental case study, in which through analyzing a specific phenomenon "the researcher aims to understand another case or another issue" (Stake, 1995). This paper also explores how the discourse of individual Ukrainian political actors might be defined and categorized, contributing to prior research, including Stanley Hoffmann's work on the dichotomy between ideology and opportunism in wartime collaboration, and Stathis Kalyvas's work on regional divergences in collaboration. Moreover, this paper also builds on Albert O. Hirschman's theories toward exit and voice, as well as those inspired by them, like those of Bert Hoffmann. This part of the research may be considered interpretive, as "through interpretive case studies, the researcher aims to interpret the data by developing conceptual categories, supporting or challenging the assumptions made regarding them" (Chetty, 2014).

3.2 Data Sources

In exploring the limitations of war as an influence mechanism, this research analyzes the responses to the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which took place on February 24, 2022. The responses analyzed were generated from Ukrainian citizens considered to be relatively prominent, traditionally Russia-sympathetic, political actors. Most literature on the study of hegemonic actors has been conducted within the framework of security studies, economics, or international institutions. Additionally, a large portion of existing literature within this field, including work by Olusola Ogunnubi on Nigeria's position in West Africa and Lee Lai To's research on China's influence in Southeast Asia during Deng Xiaoping's administration, has tended to touch only briefly on the local perceptions and statements in what Kupchan would refer to as "peripheral" societies (To, 1981; Kupchan, 2014; Ogunnubi 2017). The use of discourse generated from Ukraine's Russia-sympathetic community to serve as a gauge for part of Russia's influence in Ukraine

has been more inspired by the work of Nata Dzvelishvili, Tazo Kupreishvili, Givi Silagadze, Petro Kuzyk, and Chan Yul Yoo. In studies by these scholars, more care is taken to depict local rhetoric in peripheral regions as examples of a hegemon's influence. This can be seen particularly acutely in the work of Givi Silagadze, in which "pro-Russian" discourse in Georgia among certain political organizations can be understood within a wider framework of competition between Russia and the West, and the European Union in particular (Silagadze, 2021). A connection between a hegemon's influence and peripheral discourse is also asserted clearly in the way Chan Yul Yoo argues that "pro-Chinese" rhetoric among South Korean political actors has important implications for American and Chinese influence in the country (Yoo, 2005). Through the analysis of discourse among traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors in Ukraine, the research conducted in this paper will also serve as a useful contribution to the study of hegemonic influence and local rhetoric in peripheral societies. It will be made unique, however, by doing so in examining the case of a violent invasion by a hegemon into a peripheral region.

Defining Russia-sympathetic actors in Ukraine can be complex, and has often been achieved in existing literature by using certain parties as static axioms. This includes cases in which Ukraine's Russia-sympathetic political community has been coded solely by the Party of Regions and its descendant parties (D'anieri, 2022). However, as a living discursive position, the boundaries of what constitutes a Russia-sympathetic position can fluctuate easily, and certainly encompasses several different political parties. Regarding what this movement has in common, the author of this research would argue that Ukraine's Russia-sympathetic factions have generally rhetorically positioned themselves in the post-2014 period by:

- Advocating closer ties to Russia, as opposed to the West; or supporting the country's neutrality.
- Opposing NATO membership, and tending to oppose EU membership.
- Viewing the Russophone population in Ukraine as their primary target audience, and advocating for policies aimed at the interests of this group.
- Favoring a constitutional amendment that would give more power to the country's regions, as opposed to the central government in Kyiv.
- Advocating for direct negotiations with the DPR and LPR.

- Tending to celebrate the memory of the USSR, especially victory in the Great Patriotic War¹.

Most of these behavioral, policy, or discursive positions are represented along the platforms and demeanors of several parties that were suspended by the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on March 20, 2022, due to allegations of having ties to the Russian Federation (Sauer, 2022). These parties include:

- Opposition Platform - For Life (OPZZh)
- Party of Shariy
- Nashi
- Opposition Bloc
- Left Opposition
- Union of Left Forces
- Derzhava
- Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine
- Socialist Party of Ukraine
- Political Party "Socialists"
- Volodymyr Saldo Bloc

This list encompasses a large portion of the Russia-sympathetic movement in Ukraine, but may be accentuated by the inclusion of some smaller political parties, such as the Communist Party of Ukraine, the successor to the Soviet-era Community Party of Ukraine, which was prohibited from participating in elections after 2015 and ultimately faced a complete liquidation of its assets by the Ukrainian state on July 6, 2022 (Sweeney, 2022). The party Trust Deeds, led by the mayor of Odesa, Gennadiy Trukhanov, can also be considered a part of Ukraine's broader Russia-sympathetic community due to its participation in voting blocs like Opposition Bloc from 2014 and 2019, which advocated for most of the policies indicative of a Russia-sympathetic position ("Oppoblok obyedinilsya," 2019).

¹ The "Great Patriotic War" is how the Eastern Front in the Second World War is referred to in most Russian-speaking Ukrainian discourse. The term derives from official usage in the USSR. Despite the Ukrainian parliament legally retiring the term in favor of "Second World War" as part of a set of decommunization laws in 2015, the term "Great Patriotic War" continues to enjoy popular usage.

Ultimately, from among the plethora of Russia-sympathetic parties, this research reflects in-depth analyses of the responses to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine by 12 Ukrainian political actors. They include (in alphabetical order):

- Balitsky, Yevgeny Vitalyevich
- Boyko, Yuriy Anatoliyovych
- Kuzmin, Renat Raveliyovych
- Kyva, Illia Volodymyrovych
- Murayev, Yevheniy Volodymyrovych
- Rabinovich, Vadim Zinovyevich
- Rogov, Vladimir Valeryevich
- Saldo, Volodymyr Vasylovych
- Stolar, Vadim Mikhailovich
- Stremousov, Kirill Sergeyeovich
- Trukhanov, Gennadiy Leonidovich
- Vilkul, Oleksandr Yuriyovych

Responses from these individuals have been collected from both primary and secondary sources, such as social media posts, recorded speeches, and direct quotes from written publications and exclusive interviews. In terms of medium, 27 published articles were analyzed, 31 Facebook posts were analyzed, 53 YouTube videos were analyzed, and approximately 250 Telegram posts were analyzed, establishing a total of approximately 360 data points. Due to the varied levels of political importance among the 12 selected actors at the beginning of the war, a wide variety of data sources were required to collect an accurate picture of how each individual responded over the course of the beginning of the war. For some political actors, such as Yuriy Boyko, the existence of an official YouTube channel that posted daily in the first months following the war made it relatively easy to gather data on his position. However, some individuals did not possess official YouTube accounts, and instead actively reached their audiences through Telegram, a popular social media and messaging app developed by Russian brothers Nikolai and Pavel Durov in 2013. Similarly, some Ukrainian political actors gave preference to Facebook, such as Oleksandr Vilkul. Finally, some actors were completely devoid of an official social media presence until after the beginning of the war, leaving few options apart from secondary sources to collect their early responses.

Ultimately, this resulted in the use of the official Telegram channels of: Vladimir Rogov, Vadim Rabinovich, Yevheniy Murayev, Illia Kyva, Renat Kuzmin, and Oleksandr Vilkul. The official Telegram channel of the Russian-installed Kherson military-civilian administration was used to collect data on Volodymyr Saldo and Kirill Stremousov, and the official Telegram channel of the Platform for Life and Peace was used to collect information on Yuriy Boyko. In addition, several other Telegram channels were consulted for extra statements collected through second hand information, including the official Telegram channel of RIA Novosti, a Russian state-owned domestic news agency, and three Telegram channels focused on news regarding the war in Ukraine, including *Реальная Война | Украина Новости*² and *Инсайдер UA*³, which displayed bias toward the Ukrainian side of the war, and *Оперативные сводки*⁴, which displayed a bias toward the Russian side of the war. Data was located by using the last names of each of the target individuals as keywords in the Telegram search function.

YouTube was used to gather statements published on the official channels of Yuriy Boyko and Kirill Stremousov. Additionally, statements from Yuriy Boyko were collected from the official channel of the Platform for Life and Peace, as well as on the channel of Denis Kazanskyi, in which statements from an exclusive interview are recorded. The channel *Я в Одессі*⁵ provided a vast archive of statements which were used to analyze Gennadiy Trukhanov. Facebook was used by gathering statements from the official pages of Volodymyr Saldo, Vadim Rabinovich, Vadim Stolar, and Oleksandr Vilkul. Finally, published articles were also consulted for additional statements. This included exclusive written interviews of Vadim Rabinovich and Gennadiy Trukhanov, in Mignews, the Kyiv Independent, Newsweek, Ukrainska Pravda, and the Telegraph. Other articles that were consulted for their quotes of Volodymyr Saldo and Kirill Stremousov included those in Strana.ua and Politnavigator.

The temporal boundaries of this research were somewhat affected by the circumstances of data collection. The greatest focus is placed on data collected nearest to the date of February 24, 2022, on which Russia launched the invasion of Ukraine. This is due to the fact that many of the analyzed individuals began to solidify their positions on the war in early March, around one or two weeks after the initial invasion. With this in mind, the research largely analyzes statements from late February and throughout the month of March,

² Romanized as “Realnaya Voyna | Ukraina Novosti” or translated as “Real War | Ukraine News.”

³ Romanized and translated as “Insider UA.”

⁴ Romanized as “Operativnye svodki” or translated as “Situation Reports.”

⁵ Romanized as “Ja Odessit.” It is intentionally spelled erroneously, but can implicitly be translated as “I am an Odesan.”

although in some circumstances data points from beyond this period are also taken into consideration. This is especially true for the responses to collaborate with Russia, as much of the Russian-occupation administrative infrastructure in regions like the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts⁶ was not fully established until late March. Additionally, some data is derived from cases in which individuals gave interviews clarifying their position on the war, or elucidating how the war has changed their perspective, several months after the beginning of the invasion.

3.3 Research Methods

This analysis is focused on key statements regarding themes of loyalty, legitimacy, responsibility, and identity as they relate to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As such, the author feels that the 12 Ukrainian political actors analyzed in this research are sufficient to gain a balanced and diverse range of responses that reflect most of the different ways in which Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic community responded overall. This analysis is conducted primarily through a discourse analysis approach, which has been argued in existing literature to "provide the basis on which policy preferences, interests and goals are constructed." (Bozhko, 2011) This is due to the propensity of discourse to legitimize political institutions, policies, as well as the actions of political actors. This research method thus offers a particularly ideal way to explore the way in which narratives have shifted and norms were negotiated following the start of the war. As politicians, many of the individuals analyzed were greatly concerned with retaining a sense of legitimacy and popularity in the eyes of their constituents, which reflects deeper truths regarding Russian influence as a hegemonic global actor in Ukraine. The analysis of legitimacy through discourse has been explored in particular depth in the work of Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, who have all contributed to establishing the school of discourse analysis as a research method (1971; 1994; 2000). Ove Pedersen defined this school succinctly through the maxim that all discourses are "ideological because they appear as objectivity ... and thus conceal alternative realities" (Pedersen, 2009). Moreover, this method asserts that through discourse, "the understanding of self and of communality comes to be taken-for-granted or to be understood as meaningful and rational," which has particularly important ramifications for the influence of a hegemonic actor in its periphery (Pedersen, 2009).

⁶ "Oblast" can be translated as "region" or "province."

The relationship between discourse and power is also found in the work of James Paul Gee, Emma Waterton, Lauajane Smith, and Gary Campbell, and was instrumental in the development of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a more precise school of discourse analysis research. The latter three of these scholars argue for a connection between discourse and the interpretation of ethnic heritage, asserting that the power embedded in discourse can have serious implications on subjective feelings of national and cultural identity (Waterton et al., 2006). This is a particularly important justification for the use of discourse analysis, and a CDA approach in particular, in this research. Namely, Campbell's findings reflect the realities of war in Ukraine, which has provoked larger conversations about ethnic and national identity since 2014, and such conceptions form an important part of responses Ukrainians gave to Russia's 2022 invasion of the country. Moreover, the use of discourse analysis in this research parallels the definition of the concept as given by James Paul Gee, who viewed it as, "the analysis of how language is situated in cultural and contextual power dynamics" (Gee, 2004). The influence of CDA is thus further visible in the way this research synthesizes discourse with larger contextual information about the physical actions of each individual, and important events in course of the war, in order to reveal how discourse reflects conceptions of Ukrainian identity and power dynamics in the framework of global hegemonic competition.

3.4 Limitations

It should be noted that this research is limited in several ways. First, the fact that this research explores only a single event has skewed the results towards the unique context of this environment. Certain factors are unique to Russia's current war in Ukraine, such as the simple fact that full-scale war between two large states in 21st century Europe remains a relatively uncommon event. The fact that Russia did not achieve a quick and decisive victory, for example, may have contributed to the way in which Ukrainian society and Ukrainian political actors responded. Had Russia achieved greater victory on the battlefield, we might have seen greater support for Russia among some of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors. This could be seen as a limitation in that it does not demonstrate the limitations of war as an influence mechanism in different contexts, a drawback that could be mitigated through similar studies of other cases.

Second, political discourse can usually be divided into two types: public and closed (Bozhko, 2011). This research is limited to an analysis of only the public aspects of power discourse, which does not allow us to see behind the scenes, and witness how political actors discuss issues amongst themselves alone. Moreover, some of the most prominent Ukrainian political actors associated with the traditionally Russia-sympathetic community remained silent or only gave very limited public statements about the war. These challenges have particular ramifications on determining whether decisions by certain political actors were made opportunistically or ideologically. This can sometimes be mitigated through the use of relevant expert interviews, which is a strategy the researcher would advise to use in future studies of this topic.

