



Civic Space Country Report

# Ukraine: Measuring civic space risk, resilience, and Russian influence in the lead up to war

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Ukraine's civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia's February 2022 invasion. The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics in the region, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors.

Although Russia's aggression has undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Ukraine for years to come, the insights from this profile are useful to: (i) illuminate how the Kremlin exploits hybrid tactics to deter resistance long in advance of conventional military action; and (ii) identify underlying points of resilience that enabled Ukraine to sustain a whole-of-society resistance to the Kremlin's aggression. Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Ukraine, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Ukraine accounted for the fourth largest volume of restrictions (494 recorded instances) initiated against civic space actors in the E&E region, trailing Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The majority of restrictions of civic space activity documented between January 2017 and March 2021 were in the form of harassment or violence (85 percent), followed by state-backed legal cases (8 percent), as well as newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (7 percent). Forty percent of instances of violence or harassment throughout the entire period were carried out by separatist authorities in Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk, or Russian occupiers in Crimea. Nine restrictions involved foreign governments, including Turkey (2), Azerbaijan (2), and

Russia (5). The lion's share of these restrictions occurred in just two years, 2017 and 2018, coinciding with the imposition of Russian law in Crimea and protests following the arrest of Mikheil Saakashvili. There was a marked downturn in restrictions against civic space actors documented between 2019 and 2021, coinciding with the election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Ukrainians were demonstrating, donating, volunteering, and helping strangers at much higher levels in 2021 than seen the decade prior, though interest in politics remained muted. In 2020, two-thirds of Ukrainians reported they were disinterested in politics and a mere quarter of the population had confidence in their government, political parties, and the parliament. This disenchantment with organized politics stands in sharp contrast with a substantial uptick in reported participation in other forms of civic life. Over 40 percent of Ukrainians said they had or would join a demonstration in 2020 (+26 percentage points since 2010) and reported higher levels of membership in nearly every voluntary organization type, with the largest gains among churches, art organizations, and self-help groups. In 2021, 47 percent of Ukrainians reported donating to charity, 24 percent volunteered with an organization, and over 75 percent reported helping a stranger—charting Ukraine's highest civic engagement score in a decade.
- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** The Russian government channeled financing and in-kind support via four Kremlin-affiliated agencies to seven Ukrainian and Crimean recipient organizations via five civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 and August 2021. Legislative and executive branch restrictions of Russian-backed organizations in Ukraine in the years prior to the invasion likely inhibited the Kremlin from relying as heavily on this channel of influence, relative to the volume of activity seen in other countries. Regardless, the thematic focus of the Kremlin's support was consistent with elsewhere in the region: mobilize pro-Russian sympathizers, stoke discontent with Kyiv, and create a pretext for Russian intervention. Consistent with these aims, Kremlin support prioritized youth "patriotic" education, Eurasian integration, and increased autonomy for regional governments, particularly in the eastern oblasts. As

documented in profiles on the Russia-occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, the Kremlin also backed additional pro-Russian groups in the Donbas.

- **Russian State-run Media:** Ukraine attracted 55 percent of all Russian state-run media outlets' mentions across the E&E region related to specific civic space actors and five keywords of interest (NATO, U.S., EU, West, democracy). Between January 2015 and March 2021, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Ukrainian civic actors 5,993 times. Media organizations, nationalist paramilitary groups, and political parties were the most frequently mentioned domestic actors. Coverage by Russian state media highlighted far-right groups to stoke concerns of rising neo-Nazism; vilified ethnic Crimean Tatar organizations and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a threat to conservative values; and criticized Kyiv's mistreatment of foreign journalists to discredit the Ukrainian government. These Kremlin mouthpieces were even more prolific with regard to democratic rhetoric, mentioning NATO, the U.S., the EU, the West or democracy 6,563 times during the same period, with coverage concentrated around significant events in Ukrainian civic life (the one-year anniversary of the Odessa Trade Union House fire, 2017 restrictions on Russian banks and social media sites, and the 2019 Ukrainian presidential elections) as well as broader international stories (Crimea sanctions, the 2018 Kerch Strait incident, EU and NATO membership prospects, and the U.S.-Ukrainian alliance) as vehicles to proliferate pro-Russian messages.

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## A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms should not be

construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are de facto authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the Ukrainian government in Kyiv. Or, when we analyze the de facto authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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# 1. Introduction

It is hard to imagine Vladimir Putin, on the cusp of invading Ukraine in February 2022, viewing his odds of success as anything other than inevitable. Yet, more than one year later, the Kremlin's victory is anything but certain. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the Kremlin severely underestimated the bravery and resilience of the Ukrainian people. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was an important part of this story, but the willingness of the average Ukrainian citizen to mount a whole-of-society resistance to Putin's aggression also played a decisive role in overcoming the odds. As we show in this country report, the seeds of this solidarity began much earlier, with Russia's 2022 invasion only adding fuel to the fire of an increasingly energized Ukrainian citizenry.

