

Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

**What Would Mannheim Say?
Questioning the Emergence of a New Generation of Ukrainians in the
Light of the Russo-Ukrainian War**

BACHELOR THESIS

Tomáš Čorej

Bratislava 2025

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BACHELOR THESIS

Study program: Liberal Arts
Study Field: 3. 1. 6. Political Science
Thesis Advisor: Assoc. prof. Dagmar Kusá, PhD.
Degree of qualification: Bachelor of Arts (abbrev. "BA")
Date of submission of the bachelor thesis: February 14, 2025
Date of defense: June 13, 2025

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Bratislava 2025

Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All academic and other sources of literature used are referenced and listed in the Bibliography. Artificial intelligence, namely Grammarly and ChatGPT, was used to create this bachelor's thesis, but solely for grammar and punctuation corrections, not for generating new content or providing content ideas. See the Origin Writing Report (Appendix 1).

Bratislava, February, 15 2025

Tomáš Čorej

Acknowledgment

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my advisor, Professor Dagmar Kusá, for guiding me throughout the writing process and giving me indispensable advice. Without her encouragement and guidance, this project could not have been completed. I am also grateful to Dr. Lukáš Siegel for supervising me during the Bachelor Thesis Seminar and providing many practical suggestions. I very much appreciate the time and energy of all my interviewees included in the research sample. Finally, thanks should also go to all the Ukrainian academicians who—despite the horrors of the war and constant attacks—have not ceased to produce research on which I have heavily relied.

Čorej: What Would Mannheim Say?

Autor bakalárskej práce: Tomáš Čorej?

Názov práce: Čo by na to povedal Mannheim? Otázka vzniku generácie v svetle rusko-ukrajinskej vojny

Názov vysokej školy: Bratislavská medzinárodná škola liberálnych štúdií

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Dátum a miesto: Bratislava, 13. jún 2025

Rozsah práce: 61105 znakov, 34 strán

Stupeň kvalifikácie: Bakalár (Bc.)

Abstrakt

Ruská plnoformátová agresia proti Ukrajine si vyžiadala desiatky tisíc obetí a škody vyčíslené na desiatky miliárd eur. V jej dôsledku prvýkrát po desaťročiach vyrástla skupina Ukrajincov v prostredí, v ktorom je Rusko považované za nepriateľský štát a Rusi za nepriateľský národ, a to tak zhora na úrovni štátu, ako aj zdola v medziľudských rusko-ukrajinských vzťahov. Táto bakalárska práca skúma, či mladí Ukrajinci, pre ktorých bola formatívnou skúsenosťou invázia v roku 2022, vytvorili jedinečnú generáciu, inú ako tie predchádzajúce. Jej súčasťou je analýza existujúcej literatúry a kvantitatívnych prieskumov, ako aj vlastný kvalitatívny výskum pozostávajúci z ôsmich rozhovorov s Ukrajincami vo veku 17 až 25 rokov z rôznych častí krajiny. Výskum nepreukázal, že by mladí Ukrajinci tvorili homogénnu skupinu s jedným zdieľaným svetonázorom a identitou. Namiesto toho ich postoje vo vzťahu k ukrajinskej národnej identite, členstvu v euroatlantických štruktúrach a jazykovej otázke reflektujú širšiu transformáciu celej ukrajinskej spoločnosti, a rovnako tak jej existujúce deliace čiary. Táto práca podčiarkuje dôležitosť pokračovať v ďalšom výskume ukrajinskej mládeže a tiež skúmanie vývoja jej nálad.

Kľúčové slová: Ukrajina, Rusko, mládež, vojna, generácia, Mannheim

Čorej: What Would Mannheim Say?

Author: Tomáš Čorej

Thesis Title: Thesis Title: What Would Mannheim Say? Questioning the Emergence of a New Generation of Ukrainians in the Light of the Russo-Ukrainian War

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Place and Date: Bratislava, June 12, 2025

Page and word count: 34 pages (61105 chars.)

Level of qualification: Bachelor of Arts (BA)

Abstract

The Russian full-scale invasion has caused tens of thousands of Ukrainian casualties, as well as damage estimated to be in the tens of billions of euros. As a consequence of the war, for the first time in decades, a group of Ukrainians has emerged, raised in an environment where Russia is considered an enemy state and Russians are seen as enemies—both from above and below in terms of Russo-Ukrainian relations. This bachelor's thesis investigates whether young Ukrainians, for whom the aggression was a formative experience, have created a unique generation distinct from previous ones. It consists of an analysis of existing literature, quantitative data, and original qualitative research. As part of this research, eight interviews were conducted with Ukrainians between the ages of 17 and 25 from different regions of the country. The findings indicate that it was impossible to demonstrate that young Ukrainians form a homogeneous group with a single, dominant shared worldview and identity. Instead, their opinions regarding Ukrainian national identity, membership in Euro-Atlantic structures, and the language question largely reflect the broader transformation of Ukrainian society, as well as its existing divisions. At the same time, this thesis underscores the need for further research on Ukrainian youth, focusing on its stances.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, youth, war, generation, Mannheim

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I. Introduction

It was a cloudless morning, with people eating breakfast in cozy cafés, runners jogging in tranquil parks, and anxious drivers blowing their horns in the heavily congested city center. A deceptively serene scene for the capital of a country that, at that point, had been defending against a full-scale aggressive war for over a year and a half. Yet, as I was encountering young people in Kyiv on that sunny day in September 2023, I understood that the seeming calmness did not match the mood of those I spoke to. Talking to several young Ukrainians I met, I witnessed their weariness after yet another sleepless night of air raids and missile attacks. Persistently, I would hear that physical exhaustion was matched by a deep sense of twofold indignation. First, fury not only toward the current Russian leadership for starting the aggression against Ukraine but also contempt for anything Russian, including its “ordinary citizens” and culture in a broader sense. Second, I observed profound frustration with the rest of the world, with young people questioning why other countries allowed Russia to invade and did not support Ukraine more significantly. I acknowledged that, as strong as my experience was, it was anecdotal and based on interviews with people from a similar background, belonging to a relatively high socioeconomic status and living in the center (Kyiv) as opposed to the periphery. Nonetheless, it motivated me to study the Ukrainian youth in greater depth.

Whichever research metric would be used, it would clearly show that the full-scale invasion has indeed significantly impacted young Ukrainians. Approximately four-fifths of those between 14 and 34 years of age have experienced some form of loss, whether it be a killed relative, a decrease in income, or a broken relationship, and over 40 percent of them have reportedly faced food insecurity (Kostiuchenko et al., 2024). Ukrainian media have referred to Ukrainian youth as “the generation of fire,” highlighting their

inability to plan for the future and their need to focus on survival first (Tsurkan, 2024). It is also crucial to note that many younger men have joined the army despite the compulsory military age being set at 25. The Russian total war against Ukraine is widely regarded as imperialistic in nature (Mälksoo, 2022). It has caused damages to residential and non-residential property amounting to more than €150 billion, pushing millions of Ukrainians into poverty, and resulting in at least 12,000 civilians killed and 27,000 wounded, though the actual number is almost certainly higher (Kyiv School of Economics, 2025; World Bank, 2024; Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, 2024). Intuitively, it would not be irrational to expect younger Ukrainians, whose formative experience has been the Russian total war, to be more radical than their older compatriots raised either during the Soviet period (1922–1991) or shortly after the renewal of independence in 1991.

This bachelor's thesis attempts to answer whether such an expectation has indeed materialized. It investigates Ukrainian youth in the wake of the Russo-Ukrainian war and examines whether it has produced a united generation distinct in its ideology and worldview from previous generations. I believe that my work will contribute to the research in the field of Ukrainian studies and can serve as an inspiration for further studies, in addition to assisting anyone seeking to comprehend important trends within Ukrainian society.

I.I. Current Trends in Ukrainian Studies and the Literature on Youth

While Ukraine has been extensively researched in the wake of the so-called Euromaidan protests of 2013, the annexation of Crimea and the war in the East which Russia initiated in 2014, the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2019, and especially the Russian full-scale war of 2022, three areas have received the most attention: the transformation of Ukrainian national identity, the geopolitical shift from Russia toward the “collective West,” and the language issue.