Third, it is worth mentioning that not all of these individuals are of the same level of political importance, with some only coming to prominence following the start of the war, and some prominent members of Ukraine's Russia-sympathetic political community being left out due to a lack of available response data to analyze. Examples of this include Viktor Medvedchuk⁷, Igor Abramovych⁸, and others. Additionally, this concise list of individuals was selected in such a way so as to promote a diverse balance of responses, and may not reflect a proportional representation of all the different kinds of responses given by Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors.

Finally, the research is limited by the linguistic skills of the researcher. As a non-native speaker of Russian, the researcher may have overlooked or missed some of the nuance given in responses to the invasion, especially those published on social media or in oral statements. While most responses were given in Russian, some responses were also given in Ukrainian, a language the researcher has a more limited understanding of. In cases in which the researcher did not understand a statement, or wanted to confirm an interpretation, native Russian and Ukrainian speakers, as well as machine translation, were consulted.

⁷ Viktor Volodymyrovych Medvedchuk was elected as a representative in the Ukrainian parliament by placing third on the 2019 election list of OPZZh, and long held a leading position in the party. He previously served as chief of staff to then Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma from 2002-2005, and he is a personal friend of Vladimir Putin. In May, 2021, Medvedchuk was accused of treason by the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, and lived under house arrest for 10 months until an attempted escape from the country four days after the start of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. He eventually arrived in Russia through a prisoner exchange on September 21st, 2022.

⁸ Ihor Oleksandrovych Abramovych was elected to the Ukrainian parliament by placing fourteenth on the 2019 election list of OPZZh. On the day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he announced his resignation from the party, and in May, he established the parliamentary group Restoration of Ukraine, which supports the actions of Zelenskyy's government.

3.5 Significance

This research offers an important contribution to several fields, including the study of regional and global hegemony, Ukraine's political development, war in the former Soviet Union, wartime collaboration, political voice from abroad, and the relationship between norms, discourse, power, and war. In particular, this research builds on past claims regarding the way in which hegemonic influence is linked to the discursive positions of sympathetic peripheral actors. Theories established in past literature are accentuated through the use of a contemporary case study that offers to clarify the utility of war as an influence mechanism. This is particularly important given the likely prospect of war conducted by other hegemonic actors at some time in the future, which will have an impact on the legitimacy of sympathetic actors of their own. Moreover, the interpretation offered by this research on the effect of war on Russia's position in Ukraine will constitute an important argument for larger debates on Russian foreign policy.

This research is also important for examining the effects of a full-scale war across Ukraine in the 21st century, and will serve as a valuable contribution to the way Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors are understood before and after the start of the invasion. Given the importance of themes like identity and legitimation in this research, it will also serve an important role in understanding the future of Ukraine's social and political landscape more broadly. In the long term, this work may serve as a timeless reflection of the way this war was perceived by traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors as it was conducted, and will assist in clarifying the realities of Ukraine's past and future political factions.

4. Categorizations and Responses

This section relates the results of research across approximately 360 pieces of information either directly including or pertaining to statements made by 12 traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine. The responses of each individual follow brief summaries of their personal background, and are also accompanied by some contextual information regarding their discourse or what was occurring at the time of the war. Unfortunately, not all individuals were endowed with the same amount of publicly available information regarding their background or public life, leading to some sections being more robust than others. However, each analyzed individual has been categorized within a larger pattern of response behavior, ranging from *Exiles*, *Loyalists*, and *Collaborators*, along with five more precise sub-categories. This does not mean that the responses of individuals in each category were exactly the same, but that they shared certain noteworthy commonalities in their general attitudes toward the invasion, which are expanded upon in more detail within each section.

4.1 Exiles

Exiles describe those traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine who, due to the outbreak of Russia's 2022 invasion, left Ukraine and have since not returned. This includes individuals who left Ukraine shortly before or shortly after the invasion, as the purpose of departure varied among each individual. *Exiles* often expressed or continue to express their personal stance toward the invasion in public life, and are thus further ordered through the subcategories of *Pro-Ukrainian* and *Pro-Russian*, which reflect the allegiance of each individual with respect to the war. *Pro-Ukrainian Exiles* include Vadim Rabinovich and Vadim Stolar, while *Pro-Russian Exiles* include Renat Kuzim and Illia Kyva. Furthermore, the category *Without Voice*, named in reference to the work of Albert O. Hirschman on the relationship between political voice and exile, reflects the case of Yevheniy Murayev, whose vague comments did not reveal a distinct political position and who completely abandoned public life after departing Ukraine.

It should be noted that other prominent traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine could have been included in the category of *Exiles*, such as Viktor

Medvedchuk, and Petro Symonenko⁹ in the *Pro-Russian* subcategory. Due to a relative lack of response material, a full analysis of these individuals is out of the scope of this research.

4.1.a Pro-Ukrainians

Vadim Zinovyevich Rabinovich was sentenced to 14 years in a forced labor camp, at the age of 31, by the Kharkiv Oblast court after repeated arrests for “embezzlement of state funds in especially large amounts” in 1984 (“Jurnalisty vspomnili,” 2017). However, the Soviet Union collapsed five years after his early release in 1986, and in the early 1990s, Rabinovich made aliyah to Israel and acquired Israeli citizenship (Stashinskiy, 2017). At the time of this writing, he still retained residences in both Ukraine and Israel. Rabinovich would prove to be quite active in the Israeli philanthropy scene, donating large sums of money to the restoration of the Hurva Synagogue and several Jewish charitable organizations (Shefler, 2012). In 1996, he was appointed chairman of the Israeli-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce, and in 1997 he co-founded the Ukrainian 1+1 TV channel, became president of the Stolichnye Novosti publishing company, and created the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress (Gorchinskaya, 1999). However, in 1999, Rabinovich was banned by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) from entering Ukraine for a period of 5 years, allegedly due to his activity causing “considerable damage” to the economy of Ukraine, although possibly related to the fact that he leaked information about the sale of ammunition by Ukraine to Yugoslavia despite an international embargo (“Khto komy Rabinovich,” 2018). In 2007, Rabinovich became the president of the Arsenal Kyiv football club, and in 2011, Rabinovich established the European Jewish Union (now known as the European Jewish Parliament) with fellow Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi (“European Jewish,” 2011). In 2014, he registered as a self-nominated candidate for the presidency of Ukraine, partly to counter the characterization of the post-Maidan Ukraine as antisemitic (“President of All-Ukrainian,” 2014). His presidential bid was unsuccessful but he was elected to the Verkhovna Rada¹⁰ the same year, placing fourth on the electoral list of Opposition Bloc. In 2016, Rabinovich left Opposition Bloc, and established Opposition Platform - For Life with fellow ex-Opposition Bloc member

⁹ Petro Mykolayovych Symonenko was a member of the Ukrainian parliament from 1994-2014 and has been leader of the Communist Party of Ukraine since 1993. Symonenko and the Communist Party took pro-Russian stances in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, resulting in the suspension of the party and the seizure of all its assets. Symonenko reportedly fled from Kyiv to Belarus with the assistance of Russian forces during the Kyiv offensive.

¹⁰ The unicameral parliament of Ukraine.

Yevheniy Murayev (“Party “the Center,” 2017). While not running in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election, he did top the Opposition Platform - For Life party list in the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary election (“For Life Party’s,” 2018). In 2021, Rabinovich launched an unsuccessful impeachment attempt against President Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the government’s suspension of three television stations categorized as “pro-Russian” (Liphshiz, 2022).

As signs of the coming war between Russia and Ukraine became ever more clear, Rabinovich is known to have left Ukraine for Israel on the 3rd of February, 2022, allegedly on invitation of members of the Israeli Knesset (Insider UA, 2022, March 29). On February 13, he published a Facebook post that would cause some controversy, stating that war had “already begun,” but that it was a war by the West against Ukraine’s economy, which was suffering deeply from divestment amidst Western media’s talk of a coming invasion of the country (Rabinovich, 2022, February 13). Apart from publishing some words of caution for Zelenskyy following Russia’s recognition of the DPR and LPR as independent states on February 22, Rabinovich remained relatively silent after the start of the invasion on the 24th of February, with exceptions in the form of reposting safety information about incoming Russian attacks and calls from others for a ceasefire (Rabinovich, 2022, February 22). He first laid out his position in his own words a week after the March 20th suspension of Opposition Platform - For Life, stating that the movement has always “spoken about peace” and that “anyone who can bring peace in Ukraine ... should do everything possible and impossible for this” (Rabinovich, 2022, March 27). On the 29th of March, a video surfaced of an internal meeting of OPZZh in which Rabinovich firmly stated that, since the Russians have taken away peace from Ukraine, they are “the enemy and the aggressor” and that there “is no other possible position for our party” (Insider UA, 2022, March 29). By April 14, however, Rabinovich had been excluded from what was left of OPZZh, due to what appears to have been an internal power struggle that resulted in Yuriy Boyko moving from co-Chairman with Rabinovich to the position of sole Chairman (Rabinovich, 2022, April 14). On April 28, Rabinovich gave an exclusive interview to MigNews, an online news site that he owns, further clarifying his public position on the invasion:

“Our party has always stood for peace ... However, after the attack on Ukraine, after the bombing of cities, everything changed. I was born in Ukraine, and an attack on my country, no matter what reason is chosen for this, is aggression for me! I was and remain on the side of Ukraine”

(Ischenko, 2022)

Ultimately, despite his sustained public and discursive commitment to Ukraine following the start of the war, Rabinovich was stripped of his Ukrainian citizenship by decree from President Zelenskyy on November 3rd, and his position in the Verkhovna Rada was terminated (Mazurenko, 2022). The official justification for this was based in Ukraine's law against possessing dual-citizenship, a piece of legislation that has long been unenforced. Since his departure from Ukraine on February 3rd, 2022, he has not returned to the country.

Vadim Mikhailovich Stolar was involved in the establishment of a successful agricultural enterprise and worked as a manager of a private travel company before entering politics as part of the Our Ukraine party in 2006 ("Stolar Vadim," 2022). Some allegations arose around this time that he had been instrumental in the foundation of a pyramid scheme known as the "Elite Center", which had affected more than one and a half thousand people and defrauded Ukrainians up to \$300 million ("Vadim Stolar priznan," 2016). Unscathed by a criminal investigation, he joined the Party of Regions in 2011 and became a People's Deputy of Ukraine¹¹ and a member of the Verkhovna Rada's Committee on Combating Organized Crime and Corruption. Numerous allegations have been made regarding this time in Stolar's career, including claims of corruption, and that he did not propose a single bill or amendment throughout his time as a member of parliament ("District 217," n.d.). In the elections of the Kyiv City Council in 2014, he worked at the headquarters of Vitali Klitschko's UDAR party, and later became a member of the "Poroshenko Group" within the Kyiv City Council ("Kto budet upravlyat," 2022). In 2019, he was deported upon entering the United States and was sent back to Ukraine, although the reason for this has never been disclosed by American authorities (Roper, 2019). Soon after, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, he was elected as a People's Deputy of Ukraine from Opposition Platform - For Life.

Similar to Vadim Rabinovich, Stolar is known to have left Ukraine shortly before the beginning of the invasion in 2022 (Sereda, 2022). Stolar also remained largely silent toward the invasion until March 7th, on which he gave a written response to RadioSvoboda, a United States government-funded news organization, stating that the war horrified him, was bad for

¹¹ A representative in Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. In the 2002, 2012, 2014, and 2019 elections, 50% of People's Deputies derived from political party lists, and 50% through first-past-the-post in single-member constituencies.

business, and that he had begun raising funds and establishing a charitable foundation to direct aid toward Ukraine. In this interview he wrote:

“Will I rebuild Ukrainian cities after the victory of Ukraine? Of course I will! I will invest all my resources and strength. Because this is no longer a business, it is my duty to our country and people.”

(Sereda, 2022)

On March 15, he revealed that he had left Opposition Platform - For Life, and a week later he became more active on social media networks, especially in the form of self-advertising for his charities on Facebook (Charity Fund of Vadim Stolar, 2022). However, in September a Ukrainian political rival accused Stolar’s charity work as only being part of a larger effort to save face, and criticized him for not spending a single day in Ukraine since the beginning of the war (Dobrov, 2022). A journalistic investigation into Stolar’s activities following the Russian invasion also argued that, despite his claims of working from Warsaw and sending aid to Ukraine, he had actually moved to Nice, France, and had still been profiting greatly from his real-estate empire within Ukraine.

4.1.b Pro-Russians

Renat Raveliyovych Kuzmin rose up the ranks of Ukraine’s judicial system, starting as a trainee in 1991 in the Donetsk Inter-district Prosecutor's Office for Nature Protection, to eventually become Prosecutor of Kyiv City in 2003, and ultimately First Deputy Prosecutor General of Ukraine in 2010 (“Kuzmin Rinat separatist,” n.d.). As Deputy Prosecutor General, Kuzmin dealt with the controversial criminal cases against former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko from 2010-2014, which were initiated by then-President Viktor Yanukovich and may have been politically motivated (“President of All-Ukrainian”, 2014). By this time, Kuzmin had been the recipient of several awards for his work as a jurist, and was a member of the Board of the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary of Ukraine, the National Anti-Corruption Committee, the Working Group on the Reform of the Prosecutor's Office and the Bar and the Working Group on the Reform of the Criminal Procedure. After an unsuccessful presidential election bid in 2014, the Interior Ministry of Ukraine issued a wanted notice for Kuzmin, citing that he was

accused of “deliberately illegal arrest or illegal bringing to court” (Bonner, 2019). According to police, Kuzmin disappeared in June of 2014, and was declared a fugitive of justice and added to Interpol’s international wanted list (“Ex-first deputy,” 2014). Kuzmin did not resurface until 2019, the year that charges against him were dropped, and has said that he survived during this period by hiding in Ukraine, aided by “many people, including officials and secret services’ representatives” (Bonner, 2019). Kuzmin was elected as a People’s Deputy of Ukraine in the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary election as part of Opposition Platform - For Life.