There is a broader lesson here that reverberates far beyond Ukraine: investing early in a robust civil society is not just an optional "extra" but fundamental to a society's ability to deter, withstand, and repel the destructive intent of an external aggressor in times of peace and war. It is therefore critical for policymakers and practitioners to have better information at their fingertips to monitor the relative health of civil society across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks in the face of autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad.

Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).<sup>1</sup> In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Ukraine from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.<sup>3</sup> Here

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<sup>1</sup> The 17 countries include: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

<sup>3</sup> This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade



we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org) which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Ukrainian civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

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unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.

Although Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Ukraine for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three respects. By taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin’s patient investment in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action. Second, by examining both domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides new appreciation for underlying points of vulnerability and resilience that serve as the foundation for Ukraine’s ability to mount and sustain a whole-of-society resistance to the Kremlin’s aggression. Third, the comparative aspect of these indicators lends itself to drawing lessons learned about bolstering resilience to malign foreign influence with relevance for other E&E countries.

Table 1. Quantifying Ukrainian Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors  (January 2017–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="630 1507 1377 1577">● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors</li> <li data-bbox="630 1598 1438 1724">● Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution</li> <li data-bbox="630 1745 1438 1850">● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism</li> </ul>

<p>Citizen attitudes toward civic participation space</p> <p>(2010–2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions</li> </ul>
<p>Russian state financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators</p> <p>(January 2015–August 2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country</li> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country</li> </ul>
<p>Russian state media mentions of civic space actors or democratic rhetoric</p> <p>(January 2015–March 2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Ukraine by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>● Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Ukraine by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>● Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West” in Ukraine by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>● Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West” in Ukraine by Russian state-owned media</li> </ul>

*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Ukraine’s domestic civic space and vulnerability to Russian influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered in the subsequent analysis.*

## 2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Ukraine

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (de jure) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (de facto). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this likely has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in Ukraine over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Ukrainians engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2). Ukraine accounted for the fourth largest volume of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in the E&E region during the reporting period, driven by high instances of harassment or violence in 2017 and 2018.<sup>4</sup> There was a marked downturn in such restrictions of civic space actors between 2019 and 2021, coinciding with the election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In parallel, Ukrainians were demonstrating, donating, volunteering, and helping strangers at higher levels in 2021 than seen the decade prior. We delve into greater detail about these trends and other developments in Ukraine's domestic civic space in the remainder of this section.

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<sup>4</sup> The top three countries with the highest volume of recorded restrictions of civic space actors were Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan.

## 2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Ukraine: Targets, Initiators, Trends Over Time

Between January 2017 and March 2021, we documented 494 known restrictions of Ukrainian civic space actors (Table 2), most frequently instances of harassment or violence (85 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (8 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (7 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction.

The volume of these restrictions were unevenly distributed and decreased over the time period, particularly following the April 2019 election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (Figure 1). Thirty-seven percent of cases were recorded in 2017 alone, coinciding with two key events—the imposition of a Russian law in Crimea that restricted “missionary activity” in April 2017, and the arrest of Mikheil Saakashvili and ensuing protests. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly available information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 3).<sup>5</sup>

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Ukrainian Civic Space Actors

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021–Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence, excluding Crimea & Donbas	80	80	43	38	7	248
Harassment/Violence in Crimea	59	32	20	11	3	125
Harassment/Violence in Donbas <sup>6</sup>	19	17	5	1	3	45
Restrictive Legislation	12	9	6	6	1	34
State-Backed Legal Cases	14	11	3	10	4	42
Total	184	149	77	66	18	494

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Ukraine, disaggregated by type and year. Since the legitimacy of de facto authorities in Crimea and the*

<sup>5</sup> As in other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of harassment of, violence toward, and restrictions of civic space actors in Ukraine.