Main Research Areas within the Ukrainian Studies

Let me briefly comment on each of these. First, there is a broad consensus that Ukrainian national identity has become more salient in recent years (Fomenko, 2025; Kulyk, 2023). However, several authors note that while Ukrainian national identity was primarily civic between 2014 and 2021, since 2022, it may have acquired a more exclusive ethnocultural context (Kulyk, 2023; Kuzio, 2022). Second, with regard to the geopolitical shift of Ukrainians, extensive research shows that Ukrainians have gradually abandoned their sympathies for Russia. More than four-fifths of Ukrainians viewed Russia positively for a long time, but this figure dropped significantly in 2014 and declined further after 2022 (Paniotto, 2016; Kostyba, 2017). At the same time, support for the European Union and NATO has grown substantially. Specifically, sociologists have been interested in regional specificity, contrasting the views of Ukrainians from the western regions with those from the East. They have concluded that the common perception of Western Ukrainians as fully supportive of the European Union and Eastern Ukrainians as sympathetic to Russia has always been overly simplistic and problematic (Onuch, 2022). Third, numerous studies have demonstrated that many Ukrainians have been switching from using the Russian language to the Ukrainian language, including in regions traditionally deemed “Russian-speaking” (Olszański, 2012; Kulyk, 2024)

1.1.1. The Age Problem Following the Euromaidan and Beyond

Whereas these cleavages—identity, geopolitical opinions, language, and, to a certain extent, region—have attracted significant attention, a blind spot in the academic literature on Ukraine has been the factor of age. This is perhaps surprising, as in familiar narratives, the Ukrainian youth has consistently been portrayed as leading change and driving the anti-Russian resistance (Druckman, 2022). As early as 2014, there were expectations that a united young generation of patriotic, pro-European, and solely Ukrainian-speaking

individuals would emerge. These suppositions were based on theories of formative experiences—the pivotal moments in the lives of young people that generate a collective consciousness. Most notable is the theory of Mannheim (1952), who claims that early impressions tend to “coalesce into a natural view of the world” with all subsequent experiences deriving their meaning from this natural view (p. 298). Most often, these events are those that cause social trauma, taking the form of a destabilizing experience, such as a popular uprising or war (White, 2013). Although there is no consensus on when this “formative age” occurs—Mannheim himself does not allude to a specific age, though he claims that formative years often end as early as 17—most authors suggest that the formative stage of life occurs between the ages of 18 and 25 (Bartels & Jackman, 2014).

Several authors, primarily in the media, have suggested that for young Ukrainians in 2013, approximately aged between 18 and 25, such an event was the Euromaidan protest. That age group was even referred to as the “Maidan generation” or the “motor of change” (Korbut, 2017; Mangas, 2016). An analysis of 46 young people during the Euromaidan protests showed that they “interpreted, absorbed, and upheld” national narratives surrounding Euromaidan and conveyed pro-European views (Howlett, 2020). Having said that, quantitative research has disproved the theory, as young Ukrainians who were between 18 and 25 during the Euromaidan protests did not show greater support for the European Union in the subsequent years (Onuch & Arkwright, 2021). In other words, while a sizable portion of young Ukrainians undoubtedly supported the Euromaidan protests and became pro-European, that narrative did not prevail across the entire age group. Importantly, Onuch and Arkwright (2021) suggested that the 2019 presidential election, in which Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a supporter of the European Union, won, was more influential. Zelenskyy united Ukrainians across demographic, linguistic, and regional groups. While Zelenskyy dominated across all age groups, he was particularly popular among the youth, prompting some to call it a “youthquake” (Ukrinform, 2021; Martínez et al., 2024). Other research has also shown that the younger Ukrainian age group succeeding the Euromaidan protests was not particularly distinct from the rest of the population—in fact, if it was

specific, it was due to its relative political apathy compared to older Ukrainians (Zaremba, 2017). To give just one example, approximately 60 percent of young Ukrainians supported the membership of Ukraine in the European Union between 2014 and 2022, about the same as the rest of the population.

Developing My Research Question

A well-reasoned follow-up question is whether such a formative event—prompting a generational change—was the full-scale invasion of 2022. That, indeed, is my main research question. On that note, there has been relatively little research, with the notable exception of Blyznjuk (2023), who claims that the total war was indeed an impetus for developing a “generational style” different from that of older Ukrainians—an assumption that is not yet confirmed by other research. Since 2022, the literature on Ukrainian youth has been limited. Unlike sociological, geopolitical, or linguistic issues, much of the research has understandably focused on the mental health of Ukrainian adolescents, demonstrating that they are at especially high risk of psychiatric conditions due to the ongoing invasion (Goto et al., 2024; Horoshko et al., 2024). Overall, Ukrainians aged 14 to 25 have experienced a significant deterioration in their quality of life, with substantial concerns not only about their security but also about constant unpredictability and health (Zolkina & Fras, 2024). The degree of ill-being among Ukrainian youth is so severe that several authors have even described it as the “Ukrainian syndrome” (Matiash et al., 2023). Conducting quantitative research, however, has been very challenging. Ukrainian sociologists have faced at least three crucial complications in achieving proper representativeness: first, the lack of a census for more than two decades; second, millions of Ukrainians have moved to foreign countries; and third, the reluctance of Ukrainians with pro-Russian views to participate in the polls. Nonetheless, we can broadly trust Ukrainian sociologists to capture the most salient trends. The up-to-date literature does not seem to suggest that younger Ukrainians are noticeably different, similar to the situation after the Euromaidan protests. Young Ukrainians seem to be slightly *less* optimistic about the future of Ukraine and, perhaps surprisingly, equally or *less* likely to believe that Ukraine should wage

the full-scale war against Russia until it recaptures all lands included within the 1991 borders (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2024; Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2024). Interestingly, while some polls have shown that young Ukrainians are most hesitant to abandon EU membership, other polls have challenged conventional wisdom and shown that young people are slightly *less* supportive of the EU and NATO membership than other groups (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2024; Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2024). Furthermore, the research does not indicate that young Ukrainians are switching from Russian to Ukrainian significantly faster than the rest of society—a finding that yet again defies expectations (Matyash, 2023). However, most polls define "youth" as people between 18 and 30 or 18 and 35, meaning that Ukrainians for whom the full-scale war was their formative experience are included in the sample.

Hypothesis

All in all, the full-scale war has been a traumatizing and deeply formative event for young Ukrainians. However, similar to the Euromaidan protests, I do not expect the youth to differ significantly from other age groups—and thus, to form a unique generation radically different from others. The rationale motivating me to believe is threefold: first, young Ukrainians do not seem to be dramatically more optimistic about Ukraine than the rest of society; second, they have not been more supportive of the European Union and NATO; and third, they have not changed their language behaviours to a degree that is substantially different from their older compatriots.

I.II. What is a Generation?

To determine whether a unique generation has emerged in Ukraine, it is needed to begin with a definition. As Pilcher (1994) explains, contemporary sociologists have paid remarkably little attention to the significance of the concept of generation, despite its frequent use in everyday contexts. White

(2013) states that while generations can already be found in ancient and early Christian thought, the concept can be considered a relatively new phenomenon, with its importance tracing back to the late 18th and 19th centuries. However, the problem of defining generations is very difficult to conceptualize, and arriving at a precise definition will ultimately depend on the individual researcher (Eyerman & Turner, 1998; Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014)

Notwithstanding, to understand the phenomenon of generations, it is indispensable to begin with Mannheim's theory, whose work is widely respected even among his critics. Mannheim critiques the positivist view, in which generations are analyzed purely mathematically (p. 277). Applied to our case, he would reject investigating the possible emergence of a Ukrainian generation purely quantitatively—by relying solely on biological timeframes and data. That said, Mannheim also critiques the romantic-historical view, which, conversely, completely abandons mathematical terms and focuses exclusively on qualitative aspects (p. 286). He argues that for a generation to emerge, its members must be born within an approximately similar time frame (the positivist aspect) and must also occupy a so-called similar location within historical-social reality (the qualitative aspect). The similarity within historical-social reality, Mannheim claims, is usually caused by a strong event that unites individuals who would otherwise never come into personal contact. I will follow Mannheim's principle and search for a definition that combines both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Equally, I rely on the importance of a strong event—formative experience—as, although not immune to criticism, the lasting consequences of formative phases generally cannot be discounted (Scherger, 2012)

The main critique of Mannheim has been that his definition is too narrow. Aboim and Vasconcelos (2014) propose moving away from Mannheim's "excessive emphasis on political and intellectual self-awareness" toward an "enlarged social and cultural definition." They do not necessarily discount the importance of sharing the same historical experiences, but they argue that these alone are not enough to create a generation. Hence, they view generations as discourses; if, for Mannheim, a generation was defined by

similarity within a historical-social reality, for them, it is defined by similarity within the dominant discourse of the present time. Similarly, Eyerman and Turner (1998) develop a definition based on narratives, highlighting the importance of “culturally constructed labels” in relation to a generation, and Matthes (1985) views generations as “discursive constructs.”

