

Do Ukrainians still prefer self-defense against Russia at any cost?

Janina Dill^{1,*}, Marnie Howlett², and Carl Müller-Crepon³

¹Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

²Oxford School of Global and Area Studies and Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

³Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author: Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, 120 Walton St, Oxford OX2 6GG, United Kingdom. Email: janina.dill@bsg.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

Do Ukrainians still categorically reject political and territorial concessions to Russia as found by Dill et al. (2024a) in July 2022? Or have their attitudes toward resistance changed given mounting costs and uncertain benefits of self-defense against Russia's aggression? Between December 2024 and January 2025, we presented the original and a modified conjoint experiment with stronger cost treatments to 2,580 Ukrainian citizens, sampled from largely the same locations as before. We find continued categorical resistance to Russian control. Resistance to accepting political neutrality or conceding territory meanwhile has weakened. Ethnic Ukrainians and less war-affected respondents remain comparatively more willing to resist Russia's aggression than other respondents. Locations' exposure to war-related violence is not associated with changes in Ukrainians' attitudes since 2022. Our findings help us better understand how the attitudes of conflict-affected populations evolve over time and shed light on public support for a potential political settlement in Ukraine.

Keywords attitudes toward war, self-defense, proportionality, conjoint design, Ukraine, replication

“They may make a deal, they may not make a deal. They may be Russian some day, or they may not be Russian some day.”¹ With this flippant statement about Ukrainians, US President Trump announced in February 2025 that he was pursuing a “deal” to end the war in Ukraine, a goal he had boasted about in the months leading up to his election. U.S. Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, subsequently made clear that the Trump administration would seek painful concessions from Ukraine to bring Russia's war to an end: “[W]e must start by recognizing that returning to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders is an unrealistic objective.”² Hegseth also ruled out Ukraine's NATO membership, meeting a central Russian demand before formal negotiations had even begun. Negotiations have since stalled and been resumed as the question remains urgent: do Ukrainians accept that, for their country, territorial integrity is “unrealistic”? Are they ready to give up full political autonomy to reduce the costs of war?

Five months after the full-scale invasion, in July 2022, we (Dill et al., 2024a, short DHM) found the answer to be “no”: Ukrainian support for resistance was strong. Our conjoint survey experiment asked respondents to choose between strategies of pursuing the war against Russia with varying costs and benefits of resistance.

We showed that respondents did not trade off the war's costs in terms of fatalities and nuclear escalation against the benefits of maintaining Ukrainian territorial integrity or political autonomy. Instead, respondents categorically opposed political and territorial concessions regardless of the costs of resistance. At the time, the successful counteroffensive made plausible that Ukraine might win on the battlefield (Watling et al., 2024). Since then, however, battle-lines have barely moved as Russian troops have fortified captured territories (Ludvik & Bahensky, 2024). The costs of Ukraine's continued resistance meanwhile have climbed to more than approximately 80,000 Ukrainian soldiers killed and 12,000 civilian fatalities. Moreover, assisting Ukraine has become more contentious in the United States (Cancian & Park, 2025). In light of mounting costs and ever less certain benefits, have Ukrainians changed their views about self-defense?

Answering this question helps us gauge the prospects of a political settlement of the war, which requires the support of the Ukrainian public to be stable and legitimate. Furthermore, we seek to shed light on the attitudes of war-affected populations over time. It is unclear whether prolonged war and sunk costs harden attitudes against settling with the enemy or cause war fatigue, increasing the perceived urgency to settle. Most existing studies compare the attitudes of more and less conflict-affected groups not how overall war support changes over time.

¹ Agence France-Presse, February 11, 2025.

² Opening Remarks at Ukraine Defense Contact Group, February 12, 2025.

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We study Ukrainians' views after nearly three years of all-out war with a pre-registered replication-cum-extension of DHM,³ fielded between 6 December 2024 and 9 January 2025 with 2,580 in-person respondents across non-occupied Ukraine. We administered the original conjoint Experiment I to 1,290 respondents who chose between strategies of pursuing the war against Russia with varying benefits—territorial and political outcomes—as well as costs in terms of civilian and military deaths and nuclear escalation risks over three additional months of fighting. As an extension to test the robustness of DHM's results, Experiment II with another 1,290 respondents featured unchanged potential benefits of self-defense but substantially increased costs in terms fatalities and nuclear escalation risk over a time-horizon of one year.

We find that Ukrainians still categorically oppose a Russian-controlled government and support full territorial integrity. Territorial concessions exert slightly smaller negative effects than in July 2022, but these effects remain sizable and exceed the support-depressing effects of the highest levels of fatalities and nuclear escalation risk. Importantly, the results from Experiments I and II do not differ statistically from each other, suggesting robustness of Ukrainians' support for resistance to significant increases in the costs of the war and to a longer time-horizon for the cost-benefit calculation. We furthermore find more resistance to concessions among ethnic Ukrainians, less war-affected citizens, individuals with greater trust in Ukraine's president, and those who deem a Ukrainian victory extremely important. These heterogeneous effects are overall slightly more pronounced than in 2022, but this difference itself is not statistically significant. We find no evidence that changes in attributes' effects since 2022 correlate with locations' exposure to the war. Overall, Ukrainians are still united behind resistance, remarkably insensitive to its costs, and broadly unwilling to concede territory and autonomy, even though these three patterns are slightly weaker than in 2022.