An active user of Telegram, Kuzmin’s public position was clear as Russia’s 2022 invasion approached. He published two posts on the 22nd of February with language highly critical of Zelenskyy and suggestive of an imminent war, in which Ukraine was bound to lose (Kuzmin, 2022, February 22). He also repeated several positions often associated with Russian sources, such as suggesting that the Western regions of Ukraine would split from a post-war Ukraine or be annexed by Poland and Hungary, as well as arguing that a process of “denazification and debanderization¹²” was inevitable (Kuzmin, 2022, February 25). The day after the invasion began, he berated many for being surprised, and argued that the war was the result of the failure of successive Ukrainian governments to empathize with or understand the people of Donbas, and advised Ukrainians not to fight for Zelenskyy’s government. Additionally, he argued that:

“We have allowed external governance and the transformation of Ukraine into a colony of the West. We have allowed the creation of anti-Russia from Ukraine... We allowed the revival of Nazism in Europe... What can save the situation? Zelenskyy's immediate resignation, a complete reset of power, the re-election of the President, Parliament and local councils, complete denazification and debanderization, restoration of legality, law and order and justice, bringing to criminal responsibility all those responsible for this nightmare. And the unification of all Ukrainians around a new national idea in order to create a new neutral, non-aligned, fair, non-Bandera state in which happy and well-off people will live.”

Renat Kuzmin (2022, February 25).

¹² “Debanderization” refers to the removal of Stepan Bandera’s influence and legacy from Ukrainian society. Stepan Bandera was the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists - Bandera faction (OUN-B) from 1940-1959. He has been the subject of great controversy in post-independence Ukraine, with some viewing him as an anti-Soviet hero, and some as a collaborator with Nazi Germany and responsible for crimes against humanity.

Kuzmin would make a final post on the 26th of February, in which he expressed opposition to the fact that the Ukrainian government was handing out weapons to large portions of the population, before ceasing to post on social media. Several months later, in October, Kuzmin was charged with high treason for publishing “propaganda pieces to the detriment of Ukraine” (“MP Renat Kuzmin,” 2022). However, after going into hiding from investigation by Ukrainian authorities, his whereabouts remain unknown at the time of this writing.

Illia Volodymyrovych Kyva began his career as a policeman before entering the political scene (“Kiva Illia Volodimirovich,” 2022). He is noted for having led the Eastern division of Right Sector, a Ukrainian nationalist organization, after meeting its leader, Dmitry Yarosh, during the Maidan Revolution (Ringis, 2016). Despite serving as a confidant of Yarosh during the 2014 presidential election, Kyva’s personality was puzzling to many members of Right Sector, and he was often considered to be an *aфepycm* - swindler or conman (“Kiva soldatom nikogda ne byl,” 2020). During the presidency of Petro Poroshenko, Kyva was noted for his strong verbal Russophobia, which included calls for buses traveling from Kyiv to Donetsk to be shot at, as well as arguing in favor of the forced Ukrainianization or deportation of the population of Donbas (“Sovetnik glavy MVD Ukrainy,” 2016). In 2015 and 2016, Kyva worked as the head of the Department for Combating Drug Crime of the National Police of Ukraine (“Kiva Illia Volodimirovich,” 2022). As part of his work, he hosted a program on NewsOne TV channel called “Traffic with Kyva,” which gained some notoriety after he invited guests to create improvised narcotic concoctions for recreation use from random pharmacy products, and then arrested the guests on live television (“Glavnyi borec s narkoprestupnost'yu,” 2016). From 2016 to 2017, Kyva worked as an adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, before taking the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) under his control and serving as its leader until 2019 (“Sotsialisticheskaya partiya,” 2020). After an unsuccessful presidential election bid, he resigned as head of the SPU and was elected to the Verkhovna Rada as a member of Opposition Platform - For Life from 2019 to 2022. During this period, Kyva hosted his own show on the ZIK TV channel, often considered to be controlled by oligarch and Russia-sympathetic politician Viktor Medvedchuk (Tarasiuk & Umland, 2022). Kyva’s political position also took a sharp turn at this time, as, according to Medvedchuk, he rethought many of the events of the Maidan Revolution and recognized the importance of Russia's participation in the settlement of the conflict in Donbas (“Viktor Medvedchuk,” 2019). This became most apparent in 2020, after

he controversially proposed renaming Stepan Bandera Avenue in Kyiv after George Floyd, an African-American killed by American police that year, who he also demanded be canonized by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and added to the list of the Heavenly Hundred (Karplyuk, 2020). In July 2021, Kyva also called the Maidan Revolution a coup d'état and expressed regret that President Yanukovich “did not crush the Euromaidan with tanks” (“Skandal’nyy nardep Kiva,” 2021).

A prolific user of Telegram, Kyva posted over a hundred statements around the outbreak of Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Later, he would also reveal on Telegram that he had left the country prior to the war and had been living in Spain or even Russia at the time of the initial invasion (Kyva, 2022, March 6). Prior to the war, he made similar talking points as others in the Russia-sympathetic community, such as calling for Zelenskyy and his government to resign (Kyva, 2022, February 20). Kyva, however, also called for immediate negotiations between Ukraine, Russia, and separatists with the inclusion of Viktor Medvedchuk in the negotiation process (Kyva, 2022, February 20). On February 22nd and 23rd, the days leading up to the war, he began to spread information regarding the coming invasion of Ukraine by countries like Poland and Hungary, and also published statements like: “Millions of Ukrainians are waiting for liberation from today’s Nazi regime,” “I speak on behalf of millions of Ukrainians: our strength lies in Slavic unity!” and “We are one nation with Russia and Belarus” (Kyva, 2022, February 22). On the day of the invasion, he posted statements blaming Zelenskyy for the war, alleging that the President was under control of the United States of America, and pleaded for Ukrainians not to sacrifice themselves for the “criminal” regime of Zelenskyy (Kyva, 2022, February 24). In the following days, Kyva would make multiple oral and written statements on his Telegram channel arguing for the impossibility of Ukrainian victory against superior Russian forces, and that organized resistance on the part of the Ukrainian government would only result in innocent deaths and was itself a crime (Kyva, 2022, February 25; February 27). Kyva asserted in early March that Ukraine’s war against Russia was only in the geopolitical interests of the United States, and that it was foolish to think Ukraine could benefit from fighting for organizations like the EU and NATO that “never wanted us” in the first place (Kyva, 2022, March 1). On March 3rd, however, Kyva was excluded from OPZZh, and he posted statements declaring that Yuriy Boyko was staging a coup d'état within the organization (Kyva, 2022, March 3). Some days later he also called Boyko “an agent of British intelligence, taking advantage of the situation” and that he had “entered into collusion with Zelenskyy” from the beginning (Kyva, 2022, March 8a). Over the next few days, he would continue posting about the need for the

denazification of Ukraine, his belief that Zelenskyy was located in Poland or Lviv, that Zelenskyy was a drug addict who had lost touch with reality, and that Ukraine would soon lose the war (Kyva, 2022, March 5; March 11b). On the 6th of March, he revealed that he was located in Russia, and had flown there from Spain at some undisclosed point in time, and two days later declared that his “goal is the liberation of the Ukrainian people from external control and Nazism! The restoration of fraternal relations with the people of Russia is our future” (Kyva, 2022, March 8b) . For the next week, Kyva continued to publish similar statements, including an appeal to Russians on March 11th proclaiming that “Ukraine has long been captured by the Anglo-Saxons, turned into a colony, poisoned and dying. Genocide, dictatorship, Nazism, homosexuality - all this destroyed the Ukrainian people and was already a threat to others” (Kyva, 2022, March 11a). For the next few weeks, Kyva would also become a frequent guest to Russian political talk shows, including the 60 Minutes program on state-owned Russian television channel Russia-1 (Kyva, 2022, March 14). On the 15th of March he posted a video of himself speaking from Moscow’s Red Square, in which he asserted that Zelenskyy was “a terrorist,” and also called Zelenskyy “a pathetic and helpless faggot” the next day, after the Verkhovna Rada resigned Kyva’s powers as a People’s Deputy (Kyva, 2022, March 15; March 16).

Kyva has since been charged with high treason by the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, and on April 21st he applied for political asylum and asked for Russian citizenship in an open letter to Vladimir Putin (“Ukraine’s ex-legislator,” 2022). Investigative journalists allege that Kyva now resides in the luxurious cottage town of Agalarov Estate outside Moscow (Korshenko, 2022). He continues to frequently publish his political perspectives on social media.

4.1.c Without Voice

Yevheniy Volodymyrovych Murayev began his political career around 2006, in which he was elected to the Kharkiv Oblast Council as a member of the Viche party (“Muraev Evgeniy Volodimirovich,” n.d.). He was later reelected to the same position in 2010, but now as part of the Party of Regions, and then was appointed as head of the Zmiiv Raion by President Yanukovich (“Muraev Evgeniy,” n.d.). In the 2014 Ukrainian parliamentary election, Murayev was elected as an independent candidate. Years later, he revealed that during the Maidan Revolution in 2014, he drove the fleeing former Prime

Minister of Ukraine, Mykola Azarov, out of Ukraine from Kharkiv to the Russian city of Belgorod (“Murayev: Azarov poprosil,” 2019). During that year, he also became owner of the internet channel Robinson TV, and the news channel NewsOne (“Zelens’kogo prosyat’,” 2022). From 2015 to 2016, he acted as a member of the Opposition Bloc faction in the Verkhovna Rada, and in 2018 established his own TV channel called NASH (“Alternatively Pro-Russian,” 2021). After briefly joining Opposition Platform - For Life, he created his own political party called Nashi, which elected him as their candidate in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election (“Murayev will head Nashi,” 2018). However, Murayev ultimately pulled out of the election in favor of Oleksandr Vilkul of Opposition Bloc, and Murayev announced that Nashi would soon merge with Opposition Bloc (“Murayev snyalsya,” 2019). In 2021, TV channel NewsOne was banned by a decree of President Zelenskyy, and in 2022, the British government accused Russia of seeking to supplant Ukraine’s government via military force and replace it with an administration led by Murayev (“Britain Says Russia,” 2022). Murayev has rejected the statement, citing that he himself is placed under Russian sanctions, and some prominent Ukrainian political analysts have also expressed doubt at the veracity of Britain’s claims. In early February, 2022, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine introduced sanctions against Murayev’s TV channel NASH (“Kanal “Nash” Muraeva,” 2022).

In the days leading up to the invasion, Murayev made several Telegram posts warning against any military action on the part of the Ukrainian government against the DPR and LPR, which had been recently recognized by Russia, as well as posts suggesting that the psychological expectation of war and its economic fallout were hurting the country despite actual war remaining unlikely (Murayev, 2022, February 22a; February 22b). Following the invasion, Murayev said that the invasion was “the consequence of wrong and stupid decisions that everyone will have to sort out” and that “many citizens of Ukraine will have to experience in the near future what is familiar to the residents of Donbas” (Murayev, 2022, February 24). However, Murayev’s statements were mostly filled with suggestions of how to survive, and words of hope that Ukrainian society will live on. On the 25th of February, Murayev called for negotiations and a ceasefire, and criticized those who had “called him a traitor” for wanting to negotiate earlier with the LPR and DPR directly and fulfill the Minsk agreements¹³, as well as wanting permanent neutrality for Ukraine (Murayev, 2022, February

¹³ A series of international agreements which sought to end the war in Donbas. The agreements can be broken down between the Minsk Protocol, signed in 2014, and Minsk II, signed in 2015. Minsk II aimed at invoking a constitutional reform in Ukraine that would grant self-government to the regions of Donbas then controlled by the DPR and LPR. This reform never took place and the agreements were never fully implemented.

25). Moreover, Murayev stated that “it is obvious that NATO will not fight for our country” and berated the lack of support from NATO in terms of weapons shipments, which he viewed as hardly satisfactory (Murayev, 2022, February 25).

Following these relatively vague comments, Murayev ceased to publish any further statements, and has not made use of Telegram or Facebook since February 25. Little is known regarding his current whereabouts, although reports that he and his family moved to Vienna, Austria, began to emerge after journalists witnessed his wife being escorted by Austrian law enforcement after illegally parking her car in the middle of a street before going shopping (“Venskaya terroborona,” 2022).

4.2 Loyalists

Loyalists describe those traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine who, following the outbreak of Russia’s 2022 invasion, remained in territories controlled by the Ukrainian state and actively vocalized support for Ukraine in the war. Individuals were situated in a variety of cities and political positions, however, the similarity of their positions negated the need for additional subcategories. Individuals analyzed as *Loyalists* include Yuriy Boyko, Oleksandr Vilkul, and Gennady Trukhanov.

It should be noted that other prominent traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine could have been included in the category of *Loyalists*, such as Igor Abramovych. Due to a relative lack of response material, a full analysis of Abramovych and other individuals is out of the scope of this research.

