

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Societal Resolve Amid War: Lessons from Ukraine's Response to the Russian Invasion

Gita Leitlande¹

Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of societal resolve as demonstrated by Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. By synthesising existing research, the article identifies 12 defining features of Ukraine's societal resolve, categorised into long-term qualities, such as a strong national identity and civic duty, and short-term responses, including collective volunteering and unity under existential threat. These factors highlight Ukraine's successful nation-building, democratic aspirations, and robust leadership. The findings provide insights into how societal resolve emerges and operates during crises, offering valuable lessons for other nations. The study emphasises the interplay of psychological resilience, national unity, and effective leadership in fostering societal strength, contributing to the discourse on national security and resilience in times of conflict.

Keywords

Ukraine; societal resolve; national identity; civic duty; resilience; leadership during conflict; war lessons; Russia-Ukraine war.

¹ Center for Security and Strategic Research, National Defence Academy of Latvia.
ORCID: [0009-0003-4541-0361](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4541-0361), e-mail: gita.leitlande@mil.lv

Introduction

The resolve, courage, cohesion, and resilience of Ukraine's society have been widely praised regarding the full-scale Ukraine – Russia war, which started in February 2022 and continues to the day of writing this article (Bidenko 2023; Dickinson 2023; Kudlenko 2023, 523; Onuch and Hale 2023, 22; Tharoor 2022). Moreover, it has been characterized as “one of the defining features” of the course of the war, and the Ukrainian resistance would be “unthinkable without” it, being the factor heavily miscalculated by Russia and instrumental in convincing the outside world that Ukraine is worth defending and supporting (Bidenko 2023; Dickinson 2023). As such, this phenomenon is undoubtedly worth exploring to understand and learn from it and, if deemed possible and worthwhile, replicate at least some of its strengths to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Allies. This article aims to identify from the existing research to date the most prominent defining features of this praise-worthy and crucial phenomenon that I call Ukraine's societal resolve on this particular historic occasion.

What is this phenomenon at the core of the study that I want to explore? The experience of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine shows how important the defence of the country (both regarding soldiers and society in general) is the role of:

- *the presence of the willingness to defend one's country in society, in the armed forces, and the leadership of the country;*
- *psychological resilience, determination, and courage to defend one's own against superiority, both military and informational, on the one hand, and disbelief and doubt on the other; and*
- *the permanent presence, rather than the temporary outbreak, of these two qualities (as resolve is usually considered a resource depleted in war).*

Moreover, the importance of these three aspects continues throughout the conflict (for example, not calling for a cease-fire to spare civilians, keeping in mind the ultimate goal). It is also applicable to peacetime's daily life (like identifying and preventing the strengthening of foreign, hostile influences in individuals and society).

In the article, I call these three aspects combined as “societal resolve.” “Resolve”, understood as “Firmness or steadfastness of purpose; determination” (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “resolve (n.), sense 2,” September 2023) and whose synonyms include courage, firmness, intention, steadfastness, and willpower is the closest description of the above phenomenon.

How does this context-specific interpretation of “resolve” fit into a broader scholarly understanding of the word? Resolve as a research object and factor is well-known and widely used in the field of international relations to explain countries' behaviour and conflict outcomes, for instance, in deterrence theory and crisis bargaining. Resolve is often described as the “magic ingredient” that determines the outcome of a conflict, including military conflict. It is magic primarily because it is not directly observable and demonstrable (Kertzer 2016, 9–10, 24, 26). This study would contribute

to understand the phenomenon of resolve and its constituent components in the context of analysing one specific historical case. To arrive as close as possible to a correct explanation of this phenomenon, however, a broader reading of resolve is needed – because this study would benefit from whatever major building blocks have contributed to the phenomenon under consideration. Thus, research includes both structural and situational determinants (like costs of fighting: human, economic, and political factors; and costs of backing down, such as interests and reputation) and agency determinants of individuals and society as a whole (like historical and cultural factors – including worldviews, values, and beliefs, and dispositional characteristics like trait self-control, time and risk preferences). In this way, a complex interplay between actors and their environment is depicted. In scholarly literature, it is known as the interactionist approach (Kertzer 2016, 28, 35). However, in this study, the reading of resolve is even broader. It analyses not only the reasons why someone is determined, whatever the goal to be achieved (called second-order volition, referring to the second and third above aspects of the phenomenon under study). This study also analyses the goal itself (first-order volition, which goes beyond strict reading of resolve and combines it with the willingness to fight factor, referring to the first aspect of the phenomenon under study).