Theoretical expectations

Moral theories of permissible self-defense, so-called just war theories (Cécile, 2012), and dominant empirical theories of war support (Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi et al., 2005), predict less support for self-defense if it comes at higher costs. In turn, better chances of victory should increase support strategies of self-defense. Besides the loss of life among Ukrainians, the risk of nuclear escalation has been a salient cost of resistance since the beginning of the full-scale invasion (Mearsheimer, 2022). Like DHM, we hence expect that a higher risk of nuclear escalation and more Ukrainian civilian and military fatalities all reduce support for self-defense strategies. When it comes to the benefits of self-defense, we expect that strategies predicted to restore Ukraine to full political autonomy and its pre-2014 borders are preferred. Respondents are more likely to accept the concession of Crimea compared to also conceding Donetsk and Luhansk. Negotiated neutrality—giving up the possibility of NATO and EU memberships—will depress support for a strategy less than accepting Russian control of the government in Kyiv.

Should we expect that the projected costs and benefits of self-defense interact? Preferences for war-fighting strategies can follow two alternative logics. A logic of proportionality implies

trading off the anticipated costs of self-defense against the projected benefits. If expected costs are disproportionate to expected benefits of resistance, even wars with a just cause can become morally impermissible (Hurka, 2005). The principle of proportionality suggests then that the support-depressing effect of various costs should be weaker the more beneficial the expected outcome. This grounds the expectation, which motivated DHM, that the more desirable the projected outcome of a strategy in terms of political autonomy or territorial integrity, the weaker the negative effects of higher civilian and military death tolls and nuclear escalation risk.

While studies in Western countries have shown that war support follows such a cost-benefit calculation (Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi et al., 2005), DHM found that Ukrainians viewed their self-defense in categorical terms, preferring resistance against Russian aggression at any cost. This alternative logic of categorical resistance means that support is dependent on whether a strategy promises a tolerable outcome, regardless of its costs. Few moral philosophers endorse this categorical logic of self-defense, arguing that in the face of evil, we must sometimes close our eyes to the consequences of resistance (Walzer, 2008). If this logic still prevails, we expect that Ukrainians support strategies based on whether they have an acceptable outcome in terms of territory or political autonomy. They should seek to reduce costs only when categorically rejected or preferred outcomes are invariant in or not part of a choice set.⁴

Should we expect that Ukrainians' attitudes have changed since July 2022? Conventional wisdom is that wars initially cause bumps in the popularity of leaders (Driscoll & Maliniak, 2016), known as rally-around-the-flag effects, which weaken over time, at different rates (Baum & Groeling, 2005). Recent studies have cast doubt over whether this effect arises in large-scale militarized disputes (Seo & Horiuchi, 2024), but polls suggest that President Zelensky indeed benefited from a significant, only slowly weakening, rally effect (Kizilova & Norris, 2024). Besides being potentially correlated with trust in a war time leader, war support may also be contingent on perceived prospects of success. Correspondingly Ukrainians have over time become less optimistic about the likely outcome of the war (Nychyk & D'Anieri, 2025).⁵ Modest declines in confidence in the president and victory could mean Ukrainians are becoming less resistant to conceding territory or political autonomy. These changes do not, however, imply that Ukrainians would be unwilling to bear the same high costs for regaining political autonomy or avoiding territorial concessions as in 2022, if resistance could still yield these outcomes.

The critical question is therefore whether we expect Ukrainians to have become more cost-sensitive since July 2022? In 2022, Ukrainians categorically rejected political and territorial concessions at any cost. Due to floor effects, projected costs can hardly exert a weaker effect now, but their effects might be stronger. Just war theorists have taken opposing positions on whether higher cumulative numbers of fatalities increase the moral urgency of suing for peace (Moellendorf, 2015), whether sunk costs should be ignored (McMahan, 2015), or whether such sunk costs may even

³ For the pre-analysis plan, see Dill et al. (2024b).

⁴ Online Appendix A contains the precise wording of all hypotheses, which remain unchanged from the original study with the exception of H7a and H7b on categorical resistance and additional hypotheses on affectedness by the war.

⁵ Affirmative answers to the question "Do you believe that Ukraine will win the war" were down to 88% by the end of 2024, from 97% at the beginning of the invasion (International Republican Institute, 2024).

create an additional moral imperative to keep fighting (Rodin, 2015). Empirically, we know that Western publics gradually withdraw their support from wars as costs mount (Gartner & Segura, 1998), but the evidence stems from surveys about support for military interventions abroad (Sullivan, 2008). Do these results generalize to populations directly affected by wars of aggression?

Over time, populations in theatres of war become on average more affected by the conflict.⁶ One way to approach the question of how time affects war support is therefore to draw on studies that have compared the attitudes of more and less affected individuals in conflict contexts. However, the evidence is inconclusive. Some studies have shown that individuals exposed to violence are readier to settle (Fabbe et al., 2019) as they feel the costs of war more keenly than their less affected compatriots (Matanock & Garbiras-Díaz, 2018; Tellez, 2019). Yet, other studies show the opposite: more affected individuals (Canetti et al., 2013) become radicalized, their attitudes harden (Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014), and they are less sensitive to the costs of resistance (Grossman et al., 2015).