Yuriy Anatoliyovych Boyko began his career in Ukraine’s industrial sector, eventually rising to the title of Director General of the chemical plant Zarya in Rubezhnoye in 1999 (“Boyko Yuriy Dos’e,” n.d.). He then served as Director General of JSC Lisichansknefteorgsintez until 2001, served as chairman of the management board of JSC Ukrtatnafta until 2002, and was appointed the chairman of NAC Naftogaz-Ukraine until 2005. However, he also served as First Deputy Minister of Fuel and Energy of Ukraine in the cabinet of then-Prime Minister Victor Yanukovych from 2003 to 2005, and was appointed in the coordination committee for RosUkrEnergo in late 2004. During this important time for Boyko, the Security Service of Ukraine attempted to arrest him in 2005 on suspicion of abuse

of office while heading Naftogaz, although this arrest was blocked by the then-President Viktor Yushchenko (Kupchinsky, 2008). Boyko ultimately also became the chairman of the Republican Party of Ukraine in 2005, which joined Viktor Medvedchuk's electoral alliance "Ne Tak!" for the 2006 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, although they did not enter the Verkhovna Rada ("Boyko Yuriy," n.d.). In mid-2006, Boyko was appointed by Yanukovych as Minister of Fuel and Energy, and later successfully contested in the 2007 parliamentary elections as a member of the Party of Regions. In 2012, Boyko was promoted to the position of Vice Prime Minister responsible for ecology, natural resources, energy, coal industry, industrial policy, and eventually also the space sector. In 2014, amidst a party convention which decided to support Boyko's political opponent Mykhailo Dobkin as candidate for the upcoming presidential election, the Party of Regions political council expelled Boyko ("Ukraine's Party of Regions expels," 2014). He was, however, successfully re-elected into parliament in the 2014 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, but this time heading the electoral list of Opposition Bloc. Boyko would make headlines in 2016 after he punched fellow politician Oleh Lyashko in the face on live television after being called a "Kremlin agent" ("Ukrainian lawmaker," 2016). In 2018, Boyko signed an agreement for cooperation between the party "For Life" and Opposition Bloc, which were to cooperate in the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary and presidential elections under the name Opposition Platform - For Life. However, not all members of Opposition Bloc agreed with this strategy, causing Boyko to be excluded from the Opposition Bloc faction later that year ("Boiko, Loovochkin excluded," 2018). Nonetheless, Boyko managed to achieve fourth place in the 2019 presidential election, and led Opposition Platform - For Life to second place in the parliamentary election a few months later, establishing himself as a leading figure of the main opposition party.

With a larger public presence than most of the traditionally Russia-sympathetic individuals analyzed in this research, Boyko made statements through various forms of social media, including through his own personal YouTube channel and that of Opposition Platform - For Life. The latter of these sources was used in the beginning of February, 2022, to express his opinion that a large war with Russia remained ultimately unlikely (Platform for Life and Peace, 2022, February 12). He would largely refrain from making any more public statements until two days after the beginning of the invasion, in which he, flanked by other senior OPZZh figures, gave a video address advocating for immediate negotiations with Russia and initiating a motion to exclude Illia Kyva from OPZZh (Boyko, 2022, February 26). Starting in March, Boyko also began to publish daily videos from his YouTube channel giving updates on his perspective of the war. While Boyko consistently advocated for peace

negotiations, by the 2nd of March he stated that “the aggression of the Russian army against Ukraine cannot be denied,” and that “Ukraine is now facing a situation it has not been in since the Great Patriotic War” (Boyko, 2022, March 2). Over the next few days he expressed that he and OPZZh were doing “everything necessary for the defense capability of” Ukraine, and condemned Russia’s “massacres” against civilian targets, and “lawlessness and mass murder” (Boyko, 2022, March 5). Regarding the traditionally oppositional nature of OPZZh, Boyko stated that “we have put aside political differences, because in the conditions of war, everyone should be united. We have one country: Ukraine, and we must protect it!” (Boyko, 2022, March 5). By March 8th, Boyko stated that OPZZh had begun organizing humanitarian assistance to populations in the combat zone, and had also sent a direct appeal to the leadership of the Russian Federation to end the war and withdraw from Ukraine (Boyko, 2022, March 8). On March 15th, Vadim Rabinovich’s Telegram channel relayed claims made by Boyko that a “witch hunt” had begun against OPZZh, but that despite “groundless repression,” he and his party remained patriotic (Rabinovich, 2022, March 15). From March 19th to 26th, Boyko published multiple statements calling for the negotiated release of several members of OPZZh that had been taken prisoner by Russian forces during the invasion (Platform for Life and Peace, 2022, March 19; March 26). This was only interrupted by a statement regarding the suspension of OPZZh by the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council, which he decried as “an absolutely cynical, shameless, and lawless action, because our party stands on pro-Ukrainian positions” (Boyko, 2022, March 21). On March 24th, he also advised regional and local leaders of OPZZh to dissolve and reform under the name “Platform for Life and Peace,” which would be a new parliamentary group led by Boyko following the ban on OPZZh (Platform for Life and Peace, 2022, March 24). For the rest of the month, Boyko made public statements about his party’s loyalty to Ukraine, especially evidenced by the fact that he and his faction remained in Kyiv and active in the Verkhovna Rada. At various times he contrasted this against those who had fled the country, implicitly or explicitly referencing Vadim Rabinovich, Viktor Medvedchuk, and Vadym Stolar as examples (Boyko, 2022, March 29).

In June, Boyko gave an exclusive interview clarifying his position on the war, in which he stated that he “doesn’t believe anyone can be in favor of advocating for ties with Russia after what has happened. It can’t be like before” (Kazanskyi, 2022). He also claimed that his childhood home in Luhansk Oblast had been destroyed in the fighting, and revealed that he is now in favor of joining the European Union. Boyko still resides in Kyiv at the time

of this writing, and remains the Chairman of the Platform for Life and Peace, which supports the actions of the current Ukrainian government and President Zelenskyy.

Oleksandr Yuriyovych Vilkul (or Aleksandr Yuryevich Vilkul) started his career in the Kryvyi Rih mining industry before eventually serving as General Deputy Director of OJSC Southern Iron Ore Enrichment Works in 1997, and eventually serving as deputy CEO. From 2002 to 2006, he was the General Director of Central Iron Ore Enrichment Works, and by 2010, he would be considered among Ukraine's top ten managers by *InvestGazeta* and *Galitskiye* ("Dos'e kandidata: Oleksandr Vilkul," 2022). In 2003, Vilkul became a member of the Party of Regions, and was elected as a People's Deputy of Ukraine in the 2006 Ukrainian parliamentary election, ultimately being chosen as Vice-Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Issues of Industrial and Regulatory Policy and Entrepreneurship. Amidst the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election, Vilkul served as head of the electoral headquarters of Viktor Yanukoych in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and was appointed Governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast by decree of President Yanukovych later that year ("Vilkul Oleksandr Yuriyovich," 2022). According to *Comments* newspaper, Vilkul was recognized as the best governor in Ukraine in 2010 and in a 2011 poll, he was chosen as winner of the national "Person of the Year" award, having won the category "Regional Leader" ("Aleksandr Vilkul priznan," 2017). In 2010, Vilkul was also appointed Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine by decree of Yanukovych (UKAZ PREZIDENTA UKRAINI, 2010). However, following the Maidan Revolution, Vilkul was removed from office and returned as a People's Deputy in the 2014 Ukrainian parliamentary election as a member of Opposition Bloc. He caused some controversy in December 2016, after he called the Maidan Revolution a "coup" on a live political talk show on the Inter TV channel (Glukhov, 2016). He was eventually nominated by Opposition Bloc in late 2018 to be their candidate in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election, however, due to some infighting and legal measures, this took place later than expected and under the recently renamed party Opposition Bloc - Party for Development and Peace ("Kiva i Vilkul sdalis'," 2019). At this point, rival presidential candidate Yevheniy Murayev also announced that he was pulling out of the race and would soon merge his Nashi party with Opposition Bloc ("Murayev snyalsya," 2019). Indeed, although Vilkul lost the presidential election, the two parties joined a united party list in the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary election, along with Revival and Trust Deeds, with Vilkul topping the list ("Parties of Opposition Bloc," 2019). However, this list failed to reach the 5% threshold to

enter the parliament, causing Vilkul to lose his seat. Vilkul also failed to achieve victory in the 2020 Dnipro mayoral elections, which he also contested.

According to his personal website, “protecting the true story of the Great Patriotic War” serves as one of the main areas of work of Vilkul, and he demonstratively views Soviet victory in 1945 as something Ukrainians should be proud of (Vilkul, n.d.). This was reflected in social media posts made by Vilkul on February 22nd, just prior to the start of Russia's 2022 invasion, in which he congratulated Kryvyi Rih on the day of “liberation from Nazi invaders” accompanied by a photo of a monument to the Soviet Red Army (Vilkul, 2022, February 22). The next day he would post something strikingly different - an announcement of the creation of a Territorial Defense Headquarters in the city in preparation for armed conflict with Russia and the potential reception of refugees (Vilkul, 2022, February 23). After the invasion had begun, Vilkul’s social media use was mostly relegated to the publishing of safety information and updates, although he was already referring to Russia as “the enemy” (Vilkul, 2022, February 24). On February 26th he changed his tone further by posting “This is our land! Glory to Ukraine!” in Ukrainian in response to his appointment as Head of the Military Administration of Kryvyi Rih (Vilkul, 2022, February 26). He began using the phrase “Glory to Ukraine”, both in Russian and Ukrainian, more frequently as a way to sign off his posts from this moment on, and also made use of the traditionally nationalist phrase “Glory to the heroes¹⁴” in some instances (Vilkul, 2022, March 4). In early March, many of his posts reflected increased recruitment into Territorial Defense units, the battle against “Russian bots” and “Orcs¹⁵”, as well as his assertion that Kryvyi Rih would become a “Stalingrad” in the war if needed (Vilkul, 2022, February 27). On March 7th he also published a post on Facebook stating:

“We are the heirs of victorious warriors. And the children of those who are now coming to us from Russia and bombing peaceful Ukrainian cities will now become the successors of fascists-occupiers. Forever.”

Oleksandr Vilkul (2022, March 7)

¹⁴ “Glory to the heroes” first appeared as an accompanying response to “glory to Ukraine” in the 1930s among members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). It is widely used in Ukraine today.

¹⁵ The term “orcs” makes reference to the antagonistic species in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Following the 2022 Russian invasion, the term emerged as a popular informal way to refer to Russians, especially online.

The next day, which happened to be International Women's Day, Vilkul mockingly congratulated all the men who had fled Kryvyi Rih, implicitly challenging their masculinity (Vilkul, 2022, March 8). On March 9th, Vilkul called for the increased celebration of Ukrainian culture, including works by Taras Shevchenko, to win a battle on “the culture front” (Vilkul, 2022, March 9). However, on the 20th of March, Vilkul published a statement in which he defended the ability of Russian-speaking Ukrainians to be patriotic, and declared that May 9th¹⁶ was sacred for him, and that he viewed the current war with Russia as a contemporary “patriotic war¹⁷” (Vilkul, 2022, March 20). This point would be reflected in a similar statement made the next day, in which he asserted that Russian-speaking Ukrainians were not Russians (Vilkul, 2022, March 21). However, Vilkul would gain a much larger public image around the time of these statements due to other activity on social media. Namely on March 20th, in which he responded “*пошел на х@й, предатель, вместе со своими хозяевами!*” - “f@ck you, traitor, along with your masters!” - to calls from former ally Oleg Tsaryov, now working with Russian forces, to surrender Kryvyi Rih (Realnaya Voyna | Ukraina Novosti, 2022, March 20).

Months after the start of the invasion, on August 1st, Oleksandr Vilkul would give an exclusive interview to the Kyiv Independent on his perspective of the war and his transformation from a “pro-Russian” politician into a Ukrainian patriot. Vilkul’s response is that the term “pro-Russian” is ultimately a popularized political label, and claims to always have been pro-Ukrainian because all his decision making has been “dictated by what he thought was best for the country at the time” (Myroniuk, 2022). This includes his past positions on the Minsk agreements and his, now reversed, opinion that “the non-aligned status toward NATO was more efficient for us” (Myroniuk, 2022). He also stated that “it doesn’t matter what you believed was the right way for Ukraine’s development yesterday. Today we must protect the country, and destroy the occupiers as efficiently as possible” (Myroniuk, 2022). Vilkul remains the Head of the Ukrainian Military Administration in Kryvyi Rih at the time of this writing.

Gennadiy Leonidovich Trukhanov has an early history in the Soviet armed forces, serving in the North Caucasian Military District from 1986-1992 (“Trukhanov Gennadiy Leonidovich,” 2022). He then moved on to become the director of a private security company

¹⁶ The date of Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. It serves as a holiday in contemporary Ukraine, officially referred to as “Victory Day over Nazism in World War II.”

¹⁷ In reference to the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) and Patriotic War of 1812.

called “Captain”, named after his own rank, in 1993. By 2000, he had become an assistant to the representative of security issues to the president of the Ukrainian branch of Russian oil company Lukoil. Trukhanov was first elected to the Odesa City Council in 2005, eventually becoming the Regional Representative of the State Committee of Ukraine for Veterans Affairs in the Odesa region in 2008 (“Trukhanov Gennadiy Leonidovich,” 2022). In 2010, after being re-elected to the Odesa City Council, he headed the Party of Regions faction, and ultimately became a People’s Deputy of Ukraine in the 2012 parliamentary elections as a member of the Party of Regions, until he left the party during the Euromaidan protests in 2014 (“Participants of the protest,” 2016). As part of extraordinary elections, he was also elected mayor of Odesa in the spring of that year, and re-elected in 2015. A scandal emerged in 2016, after it was alleged that Trukhanov had dual Russian and Ukrainian citizenship, prompting the Ukrainian SBU to investigate, sparking large protests in front of the city administration demanding his resignation, and also causing Trukhanov to be detained at Kyiv’s Boryspil airport (“Pogranichniki zaderzhali,” 2018). Ultimately, the SBU found no evidence to support such claims, and Trukhanov retained his position. In 2019, Trukhanov co-founded a new political party called *Доверяй делам* - “Trust Deeds” - and successfully contested Odesa’s 2020 mayoral election as part of the party. His campaign platform included the promise of restoring Soviet Marshal Zhukov’s¹⁸ name to an avenue that had been renamed after the Heavenly Hundred protestors killed during the Maidan Revolution (Sorokin & Myroniuk, 2022).