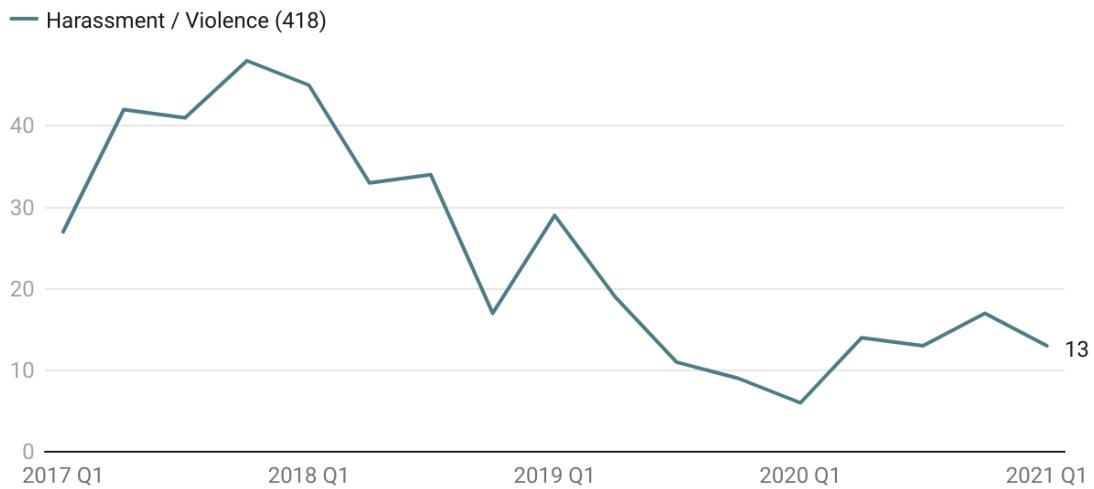
<sup>6</sup> AidData’s profiles on Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk offer a more in-depth analysis of civic space in the Donbas region of Ukraine.

Donbas are contested, we have categorized all instances of restriction (including restrictive legislation and legal cases) in the occupied territories as "harassment/violence." Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Ukraine

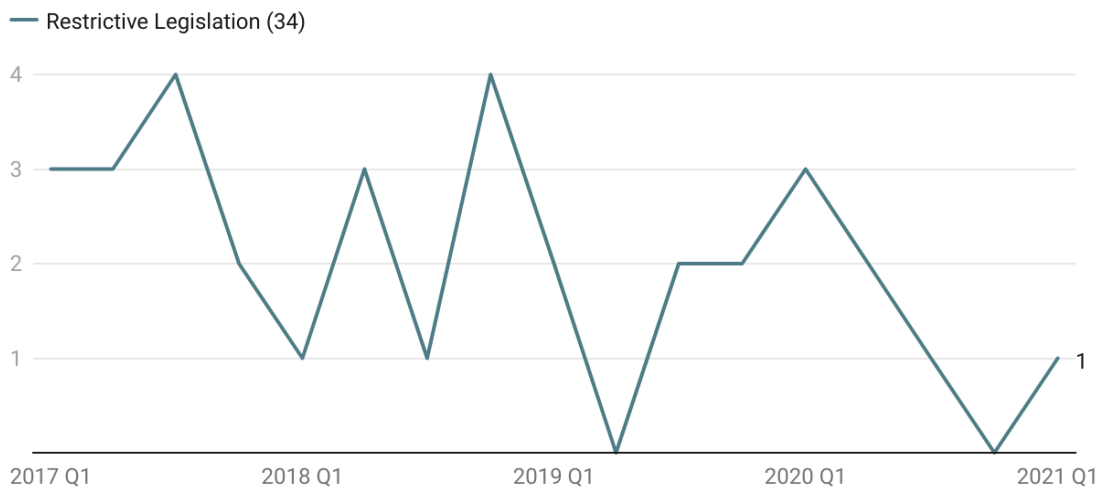
Number of Instances Recorded

Harassment / Violence



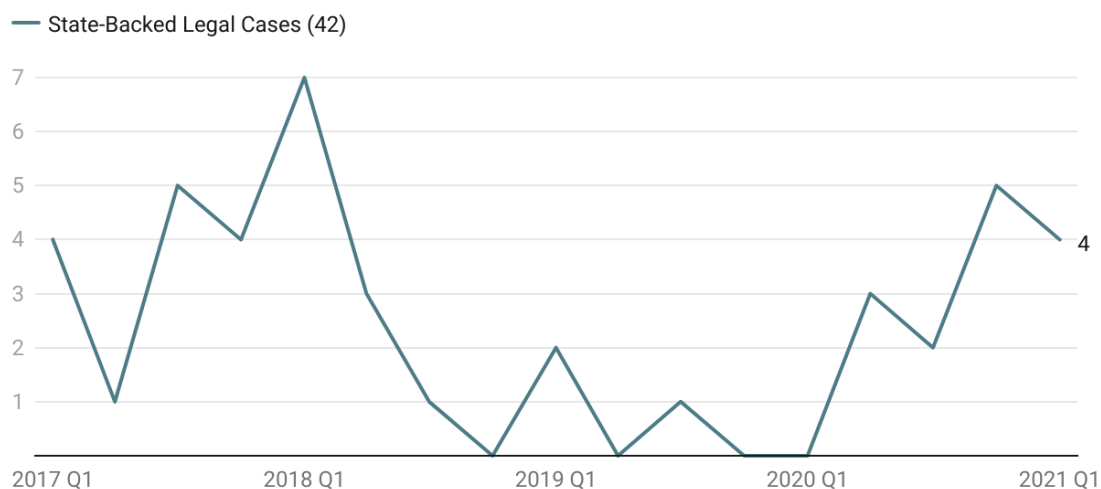
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Restrictive Legislation