In 2022, we found that war-affected individuals were less opposed to territorial concessions, but not more cost-sensitive. The difference was small, but more Ukrainians have since become war-affected. Moreover, if we think of affectedness as a matter of degree, the difference in readiness to cede territory between affected and unaffected individuals may have widened. Of course, if some individuals react to the mounting costs of war with increased and others with decreased cost-sensitivity and readiness to settle, these effects might cancel each other out so that we may not expect a change in attitudes overall, compared to July 2022.⁷

In addition, by extending the time-horizon to a year, we now also examine whether the short time-horizon of three months in the original experiment allowed individuals to take a categorical stance on resistance, which they would be unwilling to maintain if it meant resisting for longer and at significantly higher costs.

Research design

Experimental design and sampling

Building on DHM, we implemented two conjoint survey experiments, which can reduce social desirability biases (Horiuchi et al., 2022). We asked respondents to choose between different strategies for pursuing the war against Russia by registering their answers on tablets without enumerator involvement. Respondents were first asked to “[p]lease imagine that President Zelensky and his team are considering different military-political strategies for pursuing the war over the next 3 months” (Experiment I) or “[...] over the next year” (Experiment II). We then showed them four pairs of two strategies, differing in benefits (Attributes 1 and 5) and costs (Attributes 2–4) according to Table 1. Attribute levels were independently drawn for each attribute. We randomized the order of Attributes 2–4 at the respondent-level to avoid ordering effects.

⁶ A recent poll suggests that 90% of Ukrainians have experienced at least one stressful experience related to the war, see Novikova (2025).

⁷ We pre-registered competing hypotheses about whether more affected individuals are more or less cost-sensitive and more or less likely to maintain a categorical stance. We did not separately hypothesize whether they are more or less resistant to concessions.

The “benefits” are (avoiding) territorial concessions of Crimea and the regions (*oblasti*) of Donetsk and Luhansk as well as the maintenance of Ukrainian sovereignty or, at least, neutrality, as compared to ending the war with a Russian-controlled government. “Cost” attributes include the number of civilian and military fatalities as well as the risk of a nuclear strike by Russia as shown in Table 1. Experiment I featured the same attribute levels as in DHM.⁸ Experiment II tested robustness to higher costs of self-defense. We increased the time-horizon in the vignette from three months to one year, military fatalities from between 6,000 and 24,000 to between 40,000 and 160,000,⁹ and nuclear escalation risk from between 0 and 15% to between 5 and 45%, to intensify the treatments without diverging from realistic updated projections. Respondents were asked to score each strategy on a scale from 1 to 6, normalized to between 0 to 1, and to make a forced choice (0/1) between them. We followed DHM’s geographically stratified, quota-based sampling strategy and survey the same primary sampling units (PSUs). However, we add additional PSUs to construct our main sample with 125 PSUs that is representative of the population in 2024 and covers previously unsurveyed Mykolaiv and Kharkiv oblasti.¹⁰ We interview 20 respondents per PSU, 10 for each experiment. Online Appendix B contains the demographic characteristics of our sample.

Ethical considerations

We paid particular attention to best practices for ethical research in conflict zones (Howlett & Lazarenko, 2023). In line with the approved protocol of Oxford University’s ethical review board, all respondents provided their informed consent prior to participation. They were made aware that their information would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw at any time. Enumerators were trained to ensure their own and respondents’ safety during data collection (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018). We assured our Ukrainian partners that delayed or failed data collection due to the security situation would (and did) not have monetary consequences. We stayed in regular contact with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology while the survey was in the field.

Estimation strategy

Following DHM, we assessed the effect of each attribute level by estimating Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs). We present these alongside Marginal Means estimates adjusted for the co-occurrence of attribute levels (Leeper et al., 2020). We tested hypotheses on interaction effects with AMCEs conditional on moderator values while also testing for statistically significant differences between them. Lastly, we applied DHM’s ranking method to assess how far respondents made categorical choices between strategies with differing political and territorial concessions. Standard errors are clustered at the level of respondents. Pre-registered robustness checks following DHM are reported in Online Appendix F.

⁸ The only change is that we compare fatalities to the “first three months of the full-scale war” rather than “so far.”

⁹ By December 2024, cumulative Ukrainian military fatalities had amounted to approximately 80,000.

¹⁰ See Online Appendix B for details. Online Appendix C presents stable results for the set of PSUs covered by DHM.

Table 1 Independently randomized attribute levels in Experiments I and II.

Attribute	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
1. Territorial Concessions	<i>None</i>	<i>Crimea</i>	<i>Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea</i>
Exp. I and II:	No concessions	Recognize Crimea as part of Russia	Recognize Crimea and Donetsk and Luhansk regions as part of Russia
2. Civilian fatalities	<i>Low</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>High</i>
Exp. I and II:	6,000	12,000	24,000
3. Military fatalities	<i>Low</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>High</i>
Exp. I:	6,000	12,000	24,000
Exp. II:	40,000	80,000	160,000
4. Nuclear strike	<i>Low</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>High</i>
Exp. I:	None (0%)	Low (5%)	Moderate (15%)
Exp. II:	Low (5%)	Moderate (10%)	High (45%)
5. Likely outcome	<i>Full autonomy</i>	<i>Negotiated neutrality</i>	<i>Russian-controlled government</i>
Exp. I and II:	Withdrawal of Russian troops and preservation of sovereignty (includes possibility to join the EU and/or NATO)	Withdrawal of Russian troops and negotiated neutral status of Ukraine (no possibility to join the EU and/or NATO)	A ceasefire and a Russian-controlled government in Kyiv

Note. For the precise wording of attribute levels in Experiments I and II, see Tables A1 and A2 in the Online Appendix respectively. All numbers are presented as “approximately.” Civilian casualties are described as “projected number of civilian casualties (killed) in the next 3 months” and “year”, respectively. Military fatalities are described as the “[p]rojected number of military casualties (killed) in the next 3 months (Armed Forces of Ukraine, National Guard and Police, SSU Security Services of Ukraine, Territorial Defense, and volunteer battalions)”, and “year”, respectively. Military and civilian fatality levels 1 to 3 are presented as about half, the same and twice the number of fatalities of the “first three months” of the war (Experiment I) and “since the full-scale invasion” (Experiment 2).