How can these two potentially very different perceptions be reconciled? Scherger (2012) mentions that they are, in fact, not mutually exclusive but overlapping in terms of the objects they refer to. I will accept her notion and incorporate aspects of both self—awareness—based and discourse—based definitions. In fact, I will adhere to Scherger’s simplified definition, which states that a generation can be defined as “a special case of the formation of a collectively shared worldview and identity, originating in similar and similarly interpreted biographical-historical experience.”

I.III. Methodology

Conducting a study with the purpose of investigating the possible emergence of a unique generation is demanding, as it requires a multidisciplinary approach—utilizing, among others, the fields of sociology, international relations, and political science. It is worth repeating that my research question is as follows: whether the Russian full-scale invasion of 2022 was such a formative event for Ukrainians that it prompted a generational change such that it created a distinct generation. On this basis, the full-scale invasion itself is an independent variable, while the possible emergence of a generation serves as a dependent variable. As clarified in the previous subchapter, given that there is no universal definition of generation, I will hereby refer to it as “a special case of the formation of a collectively shared worldview and identity, originating in similar and similarly interpreted biographical-historical experience.” The main consequent challenge is determining how to investigate the proximity of “worldview” and “identity” following the 2022 invasion—as these concepts are rather intangible and ultimately subject to

arbitrariness by the particular researcher. After thorough consideration, I decided to analyze them along the lines of three fields that are best researched within Ukrainian studies, as highlighted earlier. Namely, the transformation of the Ukrainian national identity, the geopolitical shift from Russia toward the "collective West" and the language issue. I will seek to investigate whether young Ukrainians between 17 and 25 are distinct in the three categories referred to above. Should they share similar opinions within their respective age group—which, at the same time, differ from those of the rest of Ukrainian society—I will consider my hypothesis to be refuted. Conversely, if I reach the opposite conclusion, I will consider my hypothesis to be proven.

I will proceed in two steps. First, I will establish the theoretical framework by providing the necessary context and analyzing existing literature, with a focus on qualitative studies conducted by Ukrainian and foreign sociologists. In doing so, I primarily rely on the data from the Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), as well as additional sources such as the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Wilson Center, and others. There are several limitations to the theoretical section. First, most available polls do not specifically focus on Ukrainians within the 17–25 age group, which I consider to be the "impressionable age" for my study. Instead, surveys typically cover broader age brackets, such as 18–26 or 18–35. Second, the scope of issues linked to identity and worldview is so vast that each would warrant a separate bachelor's thesis. Hence, I will inherently need to be economical, focusing on the most salient trends rather than delving into every available poll. Third, conducting qualitative research during wartime is challenging. Apart from practicalities such as safety concerns and regular power outages, opinions tend to be more fluid and dynamic during conflict and may depend on the current developments on the frontline.

Second, my practical part consists of in-depth interviews with Ukrainians from across the country to better understand their opinions and stances, which are difficult to measure through quantitative methods. One participant is 17, while

the others are 20, 20, 21, 23, 24, 24, and 25; five are male, and three are female. They come from the westernmost Zakarpattia Oblast (Uzhgorod), the western regions (Rivne, Ivano-Frankivsk), the central Kyiv Oblast (Pereiaslav, Irpin), the center-east (Dnipro), and the northeast (Kharkiv). The interviews were anonymous. Five were conducted via Zoom, and three recorded offline. All of the interviewees gave consent for the interview to be recorded, while any summary interview content or direct quotations would be anonymized so that only their age, the city they come from, and their gender would be revealed

Similarly as with the theoretical framework, several limitations need to be taken into account. Among them, the fundamental one concerns the scope of my sample, which—due to limited time, capacity, and resources—is relatively minor. Apart from that, despite my attempt to include respondents from various regional, gender, and linguistic groups, I admit that I have faced difficulties reaching out to interviewees whose opinions do not align with those of the majoritarian Ukrainian population. Additionally, given that the interviews were conducted solely in Ukrainian due to my inability to speak Russian, it is possible that some respondents were not able to express their views as freely as they otherwise would have been—even though all of the interviewees have an excellent command of Ukrainian. Finally, it is necessary to mention the influence of the war: for example, one interview had to be interrupted due to an alarm threat, the possibility of a Russian attack, and a subsequent power outage.

II. Theoretical Framework

II. I. How Ukrainians Said Goodbye to the Russian Empire

When discussing an issue as complicated as Ukrainian identity, it is difficult to determine the right starting point. One such moment could be the devastating famine caused by the Soviet collectivization policy, known in Ukrainian history as the “Holodomor,” which killed millions of Ukrainians and is regarded as the largest policy of mass killing in Europe in the 20th century (Snyder, 2017). It has been described as a systematic attack on Ukraine itself and as “a staple part of the national myth-making of the new Ukrainian state” (Applebaum, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2017). Nonetheless, for our purposes, it is important to understand that, for most of the 20th century, as part of the Soviet Union, Ukrainians were portrayed merely as a “brotherly” nation to the Russians by the Moscow government. To illustrate this, Fomenko (2025) claims that Ukraine was unable to build a distinctive national identity during the Soviet times against Russian domination. In fact, the common history of Ukrainians and Russians was used as one of the main justifications for the full-scale invasion of 2022, with Russian President Vladimir Putin both denying the existence of Ukrainian nationhood and considering Ukrainians to be Russians (Snyder, 2022).

Polling data suggests that Ukrainians largely remained positive toward Russia even after the breakup of the Soviet Union. More specifically, between 1991 and 2013, consistently over 80 to 90 percent of Ukrainians held a favorable view of Russia (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2024). As Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2024) summarizes, it is crucial to understand that the “deterioration of the attitude towards Russia followed the aggressive actions of Russia itself and did not precede them”. Significant changes regarding Ukrainian identity occurred in the wake of the Euromaidan protests. As Kulyk (2023) explains, following the demonstrations, more than

53 percent of Ukrainians reported that their perception of Russia had worsened. Additionally, an increasing number of Ukrainian citizens began identifying as Ukrainians—even if they were Russian-speaking or, moreover, of Russian origin, including in Crimea. At the time, most scholars described Ukrainian nationalism as “anti-imperial, civic and inclusive,” as demonstrated by the fact that most Ukrainians fully differentiated between Russian political leaders and the Russian people, holding mostly negative views of the former and positive views of the latter (Onuch & Hale, 2018; Kuzio, 2022; Kulyk, 2023).

How Attitudes Toward Russia Have Changed in Ukraine



Data Source: Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2008-2024

The full-scale invasion of 2022, however, sparked further changes. In the words of Hrushetskyi (2024), Ukrainians finally “said goodbye to the Russian empire,” with virtually no citizens remaining sympathetic to Russia anymore. Much research has shown that the number of individuals identifying as Ukrainian increased even more than it did after 2014 (Brantly, 2023). However, as Kulyk (2023) notes, while national identity became even much more salient to Ukrainians, it has possibly acquired “a more radical meaning” with an ethnocultural context. Amid the unleashing of Russian attacks against Ukrainian civilians, Ukrainians largely gave up differentiating between Russian

politicians and Russian citizens (Kulyk, 2023; Hrushetskyi, 2024), blaming most Russians for the ongoing aggression and considering all of them responsible (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2024).

