

How can sociology help us understand the consequences of war?

According to the University of North Carolina, 'sociology is the study of human social relationships and institutions...ranging from... shared beliefs of a common culture and from social stability to radical change.'¹ In this research I will be looking at the Russia-Ukraine war and investigate how the invasion of Ukraine has affected how social solidarity has played a role in fighting Russian aggression. I want to research how British sentiment on the war of Ukraine has affected Russian perceptions. It is important to define what sociology means, as this research focuses on a conflict waged by the Russian military institution against Ukrainian society. Given sociology is the study of human social relationships, I want to see how a war waged can influence societal reactions and how radical change in a foreign country produces solidarity inside countries allied with the invaded country.

In addition, I will be looking at how the war has reinforced a boundary maintenance between the West and Russia. This has therefore increased social solidarity in its support of Ukraine. Boundary maintenance, argued by Durkheim is when a 'crime produces a reaction from society, uniting its members in condemnation of the wrongdoer and reinforcing their commitment to the shared norms and values.'² As society is united in reinforcing shared norms and values, I want to see how people feel about promoting Western values and how this has shown solidarity with Ukraine. Lastly, I would like to see the role of the media and how media coverage in the war differs to others.

I will be taking a functionalist view to the war by taking Park's theory of war from "The Social Function of War: Observations and Notes' 1941. Park outlines multiple functions of war; however, I will be focusing on how war 'generates a stronger sense of social bonding and solidarity'.³

One can find that media coverage on the war in Ukraine has included talk of the 'West.' But what really is the 'West' and what values do they hold? The West is a collective of countries associated with the US and have democratic governments with values such as freedom of press, speech and voting. Countries in the general term 'the West' sprawl across multiple continents: Europe, North America, Japan, Australia.

These shared commitments to their societies such as maintaining democracy, respect for sovereign nations and the freedoms of citizens are what unite these countries together who are colloquially referred to as 'the West'. The invasion of Ukraine has completely flipped the world's international security and disrespected borders and the way of life both socially and economically. These values and commitments are what unite countries together on the international stage. As a result of this there is boundary maintenance as these Western countries are pressured by their populations to uphold their democratic principles. In times of conflict this creates social solidarity to fight a common enemy. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has followed a Western style of governance and has tried to steer away from the authoritarian spotlight.

The values which the UK holds can be compared to NATO's values (an organization the UK is a part of) of 'individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.'⁴ As the UK has been a partner in NATO since 1949 it has had these values for multiple generations. The NATO alliance is a defensive alliance created in fear of Russian aggression due to the start of the Cold War and the ideological struggle between Capitalism and Communism after the end of WW2. Although, the end of the Cold War is argued to have ended since the fall of the USSR, NATO member states have not had a real purpose to live for, however, with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it has re-ignited purpose now.

Why do you think the UK is supporting Ukraine?



Highlighted in red show why respondents think the UK is supporting Ukraine. There seems to be a lot of reasoning in the name of human rights and it being a moral imperative to be involved. This can refer to the UK's commitments to NATO, EU principles (former member) and part of the UN. This links to boundary maintenance as it shows how people are united in reinforcing shared values of democratic values to condemn the actions of an aggressor. Highlighted in green, shows how we are allies with Ukraine. As an evaluative point, in purple, responses refer to containment of Russia and preventing further aggression on other states. This idea of containment can be linked to American foreign policy in which it sought to 'contain' Russian influence; introducing that Ukraine is the West's proxy war against Russia. Therefore, implying that the West aren't united in protecting values but weakening Russia and its military institutions.

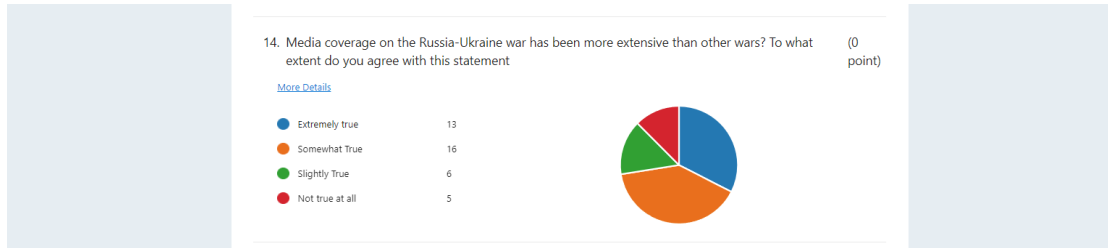
Media

Media institutions play an important role in conveying a country's sentiment. As the media represent the public, there can be a bias in how the media portray and cover a conflict. Western media having freedoms under the name of democracy, these institutions will inevitably see these values as something to defend and carry an obligation to report. Therefore, when a country is threatened, or in this case, invaded, the media and public will look to these countries and give them attention.