Results

We first estimate the main ACMEs separately for Experiments I and II. Since we find that there are no significant differences between the two experiments, we then proceed with pooled data from both experiments to test hypotheses about proportionate/categorical resistance and heterogeneous treatment effects. The results that we discuss below use our main sample and the forced choice outcome, the combination which we deem most relevant for current assessments. Results from the smaller set of PSUs in DHM’s sample and for strategy scores coincide substantively, unless otherwise noted. The Online Appendix presents all additional results.

Cost-sensitivity and willingness to concede

Figure 1 shows the main estimates for AMCEs and Marginal Means for respondents’ forced choice between strategies for pursuing the war.¹¹ Although the modified Experiment II increases the costs of resistance substantively, it yields consistent results which do not overall differ from those of Experiment I.¹² We only observe a somewhat larger effect of high nuclear risk in Experiment II—yet the difference in AMCEs (4 percentage points, $p < .05$) is small compared to the tripling of nuclear risk (15 versus 45%). We find no

different effects of “high” military fatality levels. This suggests that our results are robust even to large increases in strategies’ costs and a longer time-horizon. It is thus also unlikely that the original finding of categorical resistance is explained by cost attributes that were “too weak” to reach equivalence with territorial and political concessions. The coincidence in the results of the two experiments also allows us to economize further analyses below by pooling both experiments when estimating (conditional) AMCEs and Marginal Means.

The main differences emerge between the results from 2022 (red) and those from 2024/2025 (green/blue). Omnibus F-Tests of differences in AMCEs between the results from 2022 and those from Experiments I and II yield p -values below 0.001.¹³ While we continue to observe large, negative effects of territorial and political concessions in Experiments I and II, their magnitude decreased consistently (by between 2 and 9 percentage points, all $p < .001$). We observe the largest decrease for concessions of Crimea and Luhansk and Donetsk oblasti, which triggered comparatively less resistance in Experiments I and II (average AMCE of -12 percentage points) than in 2022 (AMCE -20 percentage points). The average AMCE of a Russian-controlled government in Kyiv decreased by 5 percentage points from -36 percentage points in 2022 to around -31 percentage points in Experiments I and II. The only consistent and (marginally) significant changes on the cost attributes concern AMCEs for high military fatalities¹⁴

¹¹ Note that low, intermediate, and high levels for military fatalities and nuclear risk imply different values for Experiments I and II, with the latter coming with higher numerical values (Table 1).

¹² An omnibus F-Test of differences in AMCEs between Experiments I and II yields p -values of .12 for the choice and .32 for the score outcomes, respectively.

¹³ These are estimated by pooling the samples from 2022 and Experiments 1 and 2, respectively, and estimating heterogeneous AMCEs by experimental wave.

¹⁴ P -values of .07 and .22 for the difference between Experiment 0 and Experiments 1 and 2, respectively.