As for the „societal” part of the phenomenon, it is evident during the Ukraine – Russia war that Ukrainians' resolve and willingness to stand for their country does not apply only to military and political leadership but concerns the entire society, and there is a substantial role to play for all citizens – both individually and collectively. As such, there is no value in pursuing a neat division among individual, community, and societal resilience or resolve (Kimhi *et al.* 2023, 02) or – using different classifications – elites or mass public, in this specific case. Because they are interrelated and all three of them are required. For instance, resolve at individual and community levels could potentially feed significantly into particular phenomena of societal resolve. In other words, the study is interested in any prominent factor, whether it is “44 million [individual] Zelenskys” (Onuch and Hale 2023, 205) or one dominating common idea within society (like victory).

Defining Features of Ukraine's Societal Resolve

After studying the existing research, I have identified 12 features that figure most prominently as contributing to Ukraine's societal resolve during this war. These features can be subdivided conceptually into two parts based on the relatively short-term and longer-term frameworks. Features No. 1 to 8 are underlying qualities, which take longer to build up but have manifested as positive contributing factors during the war. Underlying qualities include features that might be present in the society's historical memory for a longer time, like traditions and self-understanding as a nation, up to more recent, but still pre-this-war developments, like those triggered by Russian aggression since 2014. These longer-term features could be further divided into two closely related groups. The first group of features No. 1 to 5 are pertinent to the role of national identity and perception of civic duty, and the second, features No. 6 to 8 – are to the tradition of protests and collective volunteering actions within Ukraine's society. While the shorter-term features No. 9 to 12, by and large, relate directly

to the period of a country under full-scale military attack since February 2022². These shorter-term features build upon the above-mentioned underlying qualities and are a combination of underlying features and momentum.

No. 1: Successful Nation-Building Since 2014

Rationale: If a boost in self-understanding as a nation is expedited by external threats, then Russian aggression in 2014 toward Ukraine undeniably serves as such a milestone. As sociologist Mykhailo Myshchenko observes, „To a large extent, this war helped Ukrainians realise themselves as a nation” (Myshchenko 2023) and to realize in society how Ukraine is different from Russia (more on this see feature No. 4). In 2013 and 2014 Ukraine experienced two dramatic events – the Euromaidan protests that eventually led to the fall of the pro-Russian government, and Russia’s occupation of Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine. Both these events combined – an external threat and massive and persistent civic activism – encouraged much-needed and fundamental reforms in Ukraine towards democratisation, the rule of law, and Euro-Atlanticism. As Popova and Shevel observe, “Rather than falling into political instability and dysfunction, Ukraine accelerated political reforms and made progress in democratic consolidation, the rule of law and anti-corruption reforms, and growing state capacity” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 18). Fueled by the pressure of civic society and the EU requirements, these reforms had notable success: “The results were, unsurprisingly, mixed, but overall positive” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 190), thus further strengthening society’s satisfaction with where the country is heading. These major reforms were supported by positive developments in other areas as well, like major military reforms, including decentralized military command structure; being granted visa-free travel to the European Union countries; and increasing governance capacities and accountability of local governments (the last of them, in particular, being credited to facilitate Ukraine’s effective resistance and resilience after Russia’s 2022 invasion). Of course, with all the progress, Ukraine is still categorized as a flawed democracy, which is grappling with high levels of corruption, diminishing but not eradicating patronal politics and the influence of oligarchs, mass emigration (both before and during the war), high inflation rates, and ongoing military conflict on its territory since 2014, to name a few. However, the trend is there: for instance, in the most recent Transparency International report, Ukraine’s corruption perception index has increased (that is, improved) by 10 points since 2014. True, standing at 36 points, it is still well below Western Europe and the European Union’s average score of 65 (Transparency International 2024, 7–8), and there are concerns about growing corruption during the war, particularly related to foreign military aid. This example points both to the progress made and to the fact that Ukraine still has a substantial way to go in these reforms.