What does the literature say about the youngest people? Research seems to suggest a significant increase in civic participation among the youngest Ukrainians (Martínez et al., 2024). As Fomenko (2025) notes, these changes have often been driven from below, in what she refers to as the process of “cultural decolonization”. However, these changes do not appear to be isolated to the youngest age group but rather apply to the entire Ukrainian population. We can examine the data from three cities—Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Poltava—which shows that respondents across all age groups predominantly identify as citizens of Ukraine (Korostelina & Toal, 2022). However, the youngest individuals (29 and under) are slightly more inclined to view Ukraine as the home of ethnic Ukrainians, as opposed to a country of many nations, compared to Ukrainians over 30 (14 percent vs. 6 percent). Equally, the majority of selected Ukrainians—regardless of age, including the oldest—consider themselves to be European. However, data from Kosotelina and Toal (2022) shows that Ukrainians under 45 from Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Poltava are slightly more likely to view Ukrainians and Russians as two completely different nations compared to Ukrainians over 45 (78 percent vs. 64 percent). Yet, even though these differences are real, they do not appear to divide the Ukrainian population into distinct age groups.

II.II. How Ukrainians Switched to Ukrainian

Closely linked to the issue of identity is the question of language. In the Ukrainian discourse, it is well known that the Ukrainian language was regarded as provincial during the Soviet period. As Brantly (2023) explains, one needed to speak and accept the center's language (Russian) to belong to it. In this context, there is a growing push for de-Russification, which in some

cases is viewed through an ethnonational lens as a return to an “ancestral nation” (Kulyk, 2017).

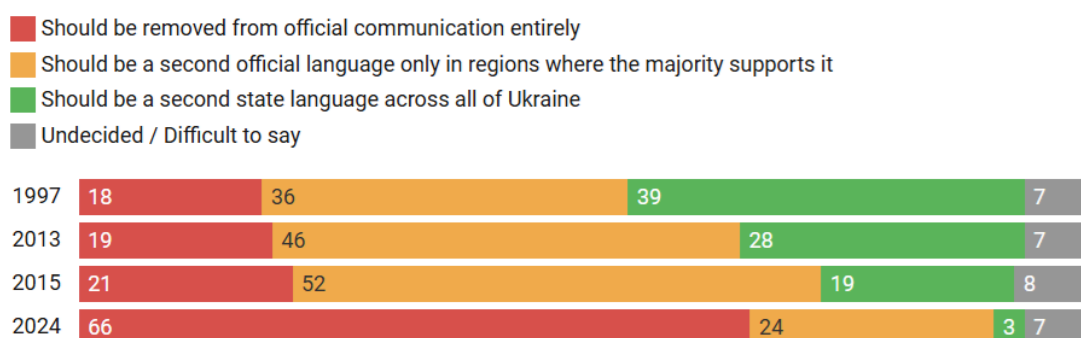
In fact, it is hard to overstate the prevalence of the Russian language in Ukraine between 1991 and 2014. In the 2010s, the three most-read newspapers in Ukraine (*Fakty i Kommentarii*, *Segodnya*, and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*) were all published in Russian, as was the most popular TV news channel (Armandon, 2013). Fascinatingly, research from 2012 shows that only 3.4 percent of songs on Ukrainian radio were in Ukrainian; in contrast, over 60 percent were in Russian. Similarly, only 28 percent of all TV programs were in Ukrainian (Armandon, 2013). That said, it is crucial to distinguish between “Russian-speaking” and “Russian sources,” as Bogomolov and Lytvynenko (2012) demonstrated that Russia used its TV shows and Soviet films to reinforce Russian nostalgia as a tool of soft power, thereby spreading the narrative that Ukrainian and Russian people share a common cultural heritage and belong to the same civilization.

It is very challenging to determine how many Ukrainians are “Ukrainian-speaking” or “Russian-speaking,” given that many speak both languages and some use the so-called surzhyk, a combination of the two languages (Olszański, 2012). However, researchers generally agree that, even though many Russian speakers considered themselves to be “true patriots” without abandoning their native language, a significant number either fully switched to Ukrainian or began speaking and listening to it much more frequently following the Euromaidan protests (Kulyk, 2016). Crucially, the process was driven both from above and below. Regarding the former, Ukraine passed legislation requiring film distribution companies to ensure that 90 percent of their content is in Ukrainian, as well as mandating that Ukrainian be the sole language of instruction from secondary school onward (Polityuk, 2019). This drew some criticism, as it was seen as oppressive toward other minority languages, including Hungarian (Darden & Mylonas, 2016). Regarding the latter, it is important to note the displacement of Russian-speaking Ukrainians from the eastern regions, who moved to

Ukrainian-speaking areas and altered their language behaviors. However, this change was not permanent in every case.

By all accounts, the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 caused a noticeably stronger shift toward the Ukrainian language. In the words of Kulyk (2023), the symbolic valorization of the Ukrainian language is now “predominant in various social domains,” something that did not occur following 2013. In this context, Kulyk (2023) writes of “impressive shifts” and predicts that, if these changes persist, Ukraine will cease to be a bilingual country. Some commentators have suggested that there is a broad consensus that Ukrainian will remain the sole official language, while Russian will be tolerated as a language used exclusively in unofficial communication (Čorej, 2023). This view seems to be supported by data indicating that only 3% of Ukrainians across all age groups believe that Russian should receive the status of a second official language (Hrushetskyi, 2023). Influential Ukrainian linguists have even suggested that Russian might be forgotten in Ukraine within 20 years (Krykunenko, 2023). While that notion is contested, it can be concluded that the whole of Ukraine has shifted in terms of language usage, according to a Razumkov poll (2024), as many as 78 percent of Ukrainians consider Ukrainian to be their native language—up 10 percentage points compared to ten years ago and more than 25 points compared to 2006.

Ukrainians' Views on the Status of the Russian Language



Data Source: Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 1997-2024

In the media, young people are often portrayed as leading in the use of the Ukrainian language (Higgins & Mazhulin, 2023). This notion, however, is

questionable. A 2021 study showed that about 49% of Ukrainians aged 14 to 34 spoke Ukrainian at home, 31% spoke exclusively Russian, and the rest used both languages. Notable regional differences were recorded: while residents of the western regions predominantly used Ukrainian (95%), young Ukrainians in the south and east relied much more on Russian (over 60%). Importantly, following the full-scale invasion, the number of Ukrainian speakers increased across the whole Ukrainian population. In terms of age, a 2022 poll, as explained by Matiash (2022), showed that young people only slightly more often communicated at home in Ukrainian (74% versus 20% in Russian) compared to older age groups (69% versus 24%). Once again, the more significant cleavage appeared to be the region of origin—while in Western Ukraine, only 3% of residents claimed to speak Russian at home, in the south and east, the share was close to 50%. A recent poll shows that while 94 percent of Ukrainians between 16 and 35 use Ukrainian when consuming video content on social media, almost 40 percent of them also use Russian (International Research and Exchanges Board, 2023). Fifty-six percent of the respondents claim to use only Ukrainian, with most of the others claiming to use both Ukrainian and Russian, and only 3 percent saying they only speak Russian.