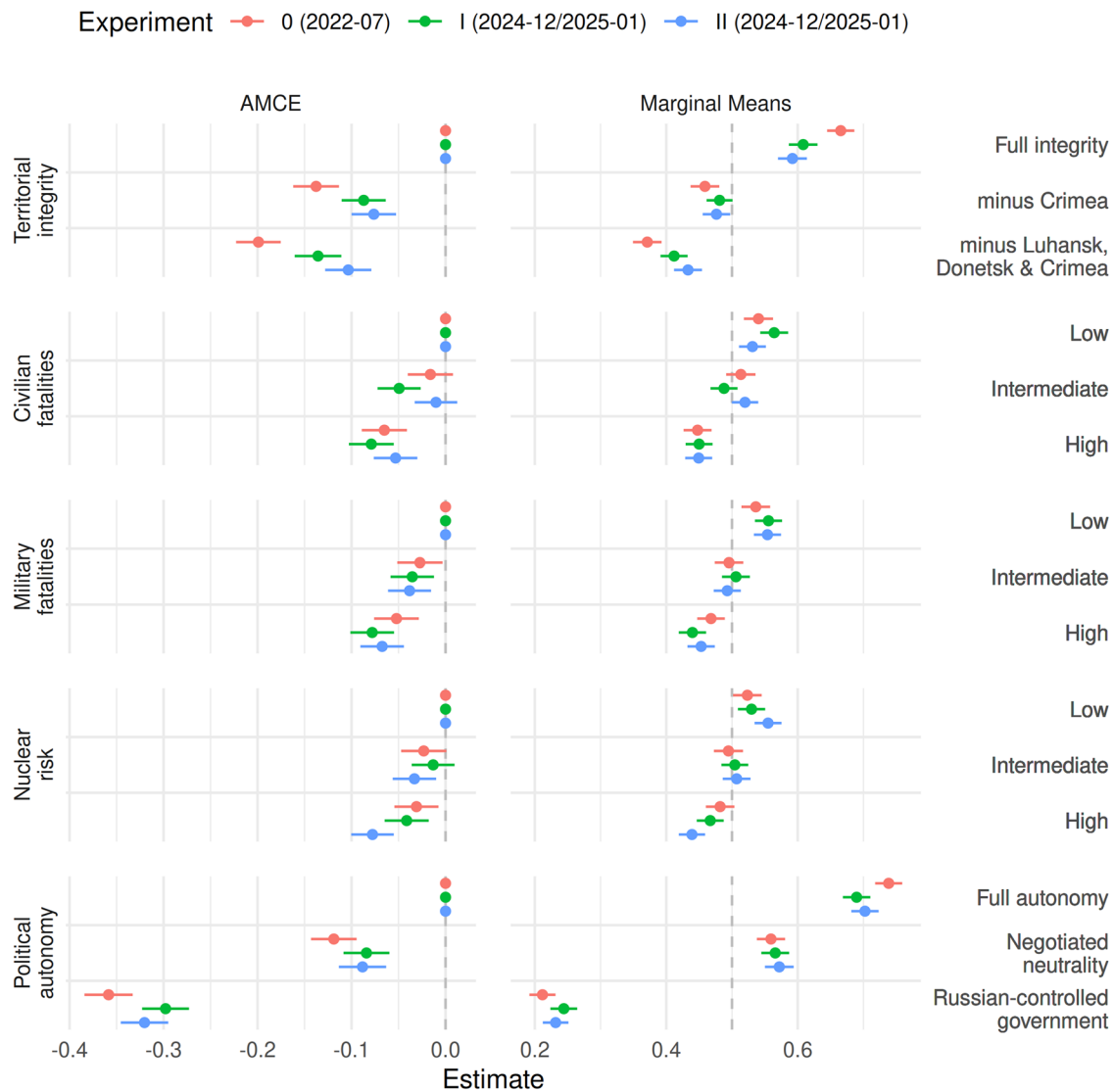


Figure 1 AMCEs and Marginal Means: Original results from July 2022 and Experiments I and II. Coefficients from July 2022 (red) coincide with Figures 2 and 3 in DHM.

and a high nuclear risk, in particular in Experiment II ($p < .01$), both increasing by between 2 and 5 percentage points. Other cost attributes' effects do not differ significantly from 2022.

No evidence of proportionality trade-offs

Our findings replicate DHM's results in showing no evidence that respondents follow a logic of proportionality in assessing strategies of self-defense. Lower benefits of resistance in terms of territorial integrity and political autonomy do not result in greater resistance to higher costs of the war. In turn, better territorial and political outcomes do not make respondents more willing to accept high costs. Figure 2 pools Experiments I and II to test whether the ACMEs of cost attributes increase significantly with worse outcomes. Consistent with DHM, we find no significant heterogeneous ACMEs when the benefit attributes change from level 1 (no concessions or full autonomy) to level 3 (conceding Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk or a Russian-controlled government). While cost AMCEs slightly but insignificantly increase with worse territorial integrity outcomes (left panel in Figure 2), decreasing political

autonomy affects ACMEs, if at all, in the opposite direction (right panel). An omnibus Wald test rejects significant subgroup differences with p -values of .35 and .60 for interactions with territorial integrity and political autonomy, respectively. Separate results for each experiment and from linear modeling of cost attributes confirm this pattern (see Online Appendix D).

Evidence of continued categorical resistance

Instead of following a logic of proportionality, Ukrainians' response patterns are still largely consistent with a logic of categorical resistance. A first test of that hypothesis compares the AMCEs of cost attributes in pairs in which the levels of the territorial integrity and political autonomy attributes vary, with AMCEs among pairs in which these two attributes are invariant. Faced with one of the latter pairs, respondents cannot improve territorial integrity or political autonomy outcomes, hence will only focus on the costs of a strategy. It is only the former pairs with

