Conflict and Nation-Building:
The Case of the 2014 Russia-Ukraine War

Serhii Abramenko, Rome Economic Doctorate
Vasily Korovkin, UPF
Alexey Makarin, MIT

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What is the impact of armed conflict on national identity?

Conceptual Framework

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- Reasons for **Polarization**:
    - In-fighting for reduced resources
    - External conflict actors may stoke divisions and separatism
    - External conflict actors may be linked to a specific ethnolinguistic group in the country

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  - 47% spoke Ukrainian, 40% spoke Russian
  - 40% were in favor of joining the EU, 35% were against
    - Correlated with language

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- Russia tried to exploit these identity differences by spreading several narratives
  - "Crimea's breakaway and the Donbas war were due to pro-Russian separatists"
  - "Russian language and identity were threatened in Ukraine"
  - "Pro-European parts of Ukraine had far-right views"

Data

- OMNIBUS survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), 2008–2020
    - Nationally representative repeated cross-section
    - 53 quarterly survey waves; more than 103,000 responses
    - Consistent question on the gradient of ethnicity ("nationality") from Ukrainian to Russian
    - Consistently recorded language used during surveys: Ukrainian, Russian, or a mix

- We analyze only government controlled territories.

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    "I will ask you to answer one more question about nationality, in order to record it as accurately as possible. This is because some people consider themselves to belong to two nationalities at the same time. Please look at this card, and tell me which of these statements, more than the others, corresponds to your opinion of yourself."

    I consider myself...
    1 – Only Ukrainian
    2 – Both Ukrainian and Russian, but more Ukrainian
    3 – Equally Ukrainian and Russian
    4 – Both Russian and Ukrainian, but more Russian
    5 – Only Russian"

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Empirical Strategy

1. Simple before-after comparison

   - Increase in 'only Ukrainian' and 'only Russian' identities? (**Polarization**)

   - Uniform shift toward Ukrainian identity? (**Consolidation**)

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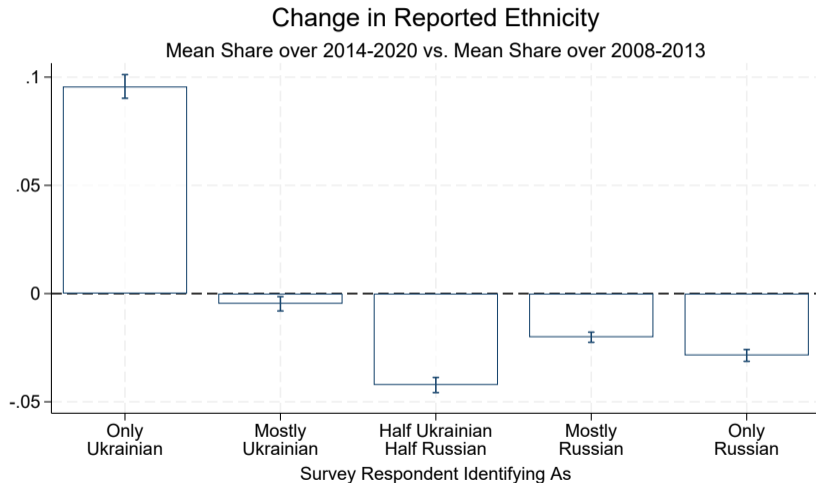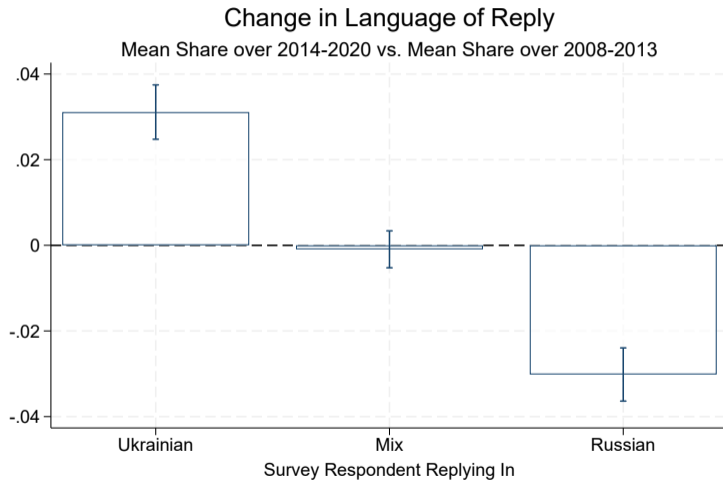   - Uniform shift toward Ukrainian identity? (**Consolidation**)