II.III. How Ukrainians Tilted to the West

European Union

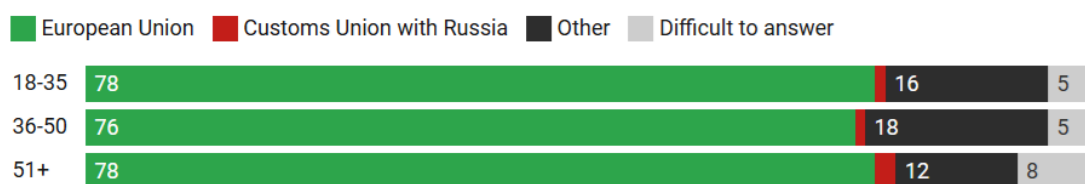
Ukraine formally declared its willingness to join the European Union as early as 1993. The first EU-Kyiv summit took place in 1997 in Kyiv, raising hopes that Ukraine would become a member state soon. In 2000, President Leonid Kuchma even announced his hope that Ukraine would join the EU by 2011 (Ukrainian Week, 2013). Even President Viktor Yanukovich, often portrayed as pro-Russian, declaratively supported European integration and called for a so-called multivector foreign policy, attempting to engage with both Brussels and Moscow (Armandon, 2013). Importantly, as Onuch and Arkwright (2021)

mention, Ukrainian youth has traditionally been slightly less supportive of EU accession, possibly due to the perceived improbability of Ukraine becoming a member state in the foreseeable future. Looking back to 2012, the youngest segment of the population only narrowly supported European integration—approximately 51.9 percent expressed this view (Armandon, 2013). That was largely similar to the 2012 poll of the entire Ukrainian society, which showed that approximately half of Ukrainians supported the EU (Texty, 2012). There were high hopes that the youth would strongly support the EU following the Euromaidan protests. Some observers even coined the term “the Maidan generation,” suggesting that young people were keeping alive “the dream of a progressive and pro-European group” (Hofmann, 2016). Similarly, Korbut (2017) claimed that it was young people who sparked the Euromaidan revolution. However, as Onuch explained, Maidan was attended not only by young people, who were the so-called “early joiners,” but also by people from all ages. In fact, two-thirds of Maidan protesters were older than 30, with the average age being almost 36. This suggests that the change was much more societal, not limited to a younger generation but across demographic groups. As Onuch concludes, there is no evidence that being socialized during the Euromaidan made individuals more supportive of the EU. In fact, as Ljubka (2016) mentions, only approximately 50% of young Ukrainians supported the EU at the time. He argued that the younger generation was not strikingly different from any other generation. In 2017, the FES poll showed that the largest portion of young Ukrainians neither trusted nor distrusted the EU (Zarembo, 2017).

Crucial for Ukraine’s shift toward supporting the European Union were the 2019 presidential elections, as neither of the candidates—Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskyy—questioned EU membership (Onuch, 2024). Following the full-scale Russian invasion, approximately 80 percent of Ukrainians have consistently supported EU membership (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2024). Specifically regarding young people, the EU Recovery poll shows that their support for the EU rose from 6.6 to 7.9 (on a 10-point scale) between 2021 and 2023. The Center for Insights in Survey Research (2024) shows practically no difference in EU support

between age groups: when asked which economic union Ukraine should choose if it could only opt for one, 77 percent of respondents picked the European Union (78 percent of Ukrainians aged 18 to 35, 76 percent of Ukrainians aged 36 to 50, and 78 percent of Ukrainians over 51). However, the data indicates that the youngest Ukrainians are the most skeptical when asked how long it will take to become an EU member. Nineteen percent of Ukrainians aged 18 to 35 expect the process to take more than 10 years, compared to 17 percent aged 36 to 51 and 12 percent over 51. The skepticism of the youngest generation seems justifiable, as many experts raise doubts about a quick EU accession process. They warn that the procedure will largely depend on how the war against Russia ends, the subsequent post-war reconstruction, and the political will of the member states (Darvas et al., 2024). An Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation poll (2024) suggests that young Ukrainians are more likely to believe that it is fully unacceptable (56%) to refuse to join the European Union compared to the rest of the population (47%). Having said that, a more important cleavage seems to be the regional distribution: while almost 58% of Westerners find the proposition unacceptable, only 30% of Ukrainians from the South and 44% of Ukrainians from the East agree.

If Ukraine could enter only one economic union, which one would Ukrainians choose?



Source: International Republican Institute, National Survey of Ukraine, February 2024

NATO

The relationship between Ukrainians and NATO was even more complicated than the accession process to the European Union. Although NATO leaders declared that Ukraine would become a member state at the 2008 Bucharest summit, their promise was vague and without a concrete road map (Sarotte,

2013). At the same time, Ukrainians overwhelmingly rejected the possibility of joining the Alliance before 2014, a phenomenon caused by multiple reasons, including the American war in Iraq which was paradoxically performed outside of the NATO framework (Bogomolov & Lytvynenko, 2012). In fact, only 18 percent of Ukrainians supported NATO membership in 2013, compared to 67 percent who opposed it. Following the Euromaidan protests and the initiation of the war in the East, that number rose significantly, with approximately 48 percent of Ukrainians favoring joining the Alliance. A further shift, similar to that seen in the case of the European Union, has occurred in the past three years. The Center for Insights in Survey Research (2024) poll shows that approximately 77 percent of Ukrainians would vote for joining NATO in early 2024. Interestingly, young Ukrainians (18-35) were less supportive of accessing the Alliance (73 percent) compared to Ukrainians aged 36 to 50 (77 percent) and those over 51 (80 percent). In this sense, a more significant difference is regional: whereas over 80 percent of Ukrainians from the West and Center support NATO membership, that figure stands at approximately 60 percent in the East. The EU Recovery poll also recorded a shift in youth opinion on NATO membership, with an increase from 5.8 to 8.1 on a 10-point scale.

If a referendum was held, would Ukrainians vote for NATO membership?



Data Source: The Center for Insights in Survey Research, National Survey of Ukraine, February 2024

On President Zelenskyy

Volodymyr Zelenskyy has long been well known in Ukraine, though initially as a comedian and a famous actor. When he entered politics in late 2018, he quickly gained popularity as an anti-elite champion whose platform was built on three pillars: "solving" the war in Ukraine's East, stabilizing the rising costs

of utility services, and revising divisive cultural policies (Minakov, 2021). Onuch (2024) notes that he employed a “unifying frame presenting an imagined future Ukraine united across its cleavages and tightly bound to Europe and by European values.” His presidency was viewed as a historical aberration and a message from a deeply disappointed Ukrainian electorate toward the “mainstream corrupt” politicians (Umland, 2016). Importantly, Zelenskyy, born in a Russian-speaking environment and a star of Russian television, underwent a “very public Ukrainization” (Onuch, 2024).

This transformation particularly resonated with the youth, as he was most popular among Ukrainians under 23 (Ukrinform, 2021). While Zelenskyy was elected by a large margin in 2019, obtaining almost 75 percent of the votes in the second round, his popularity declined sharply during the first year of his presidency. By the autumn of 2021, only 28 percent of Ukrainians approved of his performance, and nearly three-quarters of Ukrainians were dissatisfied with the direction of the country (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2021). Nonetheless, after Russia unleashed a full-scale attack and Zelenskyy decided to stay in Kyiv despite offers of evacuation from Western countries, his actions were once again supported by over 90 percent of Ukrainians (Braithwaithe, 2022; Proskurova, 2022). As the war progressed, his popularity remained relatively high. The IRI poll shows that Zelenskyy’s support stands at 63 percent, and he remains the most trusted among Ukrainians aged 18 to 35 (69 percent). This appeal was largely achieved through what Kulyk (2023) describes as a combination of “populism and inclusive nationalism.”

III. Insights from Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative interviews, all approximately 30 minutes long, followed a three-step structure set in the methodology (see the Interview Guide in Appendix 1). Respondents were asked open-ended questions to avoid suggestive questions. The interviewer did not provide his own opinions throughout the interview, nor did he do anything that might influence the respondents' opinions.

1) National identity. Respondents were asked what it means for them to be Ukrainian and how they would define their "Ukrainianness." In this context, I was particularly interested in the effect of the full-scale invasion while also paying close attention to previous events, mainly the Euromaidan protests. Apart from national identity, we also explored the issue of generational identity, aiming to understand whether young people in Ukraine consider themselves different from older Ukrainians.

2) Language. Besides determining the respondents' language of daily use, we discussed how their usage has changed since the full-scale war began. Respondents also relate their views on the nature of language—whether they perceive it as a political or practical issue. In this sense, I inquired about their consumption of Russian-speaking sources and culture and how it has changed in the past three years.

3) Geopolitical and political questions, focusing on the European Union, NATO, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidency. In the first two cases, I did not limit my questions to binary responses—whether my respondents support or oppose membership—but also explored their perceptions of these structures and whether their positions have changed.