Unlike other individuals analyzed in this research, responses from Gennady Trukhanov derive mostly from recordings of televised oral statements due to his relative lack of social media activity. In any case, at the beginning of Russia’s 2022 invasion, most of his statements were relegated to anti-panic and safety measures, as well as calls for unity and information on the allocation of resources. However, Trukhanov also began to make contact with cities that Odesa maintains special relationships with, including Marseille, France and Istanbul, Turkey. While speaking with the leadership of these cities, Trukhanov condemned “Russian aggression,” and stated that “all of Odesa is prepared to defend our city and country” and “repel the enemy” (Ia Odessit, 2022, February 28a). Moreover, Trukhanov alluded to Odesa’s status as a “Hero City¹⁹” and claimed that it would “never give up to anyone” (Ia Odessit, 2022, February 28a). Throughout early March, most of Trukhanovs

¹⁸ Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov served as Marshal of the Soviet Union from 1943-1957 and oversaw some of the Soviet Union’s most decisive victories in the Great Patriotic War.

¹⁹ A Soviet honorary title awarded to twelve cities for demonstrating outstanding heroism during the Great Patriotic War.

further statements concerned public updates on the development of defenses, as well as showcasing material and political support received from Marseille and Istanbul, whose mayors promised to pressure their governments on Odesa's behalf (Ia Odessit, 2022, February 28b). In a call on March 3rd with Finnish sister city Oulu, Trukhanov, in rhetoric that was unusual for him, stated that:

“Ukraine is a sovereign European country, we are a friendly people, but we will defend our sovereignty. We are very grateful for the countries of the EU, like Finland, for their assistance and support ... We will further support friendly and close relations with European nations.”

(Ia Odessit, 2022, March 3b)

The same day, Trukhanov began communicating within Ukraine as well, and stated that “Odesa stands with other Ukrainian cities fighting against Russia. Odesa will not give up one centimeter” (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 3a). In a call with Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko, the two mayors affirmed each other's status as mayors of especially symbolic cities within Ukraine, neither of which would fall easily (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 4). Trukhanov reaffirmed this status on March 8th in a call with the mayor of Marseille, in which he declared that as a “symbolic city for Ukraine,” Odesa would “stand to the death” (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 8). In the same call, Trukhanov later said:

“I can't even imagine there not being Odesa. Without Odesa we have nothing. It is our Motherland, it is our life. Everything is connected to this and we will stand here until the end.”

(Ia Odessit, 2022, March 8)

Trukhanov would continue to make similar statements over the next several days, including that “Odesans are a proud and freedom-loving people,” and “we are prepared to fight for our city and our freedom” (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 9). He would also use his network with other mayors around Europe and the world to advocate for “closing the sky,” or implementing a NATO-enforced no-fly zone over Ukraine (Realnaya Voyna | Ukraina Novosti, 2022, March 12). He would also make statements about the need for unity in Ukraine, and defend the right of Russian-speaking Ukrainians to be patriots and trusted to defend the country (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 13). In an oral interview to the Washington Post on the 16th of March, he stated that the war was “shocking” and that “there was not one

single person in Odesa who would have any positive feeling toward this, despite our Russian speaking population and our respect for history and the victory in the Second World War” (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 16). On the 19th of March he also visited the home of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War in Odesa, and the two discussed the impossibility to imagine war between the two countries in previous times, and the similarities now between Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 19). In contrast, on the 25th of March, Trukhanov thanked the mayor of sister city Baltimore, Maryland, in the United States, for its support to Odesa and said that he “was absolutely sure that we are real friends” (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 25). Near the end of the month, on March 27th, Trukhanov also appeared in an emotional video asking the Ukrainian government to push for UNESCO recognition and reconstruction funding guarantees of more structures in Odesa, while decrying Russia’s destruction of Kharkov and Mariupol. He showed what had already been done to save the “unique architectural heritage” of the city, which he urged should be saved for future generations, especially while the current generation “fights to protect us” (Ia Odessit, 2022, March 27).

Several months later, on May 17th, Trukhanov gave an exclusive interview to the Kyiv Independent, in which he clarified his position. Principally, Trukhanov argues that his decision making has been based on the overarching fact that he “took an oath of allegiance to Odesa and the Ukrainian people” (Sorokin & Myroniuk, 2022). This comes despite his belief that the Russians had planned to “encircle Odesa and then try to persuade Odesa to surrender” due to the city’s “symbolic place in Russia’s imperial narrative” (Sorokin & Myroniuk, 2022). When asked about his history of sympathy toward Russian and Soviet symbols, Trukhanov stated that “the Soviet soldier and the Russian soldier are completely different” and that “the Soviet soldier was a liberator” (Sorokin & Myroniuk, 2022). Moreover, he stated that politicians in the region “cannot turn a blind eye” to the local popularity “of Russian language, May 9 celebrations, and Georgy Zhukov” (Sorokin & Myroniuk, 2022). However, Trukhanov ultimately stated that his perception was dramatically changed by witnessing the death caused by Russian attacks, saying he “did not expect that the Russian people would hate us, Ukrainian people, so much ... it’s shocking to me” (Sorokin & Myroniuk, 2022). Gennadiy Trukhanov remains in Odesa and continues to serve as the city’s mayor at the time of this writing.

4.3 Collaborators

Collaborators describe those traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine who, following the outbreak of Russia's 2022 invasion, remained in territories of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces and actively participated in new Russian-installed administrative structures. These administrative structures are often referred to as *военно-гражданские администрации* - or "military-civilian administrations" - and were installed in all oblasts that experienced more than a month of Russian occupation. Inspired by the work of Stanley Hoffmann on the distinction between opportunism-driven and ideology-driven wartime collaboration, individuals have been further ordered into the subcategories of *Opportunistic* and *Idealistic*, which attempt to reflect Hoffmann's distinctions, respectively. While opportunistic motives and ideological convictions are not entirely mutually exclusive, nor easy to accurately decipher, *Opportunistic Collaborators* include individuals with more mainstream administrative experience, stagnating careers, and less impassioned discourse than *Idealistic Collaborators*. Individuals considered *Opportunistic Collaborators* include Volodymyr Saldo and Yevgeny Balitsky, and individuals considered *Idealistic Collaborators* include Kirill Stremousov and Vladimir Rogov.

It should be noted that other traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine could have been included in the category of *Collaborators*, such as Galina Danilchenko, the now acting mayor of Melitopol, and Konstantin Ivashchenko, the now acting mayor of Mariupol. Due to a relative lack of response material, a full analysis of these individuals is out of the scope of this research.

4.3.a *Opportunistic*

Volodymyr Vasylovych Saldo (or Vladimir Vasilievich Saldo) was first elected to serve in the Kherson City Council from 1998-2002, and in 2001, joined the Party of Regions and became the head of its branch in Kherson Oblast ("Saldo Volodimir Vasilovich," *Slovoidilo*, n.d.). Saldo was elected mayor of Kherson city in 2002 and served until 2012, after which he became a People's Deputy of Ukraine in the 2012 Ukrainian parliamentary elections and served until 2015. It should be noted that the Association for the Reintegration of Crimea has claimed that Saldo's ten-year mayoralty of Kherson was a "time of total

embezzlement and corruption that entangled all spheres of the city's life, at times grandiose scandals" (Mikityuk, 2022). However, thanks to his time in charge of construction, housing, and communal services as a deputy governor of Kherson Oblast in 2001, he was named the deputy chairman of the Verkhovna Rada's committee for construction, urban planning, housing and communal services, and regional policy. As the Maidan Revolution approached, Saldo is known to have voted in favor of the set of 10 anti-protest laws popularly referred to as the "dictatorship laws," on January 16, 2014, that severely restricted freedom of speech and assembly ("Saldo Volodimir Vasilovich," *Chesno*, n.d.). Saldo gained some infamy by leaving Ukraine for Russia in 2014, and speaking on several Russian television channels about the events in Ukraine. From 2015 to 2020, Saldo retained a seat on Kherson's City Council, and established his own political party, the Volodymyr Saldo Bloc, in 2019 ("Minyust zaregistriroval," 2020).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be said to have had some of its greatest success through the occupation of large parts of Kherson Oblast in the first few days of the war. Given this operational success, Kherson Oblast was also the first region outside of Donbas to develop a military-civilian administration under Russian occupation. This occurred around mid-March, and first introduced to the public in a video presented on March 16th by Russian government-funded television channel RT of the "founding congress of the new authorities" of Kherson Oblast ("Novye vlasti," 2022). The leading figures in this "Committee of Salvation for Peace and Order" included Volodymyr Saldo and Kirill Stremousov, the latter of whom presented most of the information in the meeting. However, some information later emerged alleging that Saldo, among some other individuals, were initially brought to this meeting by force, which may explain Saldo's presence despite having made posts on social media just two days prior asserting that "Kherson is Ukraine" and that he wished to prevent a referendum on joining Russia (Saldo, 2022, March 14). Despite these public sentiments, Saldo would ultimately be appointed as the head of the Kherson military-civilian administration on the 26th of April, possibly due to his position of relative political prestige compared to other individuals associated with the military-civilian administration.

Saldo made his first appearance on social media since the televised March meeting on April 27th, in the form of a video in which he received the Holy Fire for Orthodox Easter. Having come to Kherson from Crimea, he said that he welcomed the fire as "we are all Orthodox" (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, April 27). On the 29th of April, however, he publicly asserted that he did not "know of any plans to hold a referendum on the creation of some sort of republic" in Kherson but that "the Kyiv regime has practically

abandoned the people of Kherson,” and that “it is possible the Ukrainian military will engage in provocative actions” as locals celebrate May 9th (“Naznachennyi RF,” 2022). On May 5th, a few days before the celebration of the end of the Great Patriotic War, Saldo also responded to a question from a reporter on how to return a “sense of importance to Soviet history after what kids have learned ... in Ukraine over the past 8 years,” to which he responded that students in the region’s schools will now experience a heightened sense of importance toward the history of the Soviet period (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 5). The next day Saldo also appeared in a video nodding to comments from an associate who told him that “Russia will be here forever” and that they need to take that into account in terms of the region’s development (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 6). On May 9th, videos were published on the Telegram page of the Kherson military-civilian administration of Saldo marching with Victory Banners²⁰, Russian flags, Soviet songs playing in the background, and participants chanting “fascists will not pass” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 9)! On May 10th Saldo gave a televised address in a room with a portrait of Vladimir Putin behind him for the first time, and cautioned the citizens of Kherson Oblast not to succumb to misinformation (Stemousov, 2022, May 10). Most of Saldo’s further statements consisted of information regarding the repair of various pieces of infrastructure, often citing the aid of Russia. However, by May 23rd he decried the “terrorist” shelling of Kherson Oblast by the Ukrainian military and declared that they had the “blood of civilians” stained on their hands (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 23).

On June 11, Saldo received a Russian passport along with 23 other officials assisting in the Russian occupation of Ukraine (Petrenko, 2022). Ultimately, this cumulated with Saldo, along with Leonid Pasechnik of the Luhansk People’s Republic, Denis Pushilin of the Donetsk People’s Republic, and Yevgeny Balitsky of the Zaporizhzhia military–civilian administration assembling in Moscow to sign off on Russia’s annexation of the four territories on the 30th of September. Since Ukraine’s recapture of Kherson on November 11th, Saldo has relocated with other officials to Henichesk. He remains there as head of the Kherson military–civilian administration at the time of this writing.

²⁰ The Victory Banner is the banner raised by the Soviet Red Army on the Reichstag building in Berlin on May 1st, 1945. The banner today serves as one of the most popular symbols of Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Yevgeny Vitalyevich Balitsky worked in radio before entering politics, successfully establishing the first FM radio station in Melitopol, called Southern Space, in 1996 (“BALITSKIY Evgeniy Vitalyevich,” n.d.). Two years later, Balitsky was elected a deputy of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast Council for two years as an independent, joining the Party of Regions in 2004 (“Balitskiy Yevhen Vitaliyovich,” n.d.). He worked for several years in a multitude of industries before entering politics again, including beer production and the sale of tractor parts, until finally serving as a deputy of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast Council from 2010 to 2012. Specifically serving as a member of the Standing Committee on the Budget, and as the Acting Director of the Department in the Ministry of Economy and European Integration, he also became Deputy Director of Economics at Melitopol Avtogradivnyy Aggregat in 2012 (“Balitskiy Yevhen Vitaliyovich,” n.d.). From 2012 to 2019, Balitsky served as a People’s Deputy of Ukraine, being initially elected as a member of the Party of Regions in 2012, and later being re-elected as a self-nominated candidate in 2014. While elected deputy chairman of the Melitopol chapter of the Party of Regions in early 2014, following the Maidan Revolution Balitsky left the Party of Regions faction in the Verkhovna Rada and joined Opposition Bloc in 2015 (“Balitskiy Yevhen Vitaliyovich,” n.d.). Balitsky served in this capacity until 2019, in which he failed to be re-elected.