In parallel to these fundamental reforms, Ukraine’s political leadership also made a notable effort to strengthen national identity, including a fight against Russian cultural influence and “de-communization” of historical memory; Ukraine’s Orthodox Church gaining independence from the Moscow Patriarchate; and promoting the use of the Ukrainian language (Onuch and Hale 2023, 116, 120; Popova and Shevel 2024, 180, 197), among others. As a result, the process

² The question of how and why Ukraine’s reaction to Russia’s aggression differs from 2014 to 2022 is worth exploring but beyond the scope of this article. It is touched somewhat in features No. 1 and 9.

of nation-building and reforms to improve Ukraine as a well-functioning country matured enough by 2022 to play an important role in the country's resistance to the new wave of aggression. This leads to a conclusion that national identity or culture, in a broad sense, is of "essential value [...] in times of war", as it "helps to build a will to defend and fosters resilience and unity in a population" (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency 2023, 25; see also Bukkvoll and Steder 2023, 254–256). Thus, Ukrainians had eight years of "early warning" to prepare and work on their weaknesses by strengthening themselves, and they used this opportunity well. The following features 2 to 5 have been a part of the successful nation-building process since 2014, or in any case, are closely related to it.

No. 2: The Strength of National Identity

Rationale: The post-1991 period in Ukraine is marked by two competing concepts of national identity – one of them, favoured by Russia, sees Ukraine with a diminished type of sovereignty, being a "younger brother" and vassal of Russia. The second concept sees Ukraine as a sovereign and distinctive country from Russia. Ukraine's gradual move towards increased popular support of the second concept is, in accordance to some analysts (see, for example, Popova and Shevel 2024, 81), at the heart of escalating conflicts between Ukraine and Russia, starting at least from 2004. The shift in the population's mood has been significantly influenced not only by Ukraine's political elites and their policies but also by Russia's imperialistic and aggressive approach. For instance, a significant boost for the above-mentioned second concept of national identity occurred after 2014, with changes in Ukraine's electoral geography (occupation of the most pro-Russian regions by Russia) (Popova and Shevel 2024, 47–48, 53, 56, 88, 178–179, 217). Of course, this is a very simplified and abbreviated version of the national identity concepts and their dynamics in Ukraine's society, which would require a more detailed explanation than possible in this article. However, it is significant to note that Ukraine is another case study that proves that national identity is constructed and is subject to change over time. It is not something static and intrinsic to the nation and is only found in the history of the nation.

In the context of the strength of national identity, one indicator should be highlighted in particular. Ukraine has succeeded in finding and promoting its national identity efficiently, as the sense of national identity is very strong in Ukraine – around 80% (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023, 22–23). In addition, it has gradually grown over the years (from the start of this century), and it is the most robust identity relative to other identities – like a resident of a particular city, or region of Ukraine or Europe, or a representative of a particular ethnicity. This indicator is noteworthy since political theorists emphasize that it is precisely the identity of the country that is important for constructive civic participation. Moreover, to unite the country's citizens, it must be stronger than the identities of various local communities or global movements (Jones and Gaventa 2002, 5; Smith 2002, 114). Ukrainians have managed to achieve just that – the sense of national identity is strong and it is more robust than society's identification with other levels of community. Thus, it is beneficial in contributing to an effectively working civic society, including uniting citizens of the country and encouraging constructive civic participation.

No. 3: Emphasis on civic society, civic duty, and what unites the country

Rationale: With the outbreak of a full-scale war in February 2022, “It quickly became clear that Ukrainian citizens – be they military or civilian, Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking, Orthodox or non-Orthodox, western or eastern – were strongly united against the Russian assault, with only a handful of exceptions” (Onuch and Hale 2023, 19). What facilitates this kind of unity of society? The most notable element is the specifics of Ukraine’s national identity (and corresponding narratives). Onuch and Hale argue that Ukraine’s national identity right before the war and during the war is primarily based on a civic approach, that is, an inclusive type of identity³, which looks at what unites all citizens, not what divides them – like ethnic origin, language, and religion (Onuch and Hale 2023, 31). The elements of this inclusive civic national identity include decentralization of the countries’ political and economic structures and Ukraine’s diversity; being community-oriented; the value of freedom – freedom to express oneself and to make decisions; democratic and pro-European values; and perception of civic duty – to engage in political and civil society activities beyond elections, and duty to protest when the situation in Ukraine requires it (Bidenko 2023; Kudlenko 2023, 520; Onuch and Hale 2023, 18, 168, 239). This kind of identity has been boosted and exemplified by President Zelensky and his message to society: “Volodymyr Zelensky, a Russian-speaker from the south, swept the vote with a campaign message about pro-European orientation, anti-corruption, and national unity. [...] Zelensky “embraced, embodied, and affirmed” Ukrainianness as, first and foremost, a civic identity” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 189). As a result, it is precisely this notion of civic duty and civic national identity, which manifested in “strongly expressed socio-centric values” (Myshchenko 2023) after the February 2022 Russian assault and “explains why hundreds of thousands joined the territorial defence force, millions volunteered in other ways, and hundreds of farmers stole Russian tanks” (Onuch and Hale 2023, 205). The emphasis on civic society might be a hard sell for nation-states, but it has worked greatly for Ukrainians.