Birthplaces of Research Respondents



III.1. Strong National Identity

All interviews confirmed, as expected, that the full-scale war has had a profound effect on the identity of my respondents. When asked specifically about what constitutes their Ukrainian identity, most interviewees provided rather idealistic definitions. Here is the full list of their answers:

- 'fighting till the end' (respondent from Dnipro)
- 'national unity' (Uzhgorod)
- 'strong spirit' (Korosten)
- 'it means struggle for liberation' (Rivne)
- 'protecting my rights' (Kharkiv)
- 'struggle for independence and sovereign existence' (Pereiaslav)
- 'being part of a strong nation' (Ivano-Frankivsk)

Interestingly, during the interviews, several speakers frequently referred to history. Specifically, the students from Uzhgorod, Rivne, and Pereiaslav repeatedly mentioned the periods of Kievan Rus (880–1240), the Zaporozhian Sich (15th century), the Holodomor (1932–1933), World War II (1939–1945),

and the Cold War (1947–1991) to explain their present identity. The other respondents made fewer references to history, which does not necessarily indicate a lack of awareness but possibly reflects their perception that it is unnecessary to describe their identity in historical terms. Regarding Euromaidan, opinions were split. A few respondents mentioned that, in fact, it was a turning point for them, even more so than the full-scale war, despite being in their early teenage years at the time. For example, the interviewee from Uzhgorod mentioned that he had been convinced of an impending full-scale Russian attack since 2014.

"As soon as you say you are Ukrainian, I immediately start thinking about our deep history: Kyivan Rus, the Cossacks, the national liberation wars, and the national liberation struggles for Ukraine during the Soviet era." (Rivne, male, 25)

"Being Ukrainian is mostly a great honor for me because of all the great people who belong to the same nation. I feel a lot of power speaking about it. When I think of our history, I realize that we are a strong nation that still exists, even though a large neighboring territory does not want us to be on the map. For me, it is something almost extraterrestrial." (Ivano-Frankivsk, female, 23)

"When I say that I am Ukrainian, I mean that I identify with a group of people who call themselves Ukrainians and who have the same geographical and cultural roots as I do." (Kharkiv, female, 21)

What is clear from the interviews is that young Ukrainians identify strongly with the Ukrainian national identity. But do they place themselves within a specific generational identity? Interestingly, the responses varied. The interviewees from Pereiaslav and Ivano-Frankivsk were convinced that younger people differ from older Ukrainians and are more pro-Ukrainian, linking the opinions of older Ukrainians to their Soviet upbringing. While this conclusion does not appear to be substantively backed by quantitative research, their opinions might be based on anecdotal experiences and their own social bubbles. On the other hand, the respondent from Dnipro mentioned that "patriots can be both young and old," and the student from Rivne stated that he is unaware of any significant generational gaps.

Similarly, opinions on both ordinary Russians and future relationships with Russia differed—with some claiming that all Russians are responsible for the ongoing war and that there should be no ties between the two countries in the foreseeable future, and others being slightly more open to such a possibility.

"I still want to believe that there are Russians who are patriotic in a good sense. In fact, I have seen Russians shouting that their country is doing bad things, burning their passports, and trying to leave. And for these people, I have some respect."

(Dnipro, male, 20)

"We were still communicating with the Russians and treating them as people who, in the event of a full-scale invasion, would rebel against their government. I was very disappointed after February 24 that this did not happen, because the first thing all Ukrainians did was ask the Russians to help. Before February 24, I still thought that it was possible to come to an agreement with some Russians. Not anymore."

(Uzhgorod, male, 24)

III.II. Language: A Weapon or a Simple Means of Communication?

When it comes to language, my sample indeed confirms the profound impact the full-scale invasion has had on the Ukrainian population. Among my respondents, three of them, specifically from Western Ukraine (Uzhgorod, Rivne, and Ivano-Frankivsk), have only used Ukrainian throughout their lives. Three of the respondents spoke neither solely Ukrainian nor Russian at home: the interviewee from Pereiaslav was born into a family where both Ukrainian and surzhyk were spoken, while the respondents from Irpin and Kharkiv used both Ukrainian and Russian. Two interviewees (Dnipro and Korosten) primarily communicated in Russian until the full-scale invasion. Following the war, as expected, the language patterns of the three Ukrainian-speaking respondents have not changed. However, the three respondents “in-between” have started using Ukrainian more often, though the respondents from Irpin and Russian admit to still speaking Russian, albeit less frequently. Interestingly, the respondent from Dnipro, who had used Russian his entire life

and previously considered Ukrainian to be “a provincial language,” has started using Ukrainian much more frequently. One respondent (Korosten) has not changed his language behavior, claiming not to have any issues with continuing as before. These findings seem to confirm that the most important determinant of language usage is the region of birth, with respondents from the eastern regions being more likely to use the Russian language.

"I communicate in Russian more often than in Ukrainian because I do not see any big problems with it." (Korosten, male, 17)

"Most Ukrainians, I believe, switched to the Ukrainian language. I think it is an adequate reaction because as long as we belong to a Ukrainian state, we have to speak Ukrainian." (Irpın, female, 21)

Importantly, neither Russian-speaking respondents nor those who use both Ukrainian and Russian questioned the importance of the Ukrainian language. They all mentioned that they accept Ukrainian as the main language of the country and, having been educated in Ukrainian, possess full command of the language. Nonetheless, they primarily view language as a “practical issue” and a means of communication. Among Ukrainian speakers, opinions on the significance of the language are more distinct. For example, the respondent from Ivano-Frankivsk highlights its historical roots, including resistance to Russian imperialism. Similarly, the respondent from Pereiaslav noted that Ukrainian “was banned more than 80 times” and believes that Russian should be entirely banned in official spheres. The respondent from Rivne took an even stronger stance, describing language as a “weapon.” Notably, all Ukrainian-speaking respondents seem to tolerate the use of Russian, but only in unofficial contexts. This mirrors the official position of Ukraine, where there appears to be a consensus that while Ukrainian will remain the dominant language and Russian will not be permitted in official contexts, Russian speakers will not face persecution.

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"The Ukrainian language is a symbol of our struggle. For more than 80 times throughout history, they tried to ban it." (Pereiaslav, male, 24)

"No Ukrainian can say that language is just a means of communication. Some Russian official said that Russia ends where the Russian language ends. Obviously, language is a border for them, and we should take that into account." (Rivne, male, 25)

When it comes to Russian-speaking or even Russian culture, most of the interviewees admitted to consuming it in the past. In this regard, a shift has occurred among all of them. The most unambiguous respondents in this sense are those from Uzhgorod and Rivne, who claim to have stopped listening to “anything Russian” since 2014. Other respondents (Kharkiv, Pereiaslav, Ivano-Frankivsk, Korosten, Dnipro) mentioned that they did listen to Russian music or watch Russian films between 2014 and 2022 but largely or fully gave it up after 2022. Importantly, their motivations now seem to be more practical than ideological. The respondent from Kharkiv mentioned that if one was interested in dog breeding, it was not possible to find enough tutorials in Ukrainian. Similarly, the speaker from Irpin noted that the Russian language provided more educational resources.

"I used to listen to Russian-speaking performers, but when the war started, I stopped listening altogether." (Dnipro, male, 20)

"After the full-scale invasion, absolutely all of the Russian-speaking performers disappeared from my music library." (Pereiaslav, male, 24)

III.III. To the West—But with Caution

When it comes to the EU, I observed somewhat similar responses from almost all of the respondents—when faced with a dichotomous choice, they

do support membership, albeit without great enthusiasm. The only exception is the student from Korosten, who says he supports the EU without any reservations, viewing it as the guarantor of peace. The other respondents appear to be more pragmatic about it. For example, the student from Dnipro highlights the EU's economic strengths, particularly the Schengen area. The student from Uzhgorod appreciates the potential membership as it might help uproot corruption. At the same time, many respondents are critical of the EU for two main reasons: first, they believe its member states “appease” the aggressor; and second, they do not understand why Ukraine has not already been accepted. For instance, the respondent from Ivano-Frankivsk says, “It should have been admitted a long time ago,” pointing out Ukraine’s steady progress on LGBTI+ rights and anti-corruption measures. The respondent from Irpin said the EU “should learn from Ukraine,” not “the other way around.” To summarize, the respondents in my sample seem to be relatively united on this front—cautiously supportive of the EU but approaching it with a pragmatic perspective.