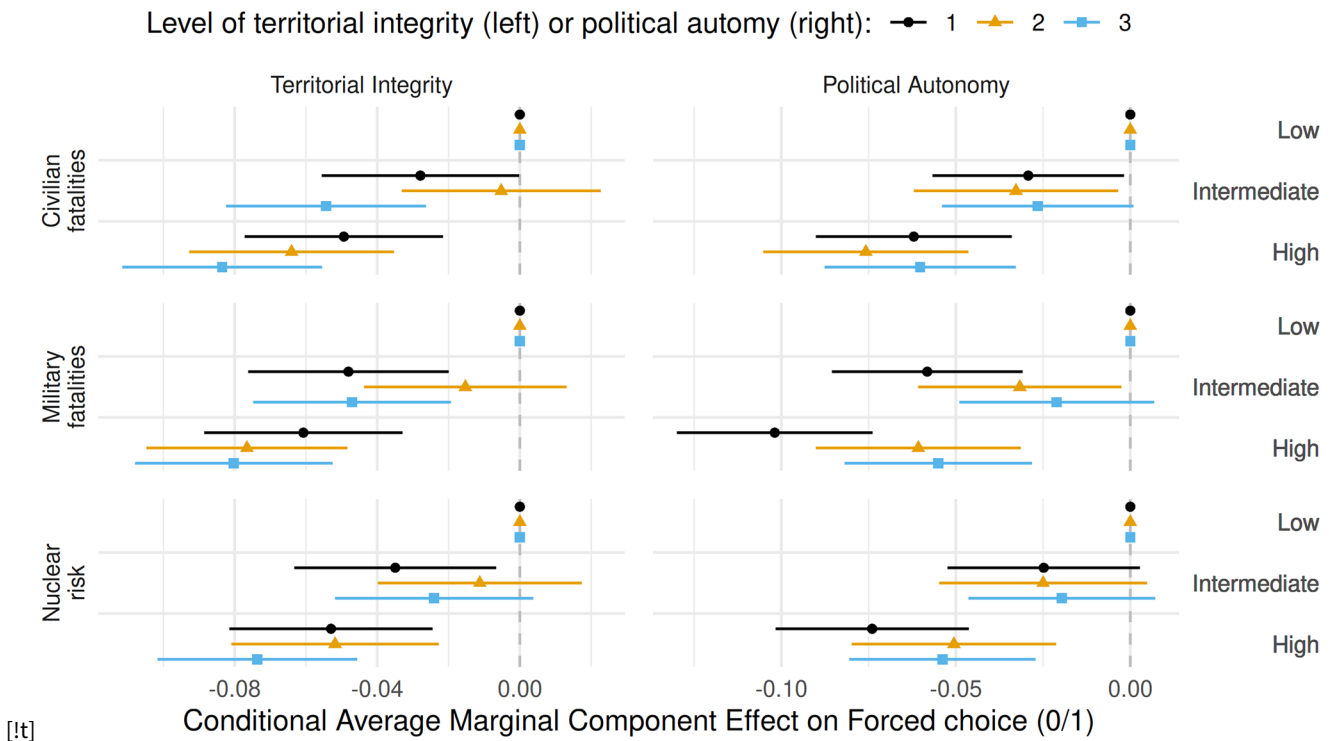


Figure 2 Heterogeneous effect of attributes 2-4 by strategies' level of territorial integrity and political autonomy. Pooling Experiments I & II, main sample. For level specifications for the territorial integrity and political autonomy attributes, refer to Table 1. An omnibus Wald test of subgroup differences yields *p*-values of .35 and .60 for the left and right panels, respectively.

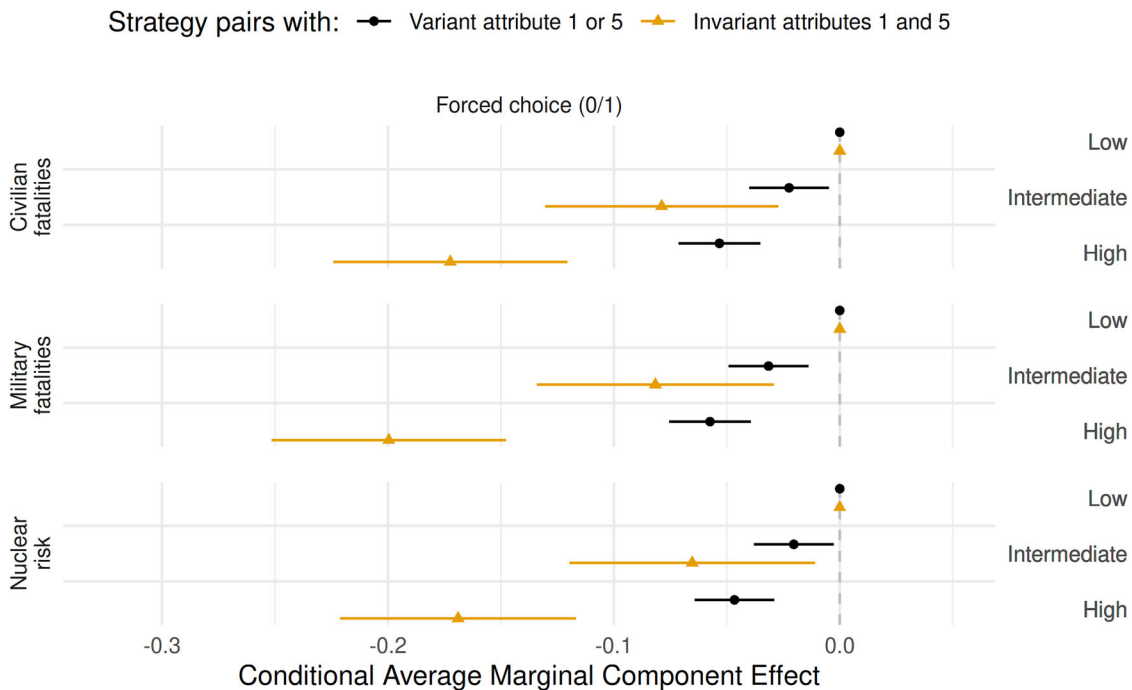


Figure 3 Heterogeneous effects of cost attributes 2-4 by variation in attributes 1 (territorial integrity) and 5 (political autonomy). Pooling Experiments I & II, main sample. An omnibus Wald test of subgroup differences yields an *F*-statistic of 12.4, *p* < .001.

variance in either territorial integrity or political autonomy that allow respondents to choose greater benefits even if they come at higher costs. Under a logic of categorical resistance, the AMCEs of the cost attributes should therefore be much smaller than in

pairs with invariant territorial integrity and political autonomy attributes. Closely resembling DHM's results, we observe small AMCEs of cost attributes (<6 percentage points) as long as respondents can choose between better or worse territorial and political