No. 4: A Clear Sense of Difference from Russia and Unwillingness to be Like Russia, including Standard of Living, Political Opportunities, and the Like

Rationale: Ukrainians, especially after 2014, despite Russia’s soft, sharp, and hard power pressure, have managed to identify how they are different from Russia and the unattractive elements of the Russian system of governance and its political and economic model. “Each escalation of pressure by Russia prompted an ever-increasing share of Ukrainians to shift from pro-Russian to pro-Western positions, to embrace more distinctly Ukrainian identity, and to support more decisive Ukrainization policies” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 12). Ukrainians recognize that Russia has become an autocratic country with all the consequences that follow from it, including dictatorship, a passive society, and anti-liberalism driven by threats and revenge (Myshchenko 2023; Popova and Shevel 2024, 3, 210). None of this seems attractive to Ukrainians. Russia’s system of governance is in stark contrast

³ Onuch and Hale report that in July 2022, “90 percent of Ukrainians generally agree that “All who consider Ukraine their fatherland belong to the Ukrainian nation, regardless of nationality, language, or religion.” While 84 percent already adhered to this highly inclusive civic notion of Ukrainianness in 2017” (Onuch and Hale 2023, 211).

of competitive, democratic, polycentric, decentralized nature of Ukraine, with a vibrant civic society and the value of freedom in society (Bērziņš and Vdovychenko 2022, 15; Kudlenko 2023, 514, 520, 522; Myshchenko 2023; Onuch and Hale 2023, 228; Popova and Shevel 2024, 3; Yermolenko 2023). As a result of continuing Russia's pressure and aggression, arising from Russia's imperial ambitions, and seeing what kind of country Russia is as opposed to what Ukrainians stand for, the attitude towards Russia is continuously deteriorating in Ukraine's society (Myshchenko 2023; Popova and Shevel 2024, 179). Therefore, Ukrainians are ultimately fighting for the principle of self-determination, an ability to decide their destiny as a country's general direction. Consequently, Ukrainians can frame the narrative of their fight as a "larger civilizational struggle" (Tharoor 2022) between democratic and authoritarian worlds and values (Myshchenko 2023). Thus, the ability to identify differences between the two countries is a significant contributing element to the question of against what (type of political system and ideology) Ukrainians are fighting and defending themselves.

No. 5: A Positive Vision for the Future – a Healthy, Thriving Democracy (as in the European Union)

Rationale: Another contributing element to why it is crucial to resist Russian invasion is a positive vision for the future. Not only what Ukrainians do not want (that is, to be like Russia and to be subordinated to Russia), but what they are striving for: a better life (not the least – stable and secure) as part of the European Union-style healthy, highly developed, and thriving democracy with a strongly observed rule of law. There is growing support for this vision of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and for now is shared by approximately 65 – 71 % of Ukraine's population (Alexseev and Dembitskyi 2023, 1; Bērziņš and Vdovychenko 2022, 15; Kudlenko 2023, 514; Myshchenko 2023; Onuch and Hale 2023, 96, 195, 264). This vision, of course, serves as a significant motivational factor to fight for Ukraine, where Ukraine's society sees "their chances of personal success as intertwined with the country's political and economic trajectory" (Onuch and Hale 2023, 103). Tellingly, in a national-level survey conducted in February 2024, that is, two years into the war, Ukrainians still indicated that the biggest threat to the country's development is corruption in government institutions (51%), while Russian military aggression (at 46 %) came second (Sociological Group "Rating" 2024, 36). These results indicate the strength and importance of the vision of where the country is heading in society even during the war (as well as, unfortunately, indicating the persistent issues with corruption). Thus, Ukrainians had not only a clear idea of what they did not want but also a clear vision of what they did want as an underlying quality already before 2022. The Russian invasion in February 2022 and the brutality that followed, as well as the fact that Ukraine formally became an EU candidate state in June 2022 (which further boosts this positive vision for the future by displaying Ukraine's ability actually to achieve it), only cemented these two sentiments within Ukraine's society (see feature No. 10).