2. Difference-in-differences

   - Shift toward Russian identity, or a weaker shift toward Ukrainian identity, in more ethnolinguistically Russian areas? (**Polarization**)

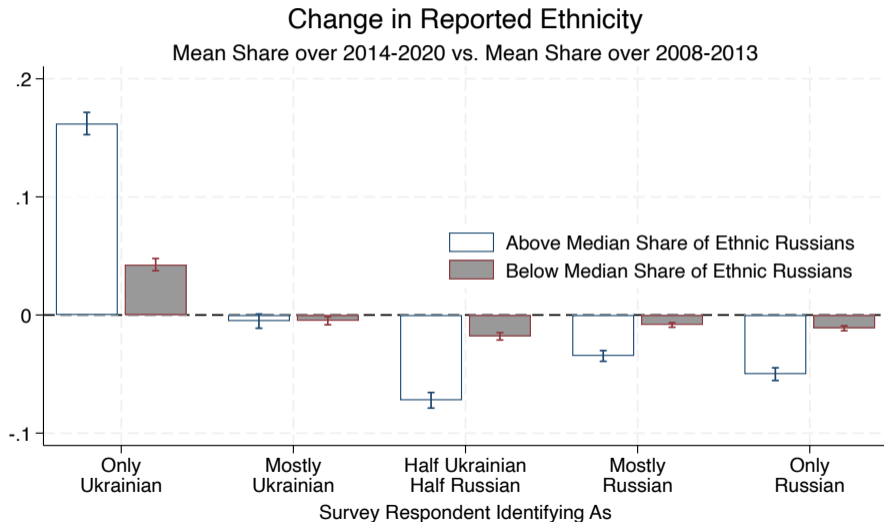   - Stronger shift toward Ukrainian identity in more ethnolinguistically Russian areas? (**Consolidation**)

Pre-Post Change in Reported Ethnicity

Change in Reported Ethnicity

Mean Share over 2014-2020 vs. Mean Share over 2008-2013

Pre-Post Change in Language Used

Change in Language of Reply

Mean Share over 2014-2020 vs. Mean Share over 2008-2013

Survey Respondent Replying In

Difference-in-Differences Strategy: Illustration

Change in Reported Ethnicity

Mean Share over 2014-2020 vs. Mean Share over 2008-2013

Legend:
- Above Median Share of Ethnic Russians
- Below Median Share of Ethnic Russians

X-axis (Survey Respondent Identifying As): Only Ukrainian, Mostly Ukrainian, Half Ukrainian Half Russian, Mostly Russian, Only Russian
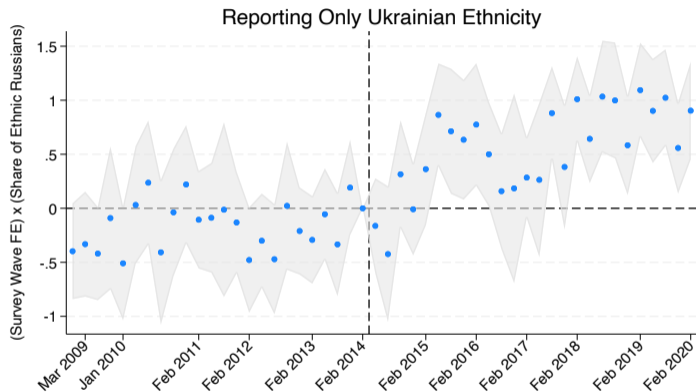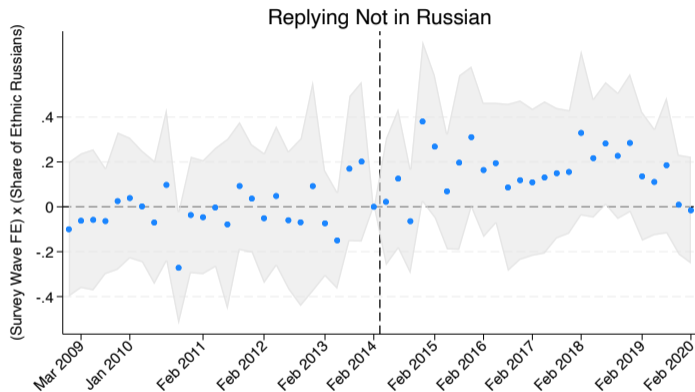
Difference-in-Differences Strategy