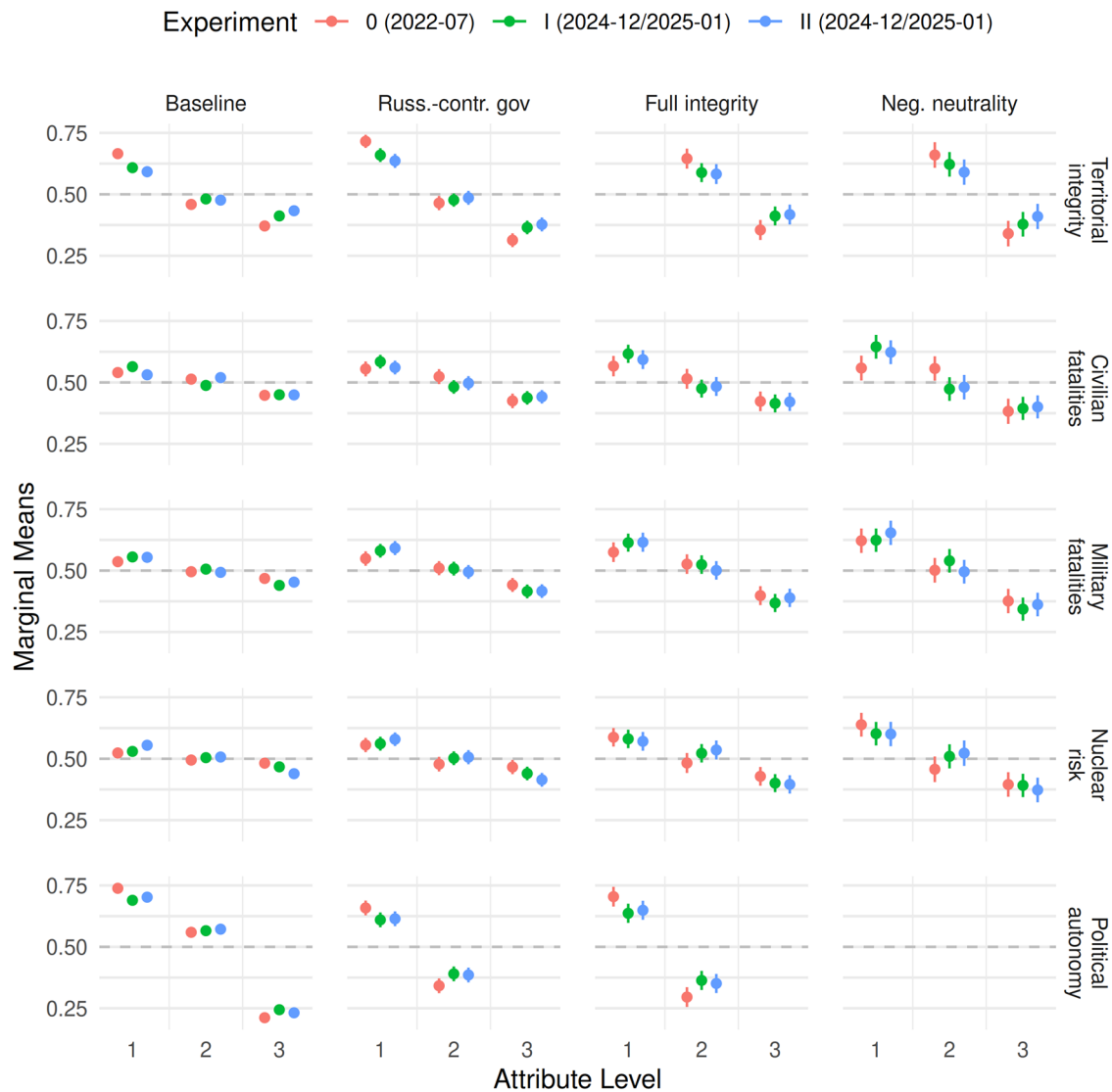


Figure 4 Nested Marginal Means, all experiments.

outcomes. Once the benefits of resistance do not vary, however, respondents place importance on reducing the costs of war.

Using the ranking method introduced by DHM, we find that respondents still prioritize the same three attributes as in 2022: resistance to a Russian-controlled government, a strong preference for full territorial integrity, and a rejection of negotiated neutrality over maintaining political autonomy. Yet, because the AMCEs of territorial concessions and neutrality are smaller than in 2022, the statistical power beyond the second rank decreases such that these ranks cannot be distinguished in a statistically significant manner.

When given the possibility to reject a Russian-controlled government, 76% of respondents in Experiment I and 77% in Experiment II do so (Figure A37). This is only marginally lower than the 79% who did so in 2022, underscoring the robustness of this finding.

Still, once the Russian-controlled government is taken off the table in column 2 in Figure 4, the results become more varied. Compared to 2022, the replication shows reduced concerns over territorial concessions and political autonomy. While these are

still sizable (with 65% choosing full territorial integrity regardless of the costs), these conditional effects are smaller than in 2022 (72%), with changes mostly due to increased concerns for military fatalities and nuclear escalation.