No. 6: The Tradition of Protests

Rationale: Researchers agree that "The resilience of Ukrainian society did not emerge out of the blue in 2022 but evolved throughout Ukraine's long history" (Kudlenko 2023, 516). More particularly, "Ukraine has a long history of civic activism, one that was among the strongest if not the strongest in the USSR [The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a country that ceased to exist in 1991]" (Onuch

and Hale 2023, 47). A few examples in the 20th century include Ukrainian nationalists who fought for independence between the 1920s and 1950s. Between the 1960s and 1980s, Ukraine experienced numerous labour strikes as well as dissidents against the rule of the USSR. In the 21st century, by 2022, Ukrainians have already lived through and participated in two revolutions (that is, massive and persistent expressions of civic activism): The Orange Revolution in 2004 and the so-called Euromaidan in 2013–2014. Both started as peaceful protests and achieved some sort of victory by civil society. The tradition of protests and protesting-kind of civic activism (which, among other things, involves self-organization on a large scale) could be considered as part of national ethos and is closely related to the perception of civic duty and duty to protest when the situation in Ukraine requires it. Furthermore, importantly, it has had its historical successes, including with the participation of currently living generations, which gives confidence to Ukrainians that this type of civic activism might as well be successful again, as well as a feeling of having some form of influence (and responsibility) over the trajectory of the country. Notable is also a scale of the phenomenon. For instance, in 2013, “an estimated half a million poured onto the streets of Kyiv” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 147), which tells us how widespread this feeling of responsibility to speak or show up is. The year 2022 was another year when this capability of Ukraine’s society came together to stand for their ideals needed to be activated again – this time against an external aggressor.

No. 7: Perception that “We Are in this Together”

Rationale: Perception of civic duty and the need to come together on a large scale to make a difference contribute to another valuable element of Ukraine’s societal resolve – the sense, which in its extreme can be described as “As goes Ukraine, so go the fortunes of all citizens within it” (Onuch and Hale 2023, 31). In other words, this is the principle that “we are in this boat together,” where everybody’s civic duty is to do their best to straighten out the course of the common “boat.” This feature has manifested the most spectacularly in the functionality of Ukraine’s public institutions, the public sector, and businesses during the war: trains keep running, the postal service, the National Bank, and the power grid keeps working, as well as various factories, restaurants, mobile operators, and internet providers, among others, remain active, exceptionally adaptable, and resilient (Dickinson 2023). This is a chain reaction effect – if one segment of the country shows strength – the military comes to mind, like the early widely talked about case of Snake Island – then the rest follow the excellent example and are strong as well. It could best be explained by the awareness that everybody should do their job for a “boat” or country to keep it going. This expression of societal resolve is not new, too: for example, “in December [2013], [...] 92 % of the protesters acted on their initiative with just 6 % belonging to a social organization or movement (and a mere 2 % to a political party)” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 154). This example demonstrates the feeling of responsibility of each individual to achieve a common good.

No. 8: Culture of Voluntarism and Collective Volunteering Action

Rationale: One aspect the world community is especially taken aback while following Ukrainians defending their country is the scale of the volunteer movement of ordinary Ukrainians. For example, “About 60 % said they were making donations, around 32 % were volunteering in their communities, 3–4 % were engaged in civil resistance, 6 % had joined the territorial self-defence, and 2 % had joined

the military" (Onuch and Hale 2023, 214). Suppose voluntarism in this particular situation, to some degree, is to be expected. In that case, the ability to self-organize or – collective volunteering action – and what Ukrainians have been able to achieve without direct vertical involvement from the state or local authorities is genuinely remarkable. The examples include providing support for victims and refugees, but also things usually thought of as the state's responsibility – like crowdfunding military supplies and organizing delivery logistics. It is related to the decentralization aspect of Ukraine's political and economic structures and the existing experience of horizontal self-organization within the society, as mentioned above. Deeply rooted culture of voluntarism and the notion that Ukraine's society "is suspicious of authority and hierarchy with a strong sense of autonomy from the state" (Kudlenko 2023, 521) feed into this efficient and needed phenomenon of collective volunteering action (which reinforces and derives from Ukraine's national identity).