"Honestly, I do not really understand why this story has been going on for so long. Sometimes it seems we are just begging them to accept us, and I suspect that they don't really want us." (Ivano-Frankivsk, female, 23)

"I thought that the EU was a cool union. Economically, these are very strong countries. But what is happening there is disappointing because there is no unity. The European Union has split into three parts. There are pro-Ukrainian countries, pro-Russian parties, and those which are, oddly enough, neutral. I believe that if it remains like this, it will sooner or later cease to exist and fall apart." (Dnipro, male, 20)

"I want Ukraine to be an example for the European Union, not the other way around. I want Ukraine to improve, develop, and fill in the gaps we currently have." (Irpin, female, 21)

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The picture with NATO is very similar. Of my eight respondents, five were supportive of NATO, though none were very enthusiastic about it. The other three (Korosten, Ivano-Frankivsk, Irpin) were not necessarily against NATO but were unsure. The respondent from Korosten declared support for anything in “Ukrainian interest,” while the respondent from Ivano-Frankivsk questioned why Ukraine had not been admitted to NATO earlier. The respondent from Irpin developed a growing frustration with the Alliance due to its cautious approach to the war. Similarly, while broadly supportive of the Alliance, the speaker from Uzghorod mentioned that NATO seems to be a weak alliance not ready to combat. In this regard, there is no clear consensus, but students seem to express a certain degree of frustration with NATO.

"Looking at the way NATO is behaving now, it seems to me to be a very weak alliance. It does not appear to be combat-ready." (Uzghorod, male, 24)

"NATO? For me, it is about security guarantees—guarantees that I can fully return to my studies and go back home." (Kharkiv, female, 21)

With regard to Ukrainian politics, most of my respondents were not able to vote in the 2019 elections, apart from the respondents from Uzghorod and Rivne. Out of the eight students, six supported Zelenskyy (Dnipro, Uzghorod, Korosten, Rivne, Kharkiv, Pereiaslav), and two supported Poroshenko (Irpin, Ivano-Frankivsk). As a reason for their choice, the student from Rivne mentioned that Poroshenko was “a corrupt guy” and criticized his inability to end the war in Eastern Ukraine. Out of the six Zelenskyy supporters, two (Dnipro, Kharkiv) continue to believe that he is performing very well and do not have major objections. Another (Korosten) does not hold a strong opinion. Two (Rivne, Dnipro) are somewhat divided, praising Zelenskyy for his foreign policy but critical of his domestic record. Finally, the student from Ivano-Frankivsk expressed a feeling of “deception.” To conclude, there is no single opinion on Zelenskyy in my sample—not even among his supporters and critics.

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"I think we should be thankful to him for staying in Kyiv after the war started. Nobody knows if the other candidates would do the same. But unfortunately, I feel that oligarchy has returned to Ukraine in recent times; those who have money can do whatever they want." (Rivne, male, 25)

"I did not support Zelenskyy. After the war started, one of my acquaintances with whom I had an argument about it asked me if I had changed my opinion because she decided to stay in Kyiv. I asked her, 'Do you really have such a low bar for a president—that he should not flee the country?'" (Ivano-Frankivsk, female, 23)

"I think he is doing fine. The boy is trying hard." (Kharkiv, female, 21)

Conclusion: Broader Implications and What's Next?

Now, after analyzing the existing literature and data, and conducting qualitative interviews, it is time to return to my original hypothesis: that the full-scale war has been a traumatizing and deeply formative event for young Ukrainians, but the youth does not significantly differ from other age groups and has not formed a unique generation. In the process, I have analyzed the research on the issue of generations and decided to use the definition describing it as "a special case of the formation of a collectively shared worldview and identity, originating in similar and similarly interpreted biographical-historical experience." When analyzing the identity and worldview, I decided to analyze the three well-researched areas—the recent transformation of the Ukrainian identity, the language issue in Ukraine, and the geopolitical and political opinions of Ukrainians.

It is clear that Ukraine as a whole has become much more patriotic over the past three years, with young people being no exception. After years of broadly sympathetic views toward Russia, Ukraine began shifting toward the "geopolitical West" in 2014, with an even more notable shift occurring after 2022. The existing data does not reveal significant differences between younger and older Ukrainians. However, the in-depth interviews suggested that young Ukrainians shaped by the war experience tend to have an idealistic view of Ukrainian identity, an issue that deserves further research and study. Ukraine has apparently reached a societal consensus that Ukrainian will remain the only official language, while Russian will be used solely in unofficial contexts. This consensus is supported by the respondents in my research. However, the existing literature and my findings alike suggest that young Ukrainians may gradually cease using Russian altogether, indicating that geography, rather than age, will be the more significant factor determining primary language use. My research showed that while young Ukrainians raised in Russian-speaking families have changed their language behavior—some of them now speak Ukrainian much more often—the youth

remains relatively diverse regarding the language issue. Finally, the available data shows that young Ukrainians, like the rest of the Ukrainian population, have become more favorable toward membership in the European Union and NATO. However, my research indicates that this support is quite fragile and pragmatic—a warning for these institutions themselves. When it comes to political issues, young Ukrainians seem to be slightly more supportive of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy following the full-scale war, but they are far from united on this issue.

Importantly, my research has not identified a distinct generational identity, with some young people claiming to differ from older age groups while others reject this notion.

To the best of my knowledge, my claim is that, while the issue warrants further research, the hypothesis has been proven: a significant generation dramatically different from other age groups has not emerged. That does not mean that young Ukrainians do not have specificities, but rather that within the framework I investigated, the transformation has encompassed a much larger part of the Ukrainian population—not solely the youngest Ukrainians—and that young Ukrainians do not share an identity and worldview that would stand out with regard to analyzed categories.

Implications

The field of Ukraine studies has grown significantly in recent years, a trend primarily influenced by the horrors associated with a war Ukraine never chose. Yet, as demonstrated in this bachelor's thesis, there remain many blind spots in the literature as well as many misconceptions among the general public, the media, and often even within academic circles. I stress the importance of continuous research on Ukrainian youth that is not only quantitative but also qualitative.

Finally, let me also share a few recommendations. It is evident both from quantitative research and my qualitative study that the Ukrainian national

identity has become more salient in the last year. Several young Ukrainians described their concept of Ukrainian identity as inherently linked to national unity and strength. That in itself is understandable and arguably both inevitable and necessary when waging a defensive war against an imperialistic neighbor. At the same time, as Ukrainian sociologists warn, national identity bears risks. For that matter, I believe it is crucial that the Ukrainian national project encompasses representatives of minority groups as well as those who might not fit into the stereotypical image of "Ukrainian strength."

Secondly, however controversial the language issue may be in Ukraine, for now there seems to be a wide consensus within Ukrainian society: while Ukrainian serves as the main official language, Russian is still used by some, mainly in the East and the South, as means of informal, everyday communication. My own study has confirmed that even Ukrainians from those regions for whom Russian is the mother tongue largely support preserving such a status quo. Much literature and my own interviews suggest that many Ukrainians from the so-called "Russian speaking families" have partially or fully switched to Ukrainian—not because, or not solely because of, state regulation but rather owing to an honest willingness to do so. I am of the opinion that those Ukrainians should be given patience and that the transformation should primarily proceed from below. In this sense, I believe it is key that Ukrainian politicians do not misuse the issue for the purpose of igniting hate and dividing society—and that, instead, there is a thorough expert debate on the correct set-up of the issue with minority rights in mind.