Heterogeneous treatment effects and change over time

Below, we summarize results on heterogeneous treatment effects along several demographic variables, measures of war-affectedness, and political attitudes (see also Online Appendix G). Overall, we find the same dimensions of heterogeneity as DHM, with less resistance to concessions from ethnic Russians, least war-affected Ukrainians, and those unaligned with the president. These heterogeneous treatment effects are modestly larger in 2024/25 than in 2022. Since we have low statistical power when comparing interaction effects over time, these changes over time are, however, not significant. First, like DHM, our results differ between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, as measured by

self-identification, mother-tongue, and interview language. Compared to ethnic Ukrainians, ethnic Russians in our sample exhibit no statistically significant or only comparatively small negative AMCEs on territorial concessions, a substantively weaker rejection of a Russian-controlled government, and no significant rejection to negotiated neutrality compared to political autonomy. This divergence holds even when only comparing respondents within the same location, suggesting that this finding is not due to fewer Russian-speakers living in Ukraine's western regions, where resistance against concessions is highest.

Second, and similar to results in 2022, respondents with a higher score on DHM's war-affectedness index are less resistant to territorial and political concessions while not reacting differently to war costs. This finding is particularly driven by respondents from Ukraine's eastern oblasti and those first invaded in February 2022. This finding holds when only comparing AMCEs among respondents with the same mother-tongue. Third, consistent with DHM, we find that respondents who deem Ukraine's victory "extremely important" and those most trusting in their president are less willing to settle for territorial and political compromises.

Finally, to get a sense of what might explain these changes, we estimated the effect of local war exposure on changes in AMCEs within locations since 2022 to test whether increases in war affectedness come with a stronger or weaker rejection of concessions. We did so by accounting for fixed location- and experiment-level attribute effects, thus only capturing changes in AMCEs that correlate with changes in locations' characteristics over time. Reported in Online Appendix H, we do not find that locations' exposure to (1) shelling and (2) greater changes in respondents' reported affectedness, or (3) that of their family members, are systematically correlated with greater positive or negative changes in AMCEs. Empirically, however, this null-finding might be due to the use of repeated PSU-level cross-sectional data rather than true panel data. Theoretically, it is also possible that some individuals' hardening attitudes cancel out others' greater sensitivity to the costs of war and readiness to settle.

Conclusion

The views of Ukrainians are critical for the legitimacy of any negotiated settlement, particularly if a settlement compromises the country's political autonomy or territorial integrity. If Ukraine is forced into a settlement that is wildly out of step with popular preferences, it may not be worth the paper it is printed on. Ukrainians may well find a way to keep fighting, turning any peace plan into a destabilizing short-term pause rather than an end to the war. Of course, attitudes may change over time and mounting costs and less certain benefits of self-defense in 2025 could plausibly have caused a sea change in Ukrainians' willingness to resist, but this is not what we found.

Almost three years into the full-scale invasion, Russian control of Ukraine's government remains a red line that Ukrainians oppose categorically. They still prefer resistance to Russian control at any cost. When the all-out war began in 2022, Ukrainians were equally united against territorial concessions and strenuously opposed to giving up NATO membership, regardless of the sacrifices that continued resistance would entail. This pattern has

modestly weakened with some Ukrainian citizens more accepting of territorial concessions or negotiated neutrality than in 2022. Like in 2022, ethnic Ukrainians, those less affected by the war, and respondents more trusting in Ukraine's president more strongly oppose concessions. Yet, despite mounting costs and uncertain prospects of success, Ukrainians do not accept concessions that open the door to them "being Russian one day."

Media (Hnidiy & Kovalenko, 2025) and political commentary (Bakke et al., 2024) casts Ukrainians as war fatigued, based on the assumption that mounting war costs have wiped out Ukrainians' steadfast support for resistance. If this were an adequate representation of reality, our data would have revealed a stronger increase in Ukrainians' sensitivity to the costs of war. Rather, the main takeaway of this replication-cum-extension is that Ukrainians' attitudes toward self-defense against Russia have remained largely stable over time. Overall, Ukrainians are as categorically opposed to Russian control as ever, still remarkably insensitive to the costs of resistance, and are not significantly less united. The only meaningful change is an overall reduced resistance to giving up NATO/EU membership and to conceding territory.

As the change in attitudes is small and gathering panel data is ethically dubious in this context, we do not have a fine-grained explanation for the changes we observe. We can, however, rule out that the modest average softened resistance to territorial concessions and political neutrality is due (a) to significantly increased forward-looking costs administered in our extension experiment, (b) to a longer forward-looking time-horizon than the original experiment asked Ukrainians to contemplate, (c) to more individuals deeming themselves affected by the war, or (d) to geographic variation in war affectedness inducing attitude changes since 2022. Future research might explore the modestly larger heterogeneity between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, and its theoretical and empirical connection to systematically different experiences of the war.

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Data availability

The dataset, codebook, and R-code for the empirical analysis in this article, along with the Online Appendix, are available at <https://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets/>.

Declaration of AI Usage

The authors did not use AI to research or write this article.

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Biographical statements

Janina Dill, DPhil in International Relations (University of Oxford, 2012); Professor in Global Security, Blavatnik School of Government of the University of Oxford, Fellow at Trinity College, and Co-Director of the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law, and Armed Conflict (ELAC); research interests: international law, ethics, public opinion and war.

Marnie Howlett, PhD in International Relations (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021); Departmental Lecturer

in Russian and East European Politics, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies and Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford; research interests: Ukraine, post-Soviet societies, qualitative research methods, research ethics.

Carl Müller-Crepon, PhD in Political Science (ETH Zurich, 2019); Assistant Professor, Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science; research interests: State building, development, conflict.