No. 9: The Consolidation of the Nation in the Face of an Existential Threat to the Country

Rationale: This phenomenon, in political science known as "rallying around the flag," has also been noted in the case of Ukraine. It includes rising levels of patriotism, support for the leadership of the country, and the ability to mobilize and be united in the face of the threat (Bērziņš and Vdovychenko 2022, 13; Kudlenko 2023, 519; Onuch and Hale 2023, 212). Of course, this reaction is not automatic and should not be considered as given in any conflict, country, and situation (for example, an armed conflict between Israel and Hamas since October 2023 has brought somewhat mixed results of consolidation in Israel's society (Pew Research Center 2024, 6; see also Kimhi *et al.* 2023, 05)). In the case of Ukraine, it is advanced, among other things, by factors explained in feature No. 4 concerning the unmistakable sense of difference from Russia and unwillingness to be like Russia, as well as conscious strategic messaging to maintain unity from the leadership of the country (Onuch and Hale 2023, 193) in the spirit of civic duty (feature No. 3) and "we are in this together" (feature No. 7), and overall commendable performance of the leadership of the country (feature No. 11). Though "rallying around the flag" effect tend to diminish over time, in case of this conflict, the proximity effect supports the phenomenon. For it is their territory and their constitution that Ukrainians are defending, combined with the just cause of the war from the Ukrainian side (self-defence) – which is easily understandable and, even more critical, morally and legally defensible.

No. 10: The Clear Vision (Goal) of Why Ukrainians are Fighting – Both for What Ends and against What Ends

Rationale: In this war, Ukrainians have an obvious goal: to defend their homeland and to remove the enemy from Ukraine's territory (Myshchenko 2023). This goal is, of course, context-specific and very helpful in answering the question of "why," like "why I/ we should fight/ resist?" To defend the country. Why Ukraine is worth defending is another issue to which the answer should be found, for example, from the underlying qualities above – whether it is a rejection of what Russia represents, a bright European Union-style future and rising quality of life, or civic duty, to name a few. This is the question of identity – who we are, what we stand for, and against whom or what we are fighting (the reason for war and the vision of the other side). First off, Ukrainians recognize that they are fighting against Russia's offered vision of the future: "Russia's full-scale invasion has produced stronger-than-ever commitment in Ukraine to exit the Russian World. [...]"

[And] distance from Russia geopolitically, economically, and culturally” (Popova and Shevel 2024, 219). Secondly, Ukrainians are fighting for a better future and have set a victory as a goal to be achieved. This clear vision of why Ukrainians are fighting – both for and against what – has a prominent and powerful unifying goals for society.

No. 11: Leading by Example – the Role of the Leadership of the Country

Rationale: Though it is easy to exaggerate the role President Volodymyr Zelensky has played during the war because of the international media hype around him, he, of course, has not fought back against Russia single-handedly. In the meantime, he undeniably has played his role as president of Ukraine very well, especially during the initial stages of the war. He has not only been effective in communicating with international partners but also sending much-needed strategic messaging to the society of Ukraine (like that he is safe, in charge, and Ukraine is fighting back (Onuch and Hale 2023, 204)), has shown his example in physically staying in the country and continuing to do his job as best as he can (which likely has had some positive chain-reaction effect on local governors and mayors (Dickinson 2023; Onuch and Hale 2023, 203)). Zelensky’s demonstrated level of trust in military commanders has likely helped to keep high morale in the armed forces and beyond (Onuch and Hale 2023, 23). Nevertheless, it is not only the president himself – local mayors within the first lines of defence, for instance, have demonstrated formidable operational and moral leadership, including by organizing and encouraging resistance, coordinating relief efforts, humanitarian aid, and evacuations, as well as refusing to collaborate with the occupying force (Grygorian 2022). All in all, President Zelensky and other leaders of the country have been good role models for Ukrainians, who are leading by example from their influential positions and “demonstrating [...] how to act and how to speak about this foreign threat on their state’s soil” (Onuch and Hale 2023, 202), thus contributing to and encouraging from their part Ukraine’s societal resolve.