Albeit a psychological process unconscious bias according to Imperial College London is a term describing 'associations we hold, outside our conscious awareness'. It can have a 'significant influence on our attitudes and behavior, especially towards other people.'⁵ Societies are composed of a large populous, these processes are engrained into our daily lives. As defined sociology looks at the 'study of human relationships and institutions', therefore, this psychological process very well becomes a part of sociology as people affect international governments, decisions of the EU (its multiple internal institutions), NATO and UN. In the context of the media, news coverage can vary according to our values and to an extent race.

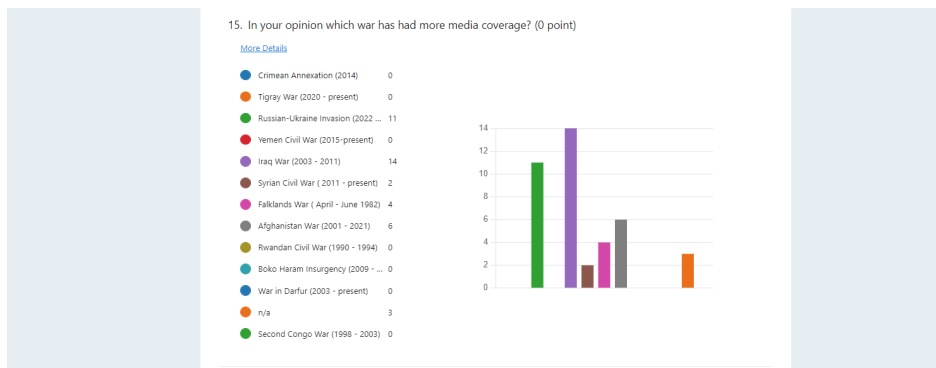
These biases affect how the international community respond. When a country is under attack, nations will respond in solidarity with one another because a boundary is being maintained, as the West

condemn Russian actions and reinforce their values of Western democracies. However, this isn't always the case for other countries and the response isn't as swift.



Using this data, it can infer that there is an element of media bias on the Russia-Ukraine war.

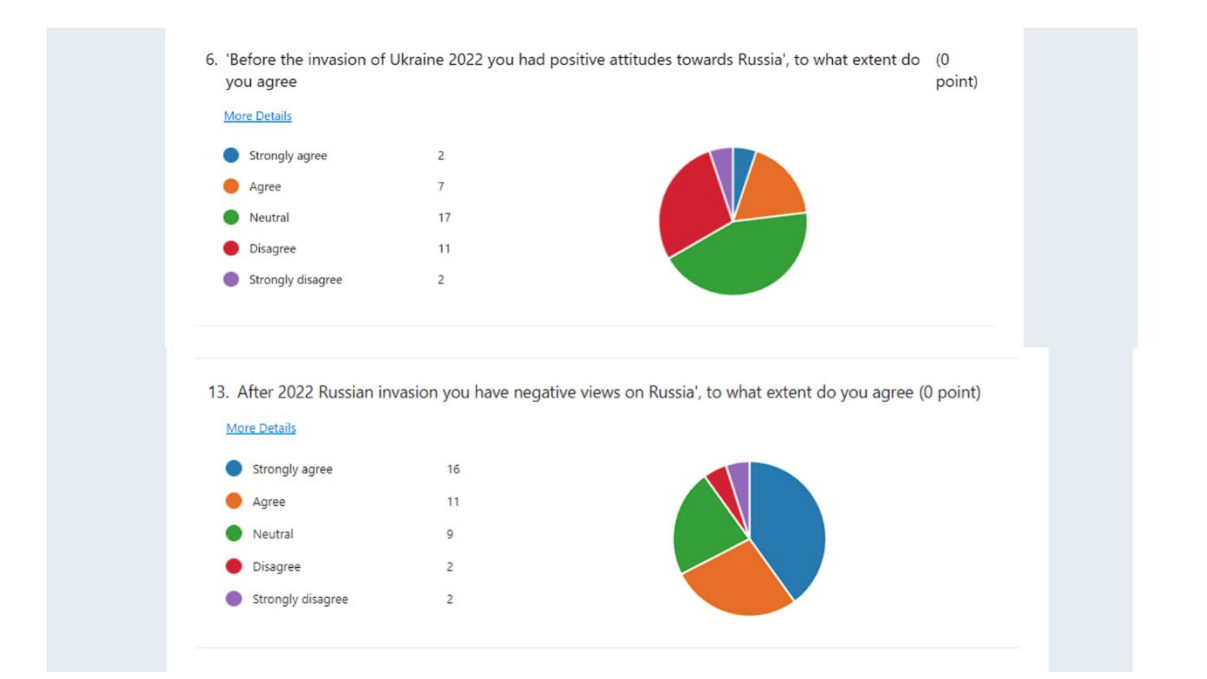
With 40% saying 'somewhat true' and 33% saying 'extremely true' it can suggest that there is some bias in news coverage. This coverage can be linked to how there are shared values between the West and Ukraine.