Finally, it is fundamental to highlight that many eventual conclusions will, in due course, depend on the outcome of the war. Perhaps no issue illustrates this better than the geopolitical alignment of young Ukrainians. My interviews confirm that while most young Ukrainians favour the West, this is largely due to a lack of a better alternative rather than to great enthusiasm. It is clear that while support for the European Union and NATO is solid, it is also fragile and should not be taken for granted. In this sense, I am convinced that if Western countries wish to maintain a positive reputation among young Ukrainians, the

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most important step for them is to keep supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia and to strengthen it so that Ukraine can end the war in the most favourable way possible.

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Čorej: What Would Mannheim Say?

024/Were-merely-surviving-Ukrainian-youth-face-significant-decline-to-their-quality-of-life

Résumé

Táto bakalárska práca skúma vplyv rusko-ukrajinskej vojny na ukrajinskú mládež, špecificky sa zameriava na Ukrajincovo vo veku 17 až 25 rokov. Napriek zdanlivo pokojnej atmosfére v Kyjive rozhovory odhaľujú všadeprítomný pocit únavy a hnevu medzi mladými Ukrajincami, ktorý je namierený nielen ruskú vládu a obyvateľstvo, ale aj na medzinárodné spoločenstvo pre nedostatočnú podporu. Cieľom práce je zistiť, či ide o anekdotálnu skúsenosť z centra hlavného mesta, alebo či vojna vytvorila medzi ukrajinskou mládežou osobitnú generačnú identitu, a konfrontovať ich skúsenosti so skúsenosťami starších generácií.

Výskum poukázal na tri základné oblasti, na ktoré sa zameriavajú ukrajinské štúdie po roku 2014 a najmä po roku 2022: sú nimi transformácia národnej identity v dôsledku anexie Krymského polostrova, vojny na východe krajiny a totálnej invázie, geopolitický posun smerom na Západ a jazyková dynamika medzi ruštinou a ukrajinčinou. Vojna tieto otázky zintenzívnila, najmä pokiaľ ide o národnú identitu, pričom mnohí mladí Ukrajinci zažili v dôsledku ruskej vojny značné straty a traumy.

Výskum kládol dôraz na národnú identitu a geopolitické názory, ale často sa prehliadal vek ako rozhodujúci faktor. Práca pritom zdôrazňuje, že hoci boli mladí Ukrajinci vnímaní ako katalyzátori zmien, ich kolektívna identita sa nelíši výrazne od starších generácií. Autor predpokladá, že invázia v plnom rozsahu v roku 2022 by mohla pre túto vekovú skupinu slúžiť ako formatívna skúsenosť, podobná protestom na Euromajdane. Nedomnieva sa však, že mládež vytvorí jednotnú politickú generáciu.

Vo výskume sa využíva prístup zmiešaných metód, ktorý kombinuje kvantitatívne údaje z prieskumov a kvalitatívne rozhovory. Kvalitatívna zložka zahŕňa rozhovory s ôsmimi mladými Ukrajincami z rôznych regiónov s cieľom pochopiť ich pohľad na identitu, jazyk a geopolitické názory.

Zistenia

Z rozhovorov vyplýva, že respondenti majú silný pocit ukrajinskej identity, ktorú charakterizujú ideály boja a jednoty. Mnohí respondenti uvádzajú historické udalosti ako základ ich identity, čo poukazuje na hlboké spojenie s minulosťou Ukrajiny. Názory na generačné rozdiely sú však zmiešané, pričom niektorí sa domnievajú, že

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mladší Ukrajinci sú viac proukrajinskí ako staršie generácie, zatiaľ čo iní nevidia žiadny výrazný rozdiel.

Dynamika jazyka

Vojna výrazne urýchlila posun ukrajinského obyvateľstva smerom k ukrajinskému jazyku, pričom mnohí mladí ľudia ho používajú vo väčšej miere. Regionálne rozdiely však pretrvávajú, najmä medzi východom a západom Ukrajiny. Hoci existuje všeobecný konsenzus, že ukrajinčina by mala byť úradným jazykom, ruština sa stále používa v neformálnom prostredí, najmä na východe.

Geopolitické perspektívy

Mladí Ukrajinci prejavujú opatrnú a pragmatickú podporu členstvu v EÚ a NATO, čo je ovplyvnené vojnou. Hoci sa ich podpora týmto inštitúciám zvýšila, zostáva skôr pragmatická než nadšená. Medzi respondentmi prevládajú obavy z reakcie EÚ na vojnu a z vnímaných slabín NATO.

Politické názory


Mladí Ukrajinci majú rôznorodé názory na prezidenta Zelenského, pričom niektorí vyjadrujú silnú podporu jeho vedeniu počas vojny, zatiaľ čo iní vyjadrujú skepsu voči jeho výkonu mandátu. To odráža širšiu ambivalentnosť voči politickým osobnostiam a inštitúciám.

Záver

Výskum dospel k záveru, že hoci vojna v plnom rozsahu hlboko ovplyvnila mladých Ukrajincov, nemala za následok vznik výraznej generačnej identity. Namiesto toho sú pozorované premeny súčasťou širšej spoločenskej zmeny, ktorá ovplyvňuje všetky vekové skupiny. Zistenia naznačujú, že hoci sú mladí Ukrajinci čoraz viac patriotickí a podporujú západné smerovanie, ich názory sú diferencované a formované skúsenosťami z vojny.

Bakalárska práca zdôrazňuje potrebu pokračujúceho výskumu ukrajinskej mládeže a varuje pred prílišným zjednodušením jej identity ako radikálne odlišnej od starších generácií. Vyslovuje sa za diferencované chápanie otázok jazyka a identity, pričom zdôrazňuje význam inkluzívnosti a uznávania práv menších pri formovaní budúcnosti Ukrajiny.

Appendix 1: Origin Writing Report by GPTZero

 Version 2025-01-09-base		Bratislava International School Of Liberal Arts - 2/13/2025	
AI Report			
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Tomáš Čorej			

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

0. Introduction, Consent, and Biographical Information

- **Introduction:** My name is Tomáš Čorej and I am a Political Science student from Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts in Bratislava, Slovakia. I am thankful to you for participating in my research. The interview will take approximately half an hour. There are no right or wrong answers, I want you to feel comfortable and tell me your honest opinions. If you feel uncomfortable about any question I ask, please, let me know. If you wish to add anything I will not be asking, please, do so. Is everything clear so far?
- **Consent:** Now, could you please state on record that you agree to the interview being recorded, and any summary content or direct quotations from the interview will be anonymized so that only your age, the city you come from, and your gender will be revealed?
- **Biographical Information:** Thank you. In this sense, we can start. Before I begin asking you questions, could you please tell me your name, age, and where you come from?
- **Warm-up:** How would you describe your city to someone who has never been there?

1. National Identity

- **On the influence of family:** Do you remember discussing politics with your family when you were a child? What is your strongest memory of those conversations?
- **On Euromaidan:** Do you have any memories of the events of the so-called Euromaidan? Do you remember what you were doing at the time? Did it influence you?

- **On full-scale war:** Tell me how you perceived the start of the full-scale invasion.
- **On future relations with Russia:** Do you believe that, once the war ends, there is a way to restore relations with Russia?
- **On identity:** We are talking about the fact that you are Ukrainian. But what does that mean to you? When I say that you are Ukrainian, what does it express to you?

2. Language

- **On language behavior:** What language did you speak in your household when you were young? Have your language patterns changed since the full-scale invasion, and if so, how?
- **On the philosophy of language:** On a general level, what does language mean to you? Do you think language is in any way political?
- **On the Russian-speaking culture:** Did you consume Russian or Russian-speaking content before the war? If yes, has that changed or remained the same?

3. Political and geopolitical positions

- **On the European Union:** Do you support Ukraine's membership in the European Union? Has your stance changed in recent years, and if so, how? What is your current view of the EU?
- **On NATO:** Do you support Ukraine's membership in NATO? Has your stance changed in recent years, and if so, how? What is your current view of NATO?
- **On Zelenskyy:** Do you remember the 2019 elections? If so, what did you think of them at the time? Has your opinion on President Zelenskyy changed or remained the same? How would you evaluate his current performance?
- **On the Perception of Generational Differences:** Do you believe that young people, in relation to the questions I have been asking you, have different opinions than those from older age groups?