No. 12: Robustness of Ukraine’s Society

Rationale: Ukrainians have demonstrated commendable and instrumental qualities that point to the robustness of individuals and Ukraine’s society as a whole. These qualities include adaptability, readiness to suffer discomfort for prolonged periods (for example, by remaining in towns near the frontline, even if without a job or drinking water), being realistic about prospects of when the war could end (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023, slide 38), not fleeing the country en masse (no doubt helped by the prohibition of male Ukrainian citizens to travel abroad), but instead staying and volunteering in different ways to help one’s country, armed forces, neighbours, or to keep doing one’s job, and the like. These qualities of Ukrainians are the expressions of perseverance, patience, taking a long view over short-term benefits, and having high levels of risk tolerance (Kertzer 2016, 74–78). The exact brand of Ukraine’s robustness of society, though going beyond the current study, could be further explored by looking at other examples of robust societies and individuals, like the phenomenon of Finnish *sisu*, in particular during the Winter War against the USSR in 1939–1940 (Lahti 2019) or the applicability of Stoic philosophy in strengthening societal resolve and resilience (Leitlande 2024; Sherman 2021). When combined with and strengthened by situational aspects, these dispositional qualities are especially effective, like a solid answer to the question

of “why” – why one should go through it? Why is Ukraine worth defending? Overall, Ukrainians have demonstrated their best character side during this conflict.

Conclusion

Societal resolve and resilience have an immense role when the country faces threats and challenges, domestic and external. It is relatively more straightforward to achieve individual resolve as there are known tools to facilitate it. However, societal resolve is seemingly more elusive, and its true success or lack thereof could be found only during the crisis. Ukrainians have been able to mobilize their will and stand up to Russia, demonstrating formidable courage, resolve, and unity to come together to defend their country. The findings of this article attempt to grasp and, in a way, dissect this phenomenon, to find out why it worked for Ukraine.

While looking at the three characteristics of societal resolve described at the beginning of the article, the question is – whether all of the identified twelve features are relevant to promoting this understanding of societal resolve. The short answer is – yes. It could be expanded as follows. (1) The presence of the willingness to defend one's country – corresponds to features No. 6 to 8, addressing the tradition of protests and collective volunteering actions within Ukraine's society, as well as to the shorter-term features No. 9 to 11, addressing rallying around the flag, having a unifying goal, and leading by example. (2) Psychological resilience, determination, and courage to defend one's own against superiority, both military and informational, on the one hand, and disbelief and doubt on the other – corresponds to features No. 1 to 5, addressing national identity and perception of civic duty, as well as to the shorter-term feature No. 12 addressing the robustness of Ukraine's society. The third characteristic, (3) the permanent presence, rather than the temporary outbreak of these two qualities – corresponds to all features that deal with underlying qualities (features No. 1 to 8) as they ensure the longer-term presence of these features. Thus, all identified features are relevant and do contribute to enhancing societal resolve, as understood in this article.

The issue of what conclusions could be derived from these features of Ukraine's societal resolve and whether they have the potential and be worthwhile to be replicated in another society are topics for further studies. Here, I offer a brief sketch summarizing potential takeaways. No doubt, societal resolve is always a context-specific phenomenon whose roots are hard to grasp and even harder to replicate, and it is generated by fundamental processes within the lives of countries. In this article, using Ukraine as a successful case study of societal resolve, we can see that it contains a unique set of factors. Some factors could not be replicated, like nation-building since 2014 or the content of a positive vision for the future. Nevertheless, we can recognize, for instance, the vital role the positive vision for the future plays in society's resolve, and we can work on things like strengthening the will and skills and encouraging experiences for the self-organization of society. Particularly, I would like to highlight three main areas where countries can work on improving societal resolve: national identity, civil society, and leadership. Future research could explore each of these areas individually, for instance, regarding national identity and leadership or, as indicated before, going into greater depth at the phenomenon of the robustness of society to determine what other European countries could learn and adapt from this case study.