This data shows people's opinions in what wars have been given more media coverage. In order the wars perceived to be given most media coverage is the following: Iraq, Russia-Ukraine, Afghanistan, Falklands, Syria. Considering the limitation of this data as it depends on how old the respondents are and what other major news events occurring in the same time period, shows that the media cover wars which involve the UK. As the UK is a part of the West and organisations such as NATO and former EU member it implies that boundary maintenances occur as a consequence of war if one's country's values are threatened or security such as 'WMD' in Iraq. In addition, wars such Tigray which have seen estimation of '500,000 {dying} from war and famine' ⁶ are arguably more relevant when talking about human life. Secondly, the Yemen Civil War where 'over 20.7million people in need of humanitarian assistance' ⁷ and 'estimated 233,000 deaths, including 131,000 from indirect causes.' ⁸ All of these wars got 0 responses in people's opinions of media coverage. Not to say this is the ignorance of the public, but of the media as the media is the institution in charge of providing reliable and trustworthy information on global conflicts.

This implies that although the consequences of war can be far reaching to those in Yemen and Tigray there isn't a boundary maintenance because the public don't see their values being threatened by outside state actors. In further support of this claim taking data from the Economist Intelligence Unit which have compiled an index on the how democratic countries are based on multiple factors it can suggest why the latter is the case. Ethiopia is considered authoritarian with an index of (2021) 3.30 - 4.72 (2006). With Yemen being ranked authoritarian and an index of (2021) 1.95 - 2.98 (2006)⁹

As said, these countries are both authoritarian and won't support the values and principles of democratic societies. Consequently, why would the media cover a conflict if there aren't shared values. Moreover, there is the argument for this potentially being linked with identity and race. Virgil Hawkins, PhD in International Public Policy argues that 'Wars in Africa are of little interest to the West because they are happening to people too far away, who are too different, living in countries that are not 'important' enough'¹⁰ This shows how there are reasons regarding social factors (democratic values), to a degree race and whether these nations are economically valuable enough to receive attention. As Park sees war generates a stronger sense of social solidarity this goes against the evidence as the media seem to be absent according to Q15. This shows there is sometimes an unconscious bias. Arguably, this unconscious bias is due to how the media see nations whether it be because of their close ties with the West (Ukraine being a NATO ally) and predominantly white population. As a result, the media will give these nations more solidarity and consequently reinforce a boundary maintenance as seen from the West's harsh economic sanctions and military assistance. This doesn't necessarily mean that Western people are racists, however, with colonial ties in Europe especially and racism being a problem for centuries, in the context of war and sociology this bias can unfortunately be a consequence of how the media and people see wars and what they are aware of.



This data shows the comparison of views before and after the invasion. This data provides some evidence of a boundary maintenance occurring. This is because there is a change in perception on Russia with 'invasion' being in mind. Although this question doesn't refer to values and social solidarity, it can show how people's perceptions change due to radical change.

Here I obtained qualitative data. In this there was a clear change in perception not on Russia but between the Russian population and leadership, most referencing Putin himself.

Attitudes Before

Feel sorry for them.	The citizens are under strict control of Putin even if they disagree with what he says or does	Fearful of the leadership, its intentions and the implications for the well-being of neighbouring countries as well as its own citizens.
Sympathy		
Feelings about the country and feelings about the leadership are two different things. Open-minded about the country.		Rogue átate
Previous poisonings, false imprisonments and previous invasions of areas of Ukraine reported in the media meant that I already had a negative attitude towards Russia. Some of my close friends are Russian so my view is also based on their personal experiences.		Negative - based on previous military responses, politics, LGBT rights
concern for lack of democracy, great affection for Russian people, admiration for culture	Untrustworthy	Cautious
Great country	positive	Very poor, Putin is a dictator and a nutcase
Reserved, my father was Russian so I felt indebted to him for what he went through. He was a Russian Jew		Mistrustful
		Cautious
	Often associated with the Cold War, a form of dictatorship	Never had strong feelings about Russia but never really agreed with them politically

This data shows how respondents are aware that Russian people and Russian leadership are very isolated. Before the invasion, there was some emphasis on the people and positive attitudes towards their culture and country. Whereas, when talking about Russian leadership most of it is to do with their intelligence services such as U.S. election interference, LGBT rights, and poisonings.