Similar to Russia’s invasion of Kherson, structures referred to as a “military–civilian administration” began to coalesce in Zaporizhzhia Oblast around mid-March, although Russia’s failure to take control of the whole region meant that claims of legitimacy were contested with the pre-war Zaporizhzhia Oblast Council. However, some members of the pre-war local government, including Yevgeny Balitsky, voluntarily switched allegiances and became prominent members of the Russian-installed administration. Rumors about his alleged cooperation with Russia had already begun in mid-March, and he gained infamy after responding to Kyiv’s call to fight the Russians by telling local journalists that he viewed the calls with skepticism. He is recorded as saying:

“Let them better explain why we are all invited to die ... "For the Ukrainian land"? The Kyiv authorities sold this land without asking people, without any referendum ... So it has not been ours for a long time, the oligarchs have bought it up. I will not fight for Zelenskyy. In 1991, I voted for Ukraine, for independence, but I voted for another country. Not for taking away our right to speak Russian, and not for them to rename our streets here without asking anyone. They did everything without us. And now, when it's hot, they say – come on, patriots, go and

fight. When I am asked why I am not a military officer taking part in combat operations? I swore an oath to the Soviet Union!”

(Antonov, 2022, March 19)

On May 9th, Balitsky was rumored to have been appointed as the head of the Zaporizhzhia military–civilian administration, and this was later confirmed on the 26th of May (“Appointed head,” 2022). However, from this point on he made relatively few public appearances, with most limited to topics like the reconstruction and reopening of various aspects of life in the Oblast. This includes the reopening of Melitopol State University, which he declared would be adapted to the Russian university system (RIA Novosti, 2022). On May 30th, there was an attempted attack on his life, after which he gave a statement decrying the “terrorism” of the “Kyiv regime,” and that it had occurred because the region did not want to “go on the path to fascism” (Realnaya Voyna | Ukraina Novosti, 2022, May 30).

Balitsky later became an official member of Russia’s current ruling political party, United Russia, on the 26th of September, two days before signing off on the region's annexation by Russia (Pogorilov, 2022). He is now considered by the Russian government to be the Governor of the Russian-claimed Zaporozhye²¹ Oblast.

4.3.b Idealistic

Kirill Sergeyevich Stremousov began his career through the ownership of a fish feed company for five years before becoming the head of the Henichesk Fish Inspectorate (Dovzhenko, 2021). In 2007, he served in a leading position in Kyiv’s Fisheries Committee before resigning and leaving for Kherson. There, Stremousov founded the NGO “Tavria News,” and went on a trip across the Americas shortly thereafter (Osypchuk, 2013). Originally intended as a trip just to the United States in order to collect material for a book, Stremousov ended up traveling across different countries that his “idol, the revolutionary Che Guevara, had once passed through” (Osypchuk, 2013). After returning to Ukraine, Stremousov dabbled in esotericism and held seminars on mystical approaches to a healthy lifestyle, and also became an adept of the Conception of Social Security. This organization combined Russian nationalism, paganism, Stalinism, and conspiratorial rhetoric to explain its

²¹ Romanization of the Russian “Запорожье.” This is equivalent to “Zaporizhzhia,” a romanization of the Ukrainian “Запоріжжя,” otherwise used in this research.

ultimate goal of the formation of a “unified East Slavic state” (Dovzhenko, 2021). Stremousov was also one of the 2013 organizers of the Russian Runs, which were jogging events that aimed to show Kherson the “power of the Russian spirit” (Dovzhenko, 2021). That same year, he founded the organization For the President, which provided explicit support to then President Viktor Yanukovich, and also established a community in the village of Staraya Zburivka that preached the derecognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian central government and issued their own “people’s passports” (Dovzhenko, 2021). This community survived the Maidan Revolution, although Stremousov would begin to become more involved in the Ukrainian political scene around 2018, when he began to lead the local branch of the Socialist Party after it had been bought and headed by Illia Kyva (Sinitsin, 2022). In 2017, Stremousov gained notoriety for attacking a police officer in the session hall of the city council, along with other acts of controversy throughout the year and into 2018 (Dovzhenko, 2021). This includes having dragged the mayor of Kherson across a street, having physically attacked the deputy mayor of Kherson, having physically attacked an SBU convoy, and having shot a man with a (non-lethal) traumatic pistol (Dovzhenko, 2021). After this final incident, Stremousov was detained and expelled from the Socialist Party of Ukraine, leading him to unsuccessfully run in the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary election as a self-nominated candidate. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Stremousov began to blog profusely about the virus, claiming that it originated from American “biolaboratories” in Ukraine, and urged others not to wear masks, get vaccinated, or observe restrictions. This resulted in his YouTube channel getting permanently suspended, which encouraged him to open several new YouTube channels, and post more frequently on Facebook (Dovzhenko, 2021). In 2020, he began to distribute journalist IDs at a mass scale among his followers, leading to a population of “Stremousov’s journalists” that have been the cause of some disorder, as they were known to use the credentials to evade pandemic-related restrictions (Dovzhenko, 2021). Ultimately, after unsuccessfully running in 2020 for the post of Mayor of Kherson as a self-nominated candidate, Stremousov became a member of the pro-Russian Derzhava party in 2021 (Sinitsin, 2022).

Stremousov’s first major appearance after the start of Russia’s 2022 invasion mirror’s that of Volodymyr Saldo, as the two appeared in the same televised meeting proclaiming a “Committee of Salvation for Peace and Order” in Kherson Oblast. In leading the meeting, Stremousov stated that “the region wants to establish trade, economic, social, and cultural ties with Russia,” and that their new administrative structure would now operate as the regional government (“Novye vlasti,” 2022). Throughout the rest of the month, Stremousov would

publish videos of himself on Telegram giving food and medicine to the people of Kherson and making statements like “don’t listen to bloggers who say that Kherson needs to be liberated, it is already liberated” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, March 21). Throughout April, his attention turned more towards preparations for the May 9th celebrations, and he criticized the previous administration’s alleged failure to adequately respect the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, April 12). In some statements, he described the current government of Ukraine under Zelenskyy as being “fascist terrorists,” and stated that the “Kyiv regime” was attacking Kherson because they “want to live with conservative family values, and Ukraine is moving away from that” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, April 29). In the beginning of May, Stremousov announced that all schools would now be taught in both Russian and Ukrainian, and that they would soon announce the prospect of officially joining Russia. This includes a statement on May 6th, in which Stremousov stated that:

“Russian passports will be given here, hopefully by the end of the year. We are not talking about the creation of a republic, but joining Russia itself, and we will have full rights as Russian citizens”.

(Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 6)

On the 9th of May, Stremousov also published a video of himself at a memorial displaying the “crimes and destruction” carried out by Ukraine against the “people of Donbas” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 9). Around mid-May he published some videos of himself in his office with a portrait of Putin behind him, and stated that he was not afraid that the Ukrainian government had put a bounty on his life because he was sure “what I don’t finish, my children will finish” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 13). A few days later, he made a video standing next to a statue of Ukrainian poet Shevchenko, and stated that, unlike the “Nazis”, his side does not destroy history (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 16a). Additionally, he also stated that:

“Liberation is near! Liberation from fear, hatred, from a kind of corrupt Europeanness, in which there is nothing in common with the world of justice, with the world of Russia.”

(Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 16a)

He gave similar statements in an interview later that day, in which he blamed Europhilic Ukrainians for “complete poverty, degradation” and “genocide of the Ukrainian people by cultural methods” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 16b). Throughout the rest of the month he would publish similar statements echoing the characterization of Europeans and Zelenskyy’s government as being fascist or “the Fourth Reich” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 18). In some of his posts, he also quoted Russian historical figures like Lev Tolstoy and Aleksander Nevsky, and also declared that “Orthodox Christianity will remain here forever” (Administratsiya Khersonskoi oblasti, 2022, May 22).

Ultimately, the Ukrainian government proved successful in retaking the city of Kherson on November 11th, prompting Russian-aligned local officials to relocate to Henichesk several days prior. However, during the time of this relocation process, Stremousov reportedly died in a car crash. The details of his death remain largely unclear, and has only been officially confirmed by an announcement from Volodymyr Saldo on November 9th (“OCCUPIERS OFFICIALLY,” 2022).

Vladimir Valeryevich Rogov has claimed that he was originally born in India, before coming later to the USSR and being raised in the country (“Rogov Vladimir separatist,” n.d.). By 1997, Rogov had become editor-in-chief of the Delovoy Gorod newspaper and worked as a private entrepreneur in the 2000s dealing with various internet businesses. He first entered the political scene in 2006 after being elected chairman of the main council of the “Slavic Guard,” a Russophilic political organization (“Lider «Slavyanskoy gvardii»,” n.d.). He would later join similar organizations, such as being elected to the presidium of the Coordinating Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots in 2009. He was also a frequent participant in events organized by Viktor Medvedchuk’s Ukrainian Choice movement, and was vocal in his criticism of Yanukovich’s flirtations with European integration (“Rogov Vladimir separatist,” n.d.). Discussion arose of Rogov becoming head of the local Zaporizhzhia branch of Ukrainian Choice before the Maidan Revolution broke out in 2014. During this time, Rogov gave several speeches at anti-Maidan rallies in Zaporizhzhia, and around the time that Crimea was being occupied by Russia, Rogov led a column to defend the Lenin statue in Zaporizhzhia city (“Rogov Vladimir separatist,” n.d.). Rogov was detained by the SBU following these events, but he eventually joined the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS) as an expert on Ukraine following the revolution, and would appear on several Russian broadcasts throughout the years (“Rogov Vladimir separatist,” n.d.). He eventually

left RISS in 2017, but remained quite active on social media and in blogging. Through his online activity, he often made provocative statements, such as:

“Ukraine is not a state, but a ruin, on the ruins of which the Nazi radicals from Azov and the Right Sector are atrocious and exude hatred for Russia, and whoever does not become a radical will be made gay by various LGBT funds for grants from the US State Department”

(“Rogov Vladimir separatist,” n.d.).

A prolific blogger, Rogov was very active on Telegram throughout the beginning of Russia’s 2022 invasion. While his account was mostly concerned with tracking the initial violence of the war, he also made several statements congratulating the beginning of the “liberation” from “the criminal power of the Poroshenko-Zelenskyy regime”, a name he used often to refer to the Ukrainian government during Zelenskyy’s administration (Rogov, 2022, February 24). He also called for local Zaporizhzhians to cease their resistance to the “liberation,” ostensibly so as to prevent bloodshed (Rogov, 2022, February 26a). In this manner he also repeatedly accused Zelenskyy of being a drug addict and argued that he had “robbed” the country, a claim based on findings from the Pandora Papers (Rogov, 2022, February 26b). In the beginning of March, he published a post comparing the Rwandan genocide to post-Maidan Ukraine, and a few days later was the first to announce the establishment of the Zaporizhzhia military-civilian administration, of which he appeared to be associated as a “member of the Central Council” (Rogov, 2022, March 2). For the next few days Rogov made statements alleging that the SBU were using former Islamic State fighters as recruits, and that Zelenskyy had been in the process of creating a “dirty bomb²²” with the help of the British government (Rogov, 2022, March 10). In other statements, he urged Russia to become more “strategically sovereign,” and defended Putin’s use of the term “special military operation” instead of “war” to describe the invasion (Rogov, 2022, March 7). Moreover, many of Rogov’s Telegram publications praised the goal of “denazification and demilitarization,” and he often referred to Zelesnkyy as a “Nazi” and a “terrorist” (Rogov, 2022, March 12). By the end of the month, he had alleged multiple times that Poland and Hungary were preparing to invade Western Ukraine, and that Zelenskyy had a plan to destroy Zaporizhzhia city, and therefore advised residents to flee (Rogov, 2022, March 16).

²² A bomb designed to release radioactive material.

In July, Rogov made a statement about the creation of a new political party in the region, called We Are Together with Russia, which aimed to act as a unified movement promoting integration with Russia (Pertsev, 2022). With Rogov as its leader, the group would ultimately serve as the force that officially requested the head of the Zaporizhzhia military-civilian administration, Yevgeny Balitsky, to initiate a referendum on the region's accession into the Russian Federation ("Pro-Russian Movement," 2022). Rogov remains the leader of this organization, which is now part of the All-Russia People's Front, a political bloc headed by Vladimir Putin and which also includes the ruling United Russia party (Potapov, 2022).

5. Analysis

5.1 Ideology, Opportunism, and Background

5.1.a Collaborators and Pro-Russian Exiles

While Hoffmann's distinction between ideological and opportunistic wartime collaboration was used to develop subcategories for Ukrainian collaborators under Russian occupation, it can also be an insightful framework to look at the other response categories in a similar lens. This is particularly true given a striking correlation found among *Idealistic Collaborator* responses and personal backgrounds marked by tendencies including involvement in fringe or radical political organizations, experience with criminal activity, and backgrounds in blogging. Discursively, this was reflected through more impassioned discourse against the Ukrainian government, as well as an increased level of controversial rhetoric. All of these traits were found to be closely similar to the *Pro-Russian Exiles*, both in terms of unorthodox personal histories and propensity to espouse controversial rhetoric. Another similarity between these two groups was the relative lack of high status personnel within them. The highest status traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actor in Ukraine who could be considered a *Pro-Russian Exile* might be Viktor Medvedchuk, who was not fully analyzed in this research due to a lack of response data from him following the beginning of the invasion. While most high status political actors in Ukraine opted not to behave in the manner of a *Idealistic Collaborator* or *Pro-Russian Exile*, Medvedchuk's close connections to Russian political networks and disadvantageous political and legal status situated him in a position similar to that of Vladimir Rogov, in terms of connections to Russian political networks; *Opportunistic Collaborators*, in terms of stagnating political careers; and Renat Kuzmin, in terms of having experienced legal challenges in Ukraine. It should also be noted that Medvedchuk was personally and professionally connected to Illia Kyva, who responded to the invasion as a *Pro-Russian Exile*. Apart from Medvedchuk, however, all individuals analyzed as *Pro-Russian Exiles* were relatively lower ranking People's Deputies of Ukraine at the time of the invasion, and *Idealistic Collaborators* were largely considered outside Ukraine's mainstream political system.