References

- Alexseev, Mikhail, and Serhii Dembitskyi. 2023. "For Victory in Freedom: Why Ukrainian Resilience to Russian Aggression Endures." PONARS Eurasia Policy, Memo no. 863: 01–07.
- Bērziņš, Jānis. 2023. "The Cognitive Battlefield: Exploring the Western and Russian Views." CSSR Paper no. 05/2023.
- Bērziņš, Jānis, and Victoria Vdovychenko. 2022. "Willingness to fight for Ukraine: Lessons for the Baltic states." BSR Policy Briefing series, no. 9: 02–16. doi:[10.13140/RG.2.2.24226.50889](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24226.50889).
- Bidenko, Yuliya. 2023. "The Puzzle of Ukrainian Resilience: Hidden Factors and Potential Risks." Accessed December 27, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/O4NdE>.
- Bukkvoll, Tor, and Steder, Frank Brundtland. 2024. "War and the Willingness to Resist and Fight in Ukraine." *Problems of Post-Communism* 71 (3): 245–258. doi: [10.1080/10758216.2023.2277767](https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2023.2277767).
- Dickinson, Peter. 2023. "Ukraine's remarkable resilience may prove decisive in long war with Russia." Accessed December 5, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/IMaeM>.
- Grygorian, Georgii. 2022. "The Role of Mayors During the Russian War in Ukraine." Accessed June 12, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/zc8Qp>.
- Jones, Emma, and John Gaventa. 2002. "Concepts of Citizenship: A Review." IDS Development Bibliography 19. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Kertzer, Joshua. 2016. *Resolve in International Politics*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Kimhi, Shaul, Yohanan Eshel, Hadas Marciano, and Bruria Adini. 2023. "Impact of the war in Ukraine on resilience, protective, and vulnerability factors." *Front. Public Health* 11 (1053940): 01–08. doi: [10.3389/fpubh.2023.1053940](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1053940).
- Kudlenko, Anastasiia. 2023. "Roots of Ukrainian resilience and the agency of Ukrainian society before and after Russia's full-scale invasion." *Contemporary Security Policy* 44 (4): 513–529. doi: [10.1080/13523260.2023.2258620](https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2023.2258620).
- Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. 2023. Institute of Sociology of the NAS of Ukraine: Results of sociological monitoring "Ukrainian Society". Accessed December 27, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/hCTJZ>.
- Lahti, Emilia. 2019. "Embodied fortitude: An introduction to the Finnish construct of sisu." *International Journal of Wellbeing* 9(1): 61–82. doi: [10.5502/ijw.v9i1.672](https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v9i1.672).
- Leitlande, Gita. 2024. "Contemporary Stoicism and Civic Values". Latvijas Universitātes 82. starptautiskā zinātniskā konference. Filozofijas doktorantu sekcija "Prāts un miers": rakstu krājums [82nd International Scientific Conference of the University of Latvia. Section of Philosophy Doctoral Students "Mind and Peace": Collection of articles]. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte, 5–25. Accepted 29.07.2024. doi: [10.22364/luszk.82.fds](https://doi.org/10.22364/luszk.82.fds).
- Myshchenko, Mykhailo. 2023. "How has the Ukrainian society changed recently?" Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/dEBBZ>.
- Onuch, Olga, and Henry Hale. 2023. *The Zelensky Effect*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary. 2023. Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/dT7h4>.

-
- Pew Research Center. 2024. "How Israeli Society Has Unified, and Divided, in Wartime". Accessed November 6, 2024. <https://ulvis.net/sB21>.
- Popova, Maria, and Oxana Shevel. 2024. *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States*. UK and USA: Polity Press.
- Sherman, Nancy. 2021. *Stoic Wisdom: Ancient Lessons for Modern Resilience*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Rogers. 2002. "Modern Citizenship." In *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*, edited by Engin Isin and Bryan Turner, 105–116. London: SAGE Publications.
- Sociological Group "Rating". 2024. "National Survey of Ukraine by the International Republican Institute (IRI): February 2024". Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://ulvis.net/aVcy>.
- Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. 2023. "Building resilience for the future: Lessons from Ukraine". Report. Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://ulvis.net/bXnV>.
- Tharoor, Ishaan. 2022. "Ukraine's resilience sets a global standard." Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/12/14/ukraine-resilience-global-standard/>.
- Transparency International. 2024. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2023". Accessed November 6, 2024. <https://ulvis.net/9ORc>.
- Yermolenko, Volodymyr. 2023. "Ukraine's resilience and why it continues to fight." Accessed December 27, 2023. <https://ulvis.net/eYx8>.