$$\text{Identity}_{irt} = \beta_t \times \text{Ethnic Russians}_{r,2001} + X_{irt}\delta + \alpha_r + \gamma_t + u_{irt}$$

- Identity$_{irt}$ — a measure of identity of individual i from rayon r in survey wave t
- Ethnic Russians$_{r,2001}$ — share of ethnic Russians in rayon r
- α_r, γ_t — rayon and survey wave fixed effects
- X_{irt} — individual-level (e.g., sex, age) and rayon-level (e.g., share of displaced individuals) controls

- **Identifying assumption:** Absent the conflict, respondent identity in rayons of different ethnic composition would have evolved along parallel trends, conditional on common rayon and time shocks.

Reporting Only Ukrainian Ethnicity

- **Accelerated consolidation** after the start of the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict

Replying Not in Russian

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Conclusion

- What is the role of conflict in nation-building?

- Consolidation or polarization?

- In the uniquely suitable context of Ukraine after the 2014 Russia-Ukraine armed conflict, survey and social media data show **accelerated consolidation** of Ukrainian identity

Appendix

Potential Concerns ◁

- Migration
  - More than 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict.
  - Pro-Ukraine individuals could have been more likely to migrate within Ukraine (vs. to Russia).
  - **Response:** We control for the number of IDPs per population.

- Selection
  - Regardless of migration, perhaps only pro-Ukraine individuals agreed to interviews.
  - **Response:** (i) We control for individual-level characteristics; (ii) results are similar in a cohort-based panel; (iii) no effect on an indicator of 'no response' to the question of ethnicity.

- Ceiling effect
  - There was naturally less space for any increase in Ukrainian ethnicity in the West of Ukraine.
  - **Response:** (i) Our strategy would still be able to capture polarization if it was happening; (ii) results hold after omitting areas in Western Ukraine or areas within the top quartile of Ukrainian ethnicity; (iii) results hold using a Tobit regression.

Baseline Estimates ⊙

VARIABLES	(1) Self-identifying as only Ukrainian	(2) Self-identifying as only Ukrainian	(3) Not replying in Russian	(4) Not replying in Russian
Post Feb 2014 × Share of Ethnic Russians	0.710*** (0.0909)	0.558*** (0.116)	0.162*** (0.0452)	0.138** (0.0580)
Observations	87,751	87,272	95,666	95,117
R-squared	0.245	0.251	0.572	0.577
Controls	No	YES	No	YES
Rayon FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Wave FE	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Controls include province-level real GDP per capita, province-level CPI, rayon-level ratio of refugees to population, rural indicator, and individual characteristics, including sex, age, and education level. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the rayon level. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

- 0% → 25% ethnic Russians $\implies$ ↑ 13.8 pp likelihood of identifying as 'only Ukrainian' & ↑ 4 pp likelihood of not replying in Russian post-Feb 2014

Baseline Estimates: Likert Scale of Ethnicity ◀

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
		Respondent is self-identifying as:			
	Only Ukrainian	More Ukrainian	Half Ukrainian	More Russian	Only Russian
Post Feb 2014 × Share of Ethnic Russians	0.558***	0.00934	-0.275***	-0.0862**	-0.207***
	(0.116)	(0.0450)	(0.0938)	(0.0353)	(0.0371)
Observations	87,272	87,272	87,272	87,272	87,272
R-squared	0.251	0.058	0.118	0.060	0.081
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Rayon FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Wave FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Controls include province-level real GDP per capita, province-level CPI, rayon-level ratio of refugees to population, rural indicator, and individual characteristics, including sex, age, and education level. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the rayon level. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$