Opportunistic Collaborators derived from a slightly different population. While they largely stemmed from lower status political actors, they could boast backgrounds of greater

mainstream status than *Idealistic Collaborators*. This includes Volodymyr Saldo and Yevgeny Balitsky's positions in local government, but can also include the background of similar individuals who were not fully analyzed in this research, such as Galina Danilchenko and Konstantin Ivashchenko. While these individuals may have also harbored pro-Russian personal convictions to some extent, what differentiates them from *Idealistic Collaborators* is use of the war to revitalize their otherwise relatively low level or stagnant political careers, as well as the profuse focus on administrative themes within their discourse compared to the colorful rhetoric of *Idealistic Collaborators*.

Understanding the relationship between these similar backgrounds and discursive behaviors may give insights into the levels of opportunism of each category of pro-Russian responses to the invasion. The relative increase in political status for both kinds of *Collaborators* indicates that their selected behavior was likely perceived as being in their immediate interests. However, this may have been more true for the *Opportunistic Collaborators* compared to *Idealistic Collaborators* given the history of *Idealistic Collaborators* to make more erratic or ideologically driven decisions and statements throughout their lives, rather than strategic decisions conducive to developing a more mainstream political career. This could be seen in the example of Volodymyr Saldo, who initially expressed personal sentiments against Russia's war aims, but eventually took advantage of the opportunity to become head of the regional government. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine may have provided an immediate boost in the status of *Idealistic Collaborators* due to their supportive ideological convictions, it is probable that the *Opportunistic Collaborators* will achieve a greater increase in their political influence over the long term compared to the *Idealistic Collaborators*. This is already evident, to some extent, in Moscow's preference for *Opportunistic Collaborators* to take leading positions in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson military-civilian administrations, as well as Yevgeny Balitsky and Galina Danilchenko's acquisition of United Russia party memberships. It is also important to note that Kirill Stremousov, an *Idealistic Collaborator*, has already experienced a premature death.

Opportunism with respect to the *Pro-Russian Exiles* serves as an interesting case in comparison to the *Collaborators*. Unlike the *Collaborators*, the *Pro-Russian Exiles* responded to the invasion with pro-Russian convictions without the direct local presence of Russian armed forces. Moreover, *Pro-Russian Exiles* derived from People's Deputies of Ukraine and other relatively high-profile positions compared to both *Opportunistic* and *Idealistic Collaborators*, and the decision to flee Ukraine and take pro-Russian positions

generally decreased their immediate political influence. This is especially true for Renat Kuzmin, who declined from a People's Deputy of Ukraine to completely abandoning public and political life and being considered a criminal by Ukrainian authorities. In Kuzmin's case, his response to the invasion may therefore be more likely to derive from genuine personal convictions rather than opportunistic or strategic considerations. Illia's Kyva's behavior is somewhat more difficult to ascertain given his history of opportunism across the political spectrum. This history may also explain his better use of the war to develop his image and status, as he managed to become a popular guest on Russian political talk shows and may have acquired Russian citizenship. *Pro-Russian Exile* behavior may also be partly explained by a belief that remaining in Ukraine or taking a pro-Ukrainian position would not be politically viable given how deep these individuals already were in terms of alignment with the harder pro-Russian discursive elements of Ukraine's broader Russia-sympathetic political community before the start of the invasion.

5.1.b Loyalists, Pro-Ukrainian Exiles, and Without Voice

The most high-profile of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors overwhelmingly responded to the invasion as either *Loyalists* or *Pro-Ukrainian Exiles*. Ranging from Leaders of the Opposition in the Verkhovna Rada, the mayor of Ukraine's third largest city, and one of Ukraine's wealthiest oligarchs, individuals that responded as either *Loyalists* or *Pro-Ukrainian Exiles* often had a lot to lose through Russia's invasion. Naturally, this formulated largely into anti-Russian discursive positions. While behavior among these individuals may have been somewhat different had Russia achieved victory in the war swiftly, it should also be noted that most *Loyalists* and *Pro-Ukrainian Exiles* responded relatively early, before it became clear that Russia was unlikely to occupy most of the country following their retreat from Kyiv. While this may be indicative of genuine loyalty to Ukraine among many of these actors, this is not mutually exclusive with opportunistic behavior.

In general, the details of how these individuals responded is as diverse as their backgrounds and political positions, and each individual found themselves rewarded differently. Arguably the most opportunistic of pro-Ukrainian individuals analyzed was Vadim Stolar, who fled the country and remained silent on the war for two weeks before developing a charity fund that has been accused of inefficiency and serving as a face-saving tool. After settling on the French riviera, adopting a pro-Ukrainian perspective may have also

been a decision made to better fit in with the general position of his new home in Western Europe. The peculiar decision-making on the part of Yevheniy Murayev is similar to that of Stolar in certain ways, especially in terms of abandoning public life following the invasion. However, it is difficult to ascertain why Murayev has still refrained from emerging from self-imposed exile, unlike Stolar. His logic may be based in either a long-term refrain from picking a side until the conclusion of the war, the calculation that his political career has been too seriously jeopardized by the war to attempt to save face, or a mix of both.

Yuriy Boyko, who responded as a *Loyalist*, also made some decisions that are indicative of opportunism. This includes an effective coup d'état against Vadim Rabinovich, who served as co-chairman of Opposition Platform - For Life with Boyko, despite both discursively responding to the invasion similarly. This allowed Boyko to serve as the sole leader of OPZZh until the party's suspension on March 20th. With political power in mind, Boyko may have simply opted for a pro-Ukrainian position given the dramatic rise in anti-Russian sentiment in Ukraine following the invasion, thus making a *Loyalist* response the only viable option to maintain his political career within Ukraine (Telishevskaya, 2022). Boyko's discursive shift in terms of policy orientation toward European integration also tends to follow general Ukrainian public opinion following the invasion. One of the worst affected by Russia's invasion was Vadim Rabinovich, who found himself politically disenfranchised and stripped of Ukrainian citizenship despite maintaining rhetorical support for Ukraine in the war. Whether Rabinovich actually left the country on political invitation from abroad or not has a relatively large impact on the statistical likelihood of his response being genuine, as existing scholarship on exile argues that the decision to leave is most often conducted by those that feel a weaker identification with their state (Hirschman, 1970). Additionally, Rabinovich's continued support for Ukraine, despite the challenges he has faced since the war began, tends to bolster the authenticity of his position.

Similar to Yuriy Boyko, Oleksandr Vilkul also made use of the war to reinvigorate his political position, albeit with greater success. Having suffered from a largely stagnant political career since falling from grace following the Maidan Revolution, Vilkul managed to regain a sense of popularity and leadership in Kryvyi Rih through his firm discourse against Russia and his involvement in the defense of the country. This is somewhat similar to the fate of fellow *Loyalist* Gennady Trukhanov, who rode the wave of public opinion change toward Russia and maintained his popularity and legitimacy through actively participating in the defense of Ukraine and shifting his rhetoric.

5.1.c Legitimacy and Voice

Overall Henry and Plantan’s argument that “constrained legitimacy” serves as the primary catalyst of exile among political actors is a theory largely reflected well within this research (2021). This is especially true for the *Pro-Russian Exiles*, who faced greater challenges with legitimacy following the invasion given their propensity to espouse more hardline pro-Russian rhetoric in the past. However, concerns over legitimacy appear to have also been experienced by other individuals who responded differently, including those who completely abandoned their political careers and public life, or those *Pro-Ukrainian Exiles* who attempted to save face after fleeing the country for Western nations. This research also displays that, in some cases, Hirschman’s original theory regarding the abandonment of voice after exile proves true. However, modern scholarship on the use of social media to express voice after exile was also widely validated, and was ultimately more common than a complete abandonment of voice, which was mostly limited to Murayev and Kuzmin. Most *Exiles* remained actively engaged with Ukraine’s domestic situation and channeled this information from their political perspectives to media in the countries they relocated to.

5.2 Reconceptualized Identities

5.2.a Collaborators and Pro-Russian Exiles

The single most common theme among all individuals who responded to the invasion by taking a pro-Russian position, which includes both *Pro-Russian Exiles* and *Collaborators*, was their shared insistence that the true responsibility for the invasion lay in Kyiv. This included assertions that the war was revenge or a ‘taste of one’s own medicine’ for suffering caused by the Ukrainian state against the inhabitants of Donbas, which was a discursive position especially common among *Idealistic Collaborators* and *Pro-Russian Exiles*. Common chains of logic among these response groups included the allegation that the post-Maidan Ukrainian government had “sold out” the country to the West, and that NATO, the EU, the United Kingdom, and/or the United States of America were responsible for driving the Ukrainian government towards conflict. In more extreme cases among individuals

like Kyva and Rogov, this language took a more conspiratorial tone. Similarly, many in this response bracket also accused Zelenskyy of corruption and of being a drug addict to accentuate claims of his government's illegitimacy. Specifically in the case of *Opportunistic Collaborators*, more nuanced rhetoric was utilized to argue that the Ukrainian state had "abandoned" the people of regions that had been occupied by Russia, as well as alleging that the Ukrainian state was intentionally attacking the "peaceful" civilians of their regions following occupation. "Terrorism" was often also used to describe the actions of the Ukrainian armed forces.

Another very common theme in the rhetoric of individuals who responded with a pro-Russian disposition was the pronounced celebration of the Soviet Union, victory in the Great Patriotic War, and the fight against fascism and Nazism. Out of these, hostility towards fascism and Nazism was the most widely vocalized, as every single pro-Russian individual had accused either President Zelenskyy personally or Ukraine at large of being "fascist" or "Nazi" at least once by the end of this analysis. Several *Idealistic Collaborators* and *Pro-Russian Exiles* also made specific mentions of nationalist combat units and movements, including the Azov Battalion and National Corps. The discourse of *Opportunistic Collaborators* varied to some extent, largely due to their preoccupation with administrative duties. However, this meant that a large part of their discourse concerned issues like the prioritization of Soviet history in local schools, ensuring that the eternal flame in cities like Kherson and Melitopol remained burning, and demonstrating their commitment to celebrating Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War on May 9th.

Other themes also emerged as prominent markers of identity and legitimacy, including grievances toward the position of the Russian language in Ukrainian society. This was pronounced among the discourse of *Pro-Russian Exiles* like Illia Kyva, but also among *Opportunistic Collaborators* like Balitsky and both *Idealistic Collaborators*. The presence of this issue in the rhetoric of *Collaborators* is due to its relevance in matters of local administration and education, as well as its potential to serve in arguments of the Ukrainian state's cultural hostility toward locals in the region. Religion, specifically the promotion of Russian Orthodox Christianity, was also a common theme among some individuals, especially those from Kherson Oblast. Both Volodymyr Saldo and Kirill Stremousov published statements or videos depicting the religion favorably and asserting it as part of local culture. It is also worthy of note that the flag and coat of arms of Kherson Oblast was changed by the Russian-installed military-civilian administration to depict an Orthodox Christian cross. A similar thematic trend found in this research was the celebration by those

with pro-Russian responses of Russia's status as a socially "conservative nation", in the case of *Pro-Russian Exiles*, or that Russian-occupied Ukraine would now respect "family values," in the case of the *Idealistic Collaborators*. Some of these individuals also expressed explicit hostility toward homosexuality. A final finding came in the tendency of the *Idealistic Collaborators* to demonstrate the greatest appreciation for Russian history and historical figures in their discourse. Both *Idealistic Collaborators* quoted or mentioned a variety of Russian historical figures, with Vladimir Rogov expressing a particularly robust interest in the history of southern Ukraine during the Soviet and Imperial eras. This may have been linked with a broader intention to signal justification of Russian annexation of the region.

5.2.b Loyalists and Pro-Ukrainian Exiles

Traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors who elected to pursue a pro-Ukrainian response to the 2022 invasion, which includes the *Loyalists* and *Pro-Ukrainian Exiles*, differed significantly in rhetoric from pro-Russian individuals. The most pronounced theme among those who took a pro-Ukrainian position was an assertion of local loyalty, which manifested itself in various ways. This includes rhetoric from actors like Yuriy Boyko and Vadim Rabinovich, who adopted the position that Russia's attack was ultimately contrary to their primary interest of peace and detrimental to the interests of their home. This is accentuated by several of their statements overtly expressing national loyalty, such as Rabinovich's response that "an attack on my country, no matter what reason is chosen for this, is aggression for me!" or Boyko's claims that his childhood home had been destroyed by Russian forces (Ischenko, 2022; Kazanskyi, 2022). Oleksandr Vilkul and Gennady Trukhanov also legitimized their response through affirmations of local loyalty, albeit with more unique local flavors. Being both engaged in the governance of particular Ukrainian cities, each professed a distinct sense of duty and loyalty to the city they resided in. For Trukhanov, this was particularly acute, as he made claims of loyalty to the city of Odesa much more frequently than he did to the Ukrainian state overall, which may be partly explained by the character of Odesa's proud and unique identity within Ukraine.