Attitudes After

Very negative towards the people in power of Russia not Russian people and a whole		Putin is dangerous	Bully, self centred, delusional, oppressive
I sympathise with the citizens who have been forced to join the military and have not been able to escape	Russian leadership needs to be overhauled. The Russian civilians are largely unaware/unable to grasp the realities of what is happening.	Russian leadership needs to be overhauled.	The same. I believe that Vladimir Putin's actions are completely unjustified and that he is to blame and not Russia.
No changed but still sympathy for the majority of Russians		The leader is at fault, not the people	Putin and the machinery of government and state control is awful
The invasion or politics of those invading are not the politics or beliefs of all Russians. We should be careful not to tarnish the multitudes of peace-seeking Russians with the same brush as those who seek to create fear and hatred by this war.		Negative	
I feel sorry for the many many people who are being forced into a war they do not want to be involved in. People need to understand it's not Russia as a whole who are bad but the Kremlin and oligarchs who have all the power.	Poor; but split opinion between the leaders and the people; as reports state that Russians don't want the war.	Negative- don't see the need for conflict in this day and age	The Russian gov is bad at the moment
Negative to the regime not the people		People need to understand it's not Russia as a whole who are bad but the Kremlin and oligarchs who have all the power.	Very negative towards the people in power of Russia not Russian people and a whole
		More wary than before	
		Even more negative	Nothing wrong with the country. attitude has changed towards the leadership

Post invasion, there has been a considerable shift between the Russian people and leadership. Now there is a lot of sympathy for the Russian people and that most Russians are not to blame for the war. On the other hand, Russian leadership has focused on Putin specifically and his control over Russia. In addition, any past suspicion towards Russia before the invasion have been reinforced.

Internationally, condemnation of Russia has seen Finland and Sweden handing in official letters of application to join NATO.¹¹ This shows how there is the fear of military aggression of with countries bordering Russia.

Domestically the war has created a social solidarity even in the Russian populous. Most attention now is on Putin himself and his tyranny over Russia. Moreover, there does appear to be boundary maintenance in Russia itself in which Russian population has condemned the invasion of Ukraine. According to the UN, 'some 2377 demonstrators have been arrested.'¹² These arrests were in response when the Russian Federation announced partial mobilization. The consequences of war and solidarity of Ukraine doesn't just point to condemnation of Russia but show a shared universal value of peace as seen domestically among the Russian population. As shown through the data, a lot of respondents talk about Russian people being dragged into a war which they don't want. This tells us that in times of war, even the aggressor has levels of solidarity within one's populous. Boundary maintenance isn't just something the West is conveying but also elements in Russian society. As noted in responses, people are weary of the Russian leadership, not the people, in fact sympathy is expressed. This implies how the Russia-Ukraine war is Putin's war, not Russia's.

In conclusion, we have explored how the media play a role in war and how values affect social solidarity. In both studies of crisis in Europe and Africa, there appears to be an overwhelming response to Russia-Ukraine war, however, little spotlight on on-going wars in Yemen and Ethiopia, where the physical consequences of war are more devastating. On a more depressing note, unfortunately an element of race and "importance" affects how the public and media see the consequences of war.

There is always a boundary to maintain when it costs a life, but it depends how close it hits home.

Footnotes

1. <https://sociology.unc.edu/undergraduate-program/sociology-major/what-is-sociology/>
2. [https://app.memrise.com/course/359883/a2-sociology-crime-and-deviance-unit-4-aqa/2/#:~:text=Boundary%20Maintenance%20\(Durkheim\),is%20to%20reaffirm%20society%27s%20rules.](https://app.memrise.com/course/359883/a2-sociology-crime-and-deviance-unit-4-aqa/2/#:~:text=Boundary%20Maintenance%20(Durkheim),is%20to%20reaffirm%20society%27s%20rules.)
3. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-socialproblems/chapter/16-1-sociological-perspectives-on-war-and-terrorism/>
4. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_68144.htm#:~:text=NATO%20strives%20to%20secure%20a,and%20the%20rule%20of%20law.
5. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/equality/resources/unconscious-bias/>
6. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-tigray-war-has-seen-up-to-half-a-million-dead-from-violence-and/>
7. <https://gho.unocha.org/yemen>
8. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078972>
9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index
10. <https://newint.org/features/2012/09/01/media-war-coverage>
11. <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/finland-sweden-accession>
12. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2022/09/arrests-russia-protests-over-troop-mobilization>

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