Similar to this sense of local loyalty was the common prioritization of peace among traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian politicians, and those who responded with a pro-Ukrainian position blamed Russia for having ruptured this peace. The prioritization of peace was particularly common in the rhetoric of members of Opposition Platform - For Life,

including those who took pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian positions, and also served as the primary theme in Murayev's discourse despite otherwise refraining to take a deeper stance on the invasion. However, it should be noted that the top leadership of OPZZh, Boyko and Rabinovich, adopted pro-Ukrainian positions, and Kyva's blaming of Ukraine and the West for this rupture in peace was the reason for his expulsion from the party. Notably, the traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actor who expressed the need for negotiations and a quick peace the least was Oleksandr Vilkul, whose new position in the Territorial Defense Headquarters of Kryvyi Rih was largely dependent on conflict with Russia. This is in contrast to most traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors, who initially remained tied to a desire among the Ukrainian electorate to improve relations with Moscow and thus had discernible interests in ending the war as fast as possible.

Another important thematic trend detected in the discourse of those who took a pro-Ukrainian position was the notable retention of some rhetoric glorifying the Soviet Union and its victory in the Great Patriotic War. This was present in the rhetoric of Boyko and Trukhanov, the latter of whom published a long television segment arguing that Russia's actions paralleled those of Nazi Germany. However, this was mostly reflected in the rhetoric of Oleksandr Vilkul, who published several posts on social media that demonstrated this. Vilkul's use of Soviet symbolism was particularly interesting and seemingly paradoxical, given that he also frequently used slogans and motifs originally derived from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army²³, which actively fought against the Soviet Union during the Second World War. This paradox was seemingly more apparent given that Ukraine had just been invaded by a force with an official aim of "denazification," and which made significant use of Soviet nostalgia for its own purposes. However, these responses can perhaps be partly explained by the words of Gennady Trukhanov in an interview with the Kyiv Independent, in which he argued that politicians in south and eastern Ukraine could not ignore the popularity of Soviet symbolism among the electorate, and especially those symbols derived from the Great Patriotic War. This evidently applies also to the way that traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors in the region have legitimized their response to the invasion.

Some additional themes were also present in the rhetoric of pro-Ukrainian response groups. This includes reassertions of the identity and rights of Russian speakers in Ukraine,

²³ The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was a Ukrainian paramilitary and partisan group founded by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in December 1941. During the Second World War, it fought against the USSR, Polish forces, and, in the later stages of the war, Nazi Germany, with the intention of establishing an independent Ukrainian state. From 1941-43, the group was allied with Nazi Germany, and engaged in ethnic cleansing of Poles and Jews in the regions of Volhynia and Galicia.

and their place within contemporary Ukrainian society. Both Vilkul and Trukhanov reaffirmed the right of Russian-speaking Ukrainians to exist and to be patriots of Ukraine, which served as an important element in calls for the unity of the country in the face of invasion. Complete turn-arounds in respect to foreign policy positions were also evident in the discourse of those who responded as pro-Ukrainians. This includes both Boyko and Trukhanov making statements in favor of European integration, which they had opposed prior to Russia's 2022 invasion. The most likely explanation for these discursive positions is that they trail broader changes in the opinion of the regional or national electorate following the war.

5.3 Russia's Hegemonic Position

Considering the behavior of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community as representative of Russian influence in the country overall, Russia's position appears to have dramatically declined as a result of the war by the time of this writing. This is largely due to the fact that individuals were generally forced to choose between adopting a very pro-Russian position or retaining political and personal legitimacy within un-occupied Ukrainian society. This resulted in increases of Russian influence being limited only to traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors located in regions of Ukraine occupied by Russia's armed forces, as well as to a consolidation of some pro-Russian political actors who left Ukraine and moved to Russia. The effect of this invasion on Russia's position as a global hegemonic actor would have thus likely been much greater had Russia performed more successfully on the battlefield. This is further informed by the number of individuals who refrained from commenting on the invasion until it had already become clear that Moscow would not achieve a swift victory, especially Yevheniy Murayev. It is also worth mentioning that individuals who left un-occupied Ukraine for Russia were those who had already demonstrated a particularly strong ideological affinity toward Russia or who were already well connected with Russian political networks before the invasion. All of the traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors analyzed in this research who remained in un-occupied Ukraine adopted pro-Ukrainian responses to the invasion. Additionally, many of the *Exiles* who left Ukraine also retained pro-Ukrainian orientations.

In terms of the political and social status of those who adopted pro-Russian responses, Russia again fared poorly. All of the most prominent traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors completely changed their position on Russia following the invasion, with all of them now considering Russia as an aggressor and an enemy. One exception to this is Viktor Medvedchuk, who was not fully analyzed in this research due to a lack of available data, who effectively responded as a *Pro-Russian Exile*. However, Medvedchuk had been under house arrest in Ukraine for around 10 months before the start of the invasion, had seen his political status sharply diminish, and was already connected to Russia's political class. Nonetheless, relatively important political figures like Yuriy Boyko, Gennady Trukhanov, Oleksandr Vilkul, and Igor Abramovych have remained in un-occupied Ukraine and can no longer be said to advocate Russia-sympathetic policies. More strikingly, Russia has also lost sympathy from politically and financially well-connected Ukrainians who fled to Western nations, like Vadim Rabinovich and Vadim Stolar. The pro-Ukrainian stances among these latter individuals appears to also reflect the loss of Russian prestige in the Western world at large.

Understanding the mosaic of responses exhibited by this research offers a compelling argument that Moscow's decision to pursue an invasion of Ukraine has evaporated its political and social influence in un-occupied Ukraine overall, which marks a particularly painful failure for Russia in one of its most strategic neighboring regions. However, this research also offers some reinforcement for an explanation of Moscow's gamble as influenced by Michael Beckley and Hal Brands' interpretation of the Thucydides Trap, which would argue that Russian elites pursued the invasion as a last-resort influence mechanism due to the perception of a gradually ongoing and otherwise irreversible loss of influence in Ukraine. The backgrounds of many of the individuals analyzed in this research tend to incline toward this interpretation, as traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors like Vilkul, Balitsky, Saldo, Rogov, Stremousov, and Medvedchuk all faced relatively stagnant careers following the Maidan Revolution in 2014. These individuals can be used as bellwethers for the countless other traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine not analyzed in this research, and the implications this trend has had on Russia's position in the country: a stagnation or gradual decline of influence. Moscow's decision to invade may also be better understood if we also consider the Russian occupied regions of Ukraine as models for the Kremlin's intended form of governance over the whole of Ukraine. This model offers no representation for political movements that could be hostile to Russian interests, and has also proven to proliferate the discursive positions of hardline pro-Russian elements from within

Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community. Whether this model will be successful in altering the sympathies of locals in Ukraine is unknown, but it has proven effective in consolidating and reinforcing a loyal local political class.

Looking at Russia's invasion through the framework of systemic competition between global hegemonic structures is also supported by the way discourse was reflected in the responses of traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors. While multifurcation is a term that more accurately describes the impact that the invasion had on the discourse of traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors due to notable differences in the rhetoric of *Opportunistic Collaborators*, *Pro-Russian Exiles* and *Idealistic Collaborators*, *Loyalists* and *Pro-Ukrainina Exiles*, and those *Without Voice*; in many ways discourse was also largely split along the fault lines of the war. This could be argued to embody a manifestation of the "ideological contest" that Charles Kupchan refers to as a frequent characteristic of hegemonic competition. This is especially pronounced in the way that individuals expressed core blame for the war, their foreign policy priorities, and the way that each side defined itself. The latter is especially apparent in remarks by pro-Russian response groups to characterize Ukraine as "fascist," corrupt, and morally decadent, while those in pro-Ukrainian response groups defined themselves as fighting for "freedom," their homeland, and/or peace. Kupchan's argument that hegemonic actors use and retain influence in the extension of their particular models of governance to peripheries is also reflected in this research. In Russia's case, the use of hard power resulted in the creation of a loyal local elite, part of which directly integrated into Russia's ruling power structures. Namely, this can be witnessed in Balitsky and Danilchenko's acquisition of United Russia party memberships, as well as the consolidation of Rogov's political movement, We Are Together with Russia, into Vladimir Putin's All-Russia People's Front.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to offer a comprehensive understanding of the effect of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine on Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community and on Russia itself. The researcher aimed to map response trends, including how members of Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community reconceptualized their sense of loyalty, legitimacy, and identity. Data gathered from this analysis was used to find correlations between responses to the invasion, an individual's background, and potential indications of opportunism. Finally, in considering the state of Russia-sympathetic discourse as an important way to gauge Russian influence in Ukraine, this research aimed to make larger claims about Russia's position as a hegemonic actor in the global system, and argued that its use of war as an influence mechanism has had limited results.

The way in which this research was conducted was inspired by work analyzing the influence of global hegemonic actors as reflected in local, hegemonically peripheral, discourse. However, this research goes further by analyzing a case in which the primary method of influence is violent conquest through military means. This research is thus the first of its kind in that no existing literature explores the way in which violent invasion has ruptured the discourse of a political population traditionally sympathetic to the invader, and then uses this data to extract conclusions about the position of the invader's influence from the perspective of a global hegemonic actor. Moreover, this research is unique in that it is specifically concentrated on Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which remains understudied as a relatively recent event. This research is also notable by the methods used to gather data. Drawing from social media posts, televised broadcasts, and written interviews, more than 360 data points were analyzed in order to build a comprehensive understanding of every given response to Russia's invasion made by 12 traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors. While these 12 individuals do not cover every kind of response made toward the invasion, they offer a wide range of responses that illustrate the most pressing trends triggered by Russia's actions.

This includes the way in which loyalties and identities splintered into pro-Ukrainian discourse and pro-Russian discourse. Those traditionally Russia-sympathetic Ukrainian political actors who responded as *Collaborators* and *Pro-Russian Exiles* were found to blame Kyiv and the West primarily for the war, and viewed the current Ukrainian government as corrupt, "fascist," and hostile to Russian-speaking Ukrainians. These discursive positions

reinforced a sense of illegitimacy toward Zelenskyy's administration that was aided by existing ideological and cultural affinity toward the invading force, including praise of Russia's conservative society and Russia's association with the Soviet Union. Those individuals who responded as *Loyalists and Pro-Ukrainian Exiles* demonstrated different priorities in their discourse. For them, Russia served as the clear aggressor, and war against their nation and cities was condemned harshly. Homeland and freedom were marked as two of the most important goals and symbols of identity within the pro-Ukrainian responses. Interestingly enough, *Loyalists and Pro-Ukrainian Exiles* also retained elements of Soviet nostalgia within their self-conceptualizations, shifting the mythology of the Great Patriotic War to legitimize the fight against Russia. However, some responses failed to enter either pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian categories, such as those by the *Exile Without Voice*, Yevheniy Murayev, who refrained from taking an active position on the invasion and completely abandoned political and public life.

In analyzing these 12 individuals, correlations were also detected between responses, socio-political status, personal background, and personal interests. Namely, individuals who had stirred up the greatest amount of controversy in their past responded as *Idealistic Collaborators* and *Pro-Russian Exiles*. These individuals largely shared backgrounds of violence, participation in radical political movements, and unstable careers. *Opportunistic Collaborators* demonstrated more mainstream backgrounds in local administration, although their relatively stagnant careers may explain a willingness to increase in political status as part of Russian-installed regional governments. In contrast, those who responded as *Loyalists* always derived from more prestigious political backgrounds, and included the Leader of the Opposition in the Verkhovna Rada, as well as the mayor of Odesa. These professional politicians often also succeeded in maintaining or increasing their status through crafty political and discursive maneuvering, although even most of the highest-profile *Exiles* adopted pro-Ukrainian positions despite sometimes dropping sharply in political power.

Whether adopting pro-Ukrainian positions opportunistically or not, one of the findings of this research is a sharp decrease in Russian influence among the population of traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors that remained in un-occupied territories of Ukraine. This has also translated into a loss of Russian influence among the most high-profile members of the traditionally Russia-sympathetic community in the country, with most now expressing far greater discursive favorability towards European integration and NATO as opposed to Russia. However, it should be recognized that Russia was successful in establishing a loyal local political class in the regions it occupied, especially in Kherson and

Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, and was therefore able to secure a level of political influence in some parts of Ukraine through the use of hard power. While some of these *Collaborators* appear to possess relatively disreputable backgrounds, Russia's military-civilian administrations can be noted for having successfully drawn in a number of experienced local administrators to Moscow's side. Had Russia performed more successfully on the battlefield, this may have served as Russia's preferred model of government across the entirety of Ukraine. Had this been the case, it is probable that some of the traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors who adopted pro-Ukrainian responses would not have done so, and Russia would have likely retained greater influence across Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community, and across Ukraine as a whole. At the time of this writing, Russia's position among Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic actors is therefore undeniably weaker as a result of this war. Inasmuch as Russia's position among Ukraine's traditionally Russia-sympathetic political community is reflective of its influence in the country overall, this research points to a dramatic reduction of Russian influence in Ukraine. This represents a failure for Russia, as a global hegemonic actor, to secure a favorable position in a strategic region that is increasingly peripheral to Moscow's center of power.

However, Russia's decision to invade Ukraine appears to have been predicated on an existing perception of declining influence across Ukraine following the Maidan Revolution in 2014. This was corroborated to some extent by this research, which detected a trend of stagnation regarding career advancement among many traditionally Russia-sympathetic political actors in Ukraine following 2014. An immediate decrease in the prestige or quantity of sympathetic discourse has thus demonstrated an increased probability of a global hegemonic actor to pursue foreign policy goals through the use of hard power. Furthermore, the dramatic decrease in reach and prestige of Russia-sympathetic discourse in Ukraine following February 24th, 2022, may contribute to calculations about the course of the war. Namely, it may suggest a firmer commitment to and prolonged use of military force by the Russian government against Ukraine until it feels its goals have been achieved, becomes physically unable to continue the war, or experiences a change in foreign policy leadership.

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