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## State-Backed Legal Cases



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## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Ukraine

January 2017	Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatist rebels, fighting in eastern Ukraine, accuse each other of disrupting a fragile truce declared in December.
April 2017	Imposing Russian law in Crimea, the Prosecutor's Office only allows religious organizations registered with the authorities to perform missionary activities.
July 2017	The EU ratifies Ukraine's association agreement, set to begin September 1.
May 2018	Vladimir Putin opens a bridge linking southern Russia to Crimea, an action Ukraine calls illegal.
November 2018	Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko declares martial law after Russia seizes three of Kyiv's navy vessels near the Kerch Strait.
January 2019	With support from the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Ukraine sets up its own Orthodox Church, breaking ties with Russian ecclesiastical supervision.
April 2019	Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a television comedian and political novice, wins a presidential runoff with more than 70 percent of the vote, defeating Poroshenko.
July 2019	The Servant of the People Party wins Parliamentary elections, marking the first time that the President's party has a majority in Ukrainian parliament.

March 2020	Former businessman Denys Shmyhal is appointed Prime Minister with a mandate to stimulate industrial revival and improve tax receipts.
June 2020	NATO recognizes Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner.
September 2020	The Russian Federation holds "elections" in the occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.
February 2021	Zelenskyy orders sanctions against oligarchs, notably Viktor Medvedchuk, chairman of Ukraine's largest pro-Russia political party and a close friend of Putin.

*Notes: The above charts visualize instances of civic space restrictions in Ukraine, including in Crimea and the Donbas, disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of Ukraine. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Over one in every three instances (40 percent) of violence or harassment was carried out by separatist authorities in Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk, or by the Russian occupying authorities in Crimea against the Crimean Tatars or a church. The Ukrainian government was the second-most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 157 recorded mentions (Figure 2). Members of community groups—including the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other churches in Russia-occupied Crimea—were frequent targets of restrictions (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 48 restrictions and there were some incidents involving unidentified assailants (53 mentions). Due to how the indicator was defined, the initiators of state-backed legal cases are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or those clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official).

Of the nine instances of restriction which involved a foreign government, two were associated with Turkey, two with Azerbaijan, and five with Russia.

- Following the failed coup in Turkey in 2016, Yusuf Inan, a Turkish blogger, was accused of "trying to discredit some political figures and state officials in Turkey by carrying out a perception operation on social media."<sup>7</sup> He was detained by the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) in July

<sup>7</sup> France24.com. Ukraine arrested Turkish blogger for Ankara: police. July 17, 2018. via Factiva



2018. In October 2019, a woman was attacked by Turkish Embassy staff in Kyiv, as she protested Turkish military action in Syria, outside their compound.

- Two incidents involving Azerbaijan pertained to the arrest and extended detention of Fikret Huseynli, a Dutch journalist of Azerbaijani origin. He was arrested at Boryspil International Airport near Kyiv in October 2017, based on an Interpol alert issued by Azerbaijan's government.
- Among the instances that involved the Russian government, three were cases being investigated by, and tried in, Russian courts against Ukrainian citizens. The fourth instance was the September 2019 extradition request against Amkhad Ilayev, a Russian citizen seeking political asylum in Ukraine. The most violent among these instances was the assassination of Denis Voronekov, a former Russian lawmaker who defected to Ukraine and aired damning criticism of Russia's leadership. He was gunned down in broad daylight in the heart of Kyiv in 2017.

Figure 4 breaks down the targets of restrictions by political ideology or affiliation in the following categories: pro-democracy, pro-Western, and anti-Kremlin.<sup>8</sup> Pro-democracy organizations and activists were mentioned 87 times as targets of restriction during this period.<sup>9</sup> Pro-Western organizations and activists were mentioned 75 times as targets of restrictions.<sup>10</sup> There were also 162 instances where we identified the target organizations or individuals to be explicitly anti-Kremlin in their public views.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> These tags are deliberately defined narrowly, such that they likely understate rather than overstate selective targeting of individuals or organizations by virtue of their ideology. Exclusion of an individual or organization from these classifications should not be taken to mean that they hold views that are counter to these positions (i.e., anti-democracy, anti-Western, or pro-Kremlin).

<sup>9</sup> A targeted organization or individual was only tagged as pro-democratic if they were a member of the political opposition (i.e., thus actively promoting electoral competition) and/or explicitly involved in advancing electoral democracy, narrowly defined.

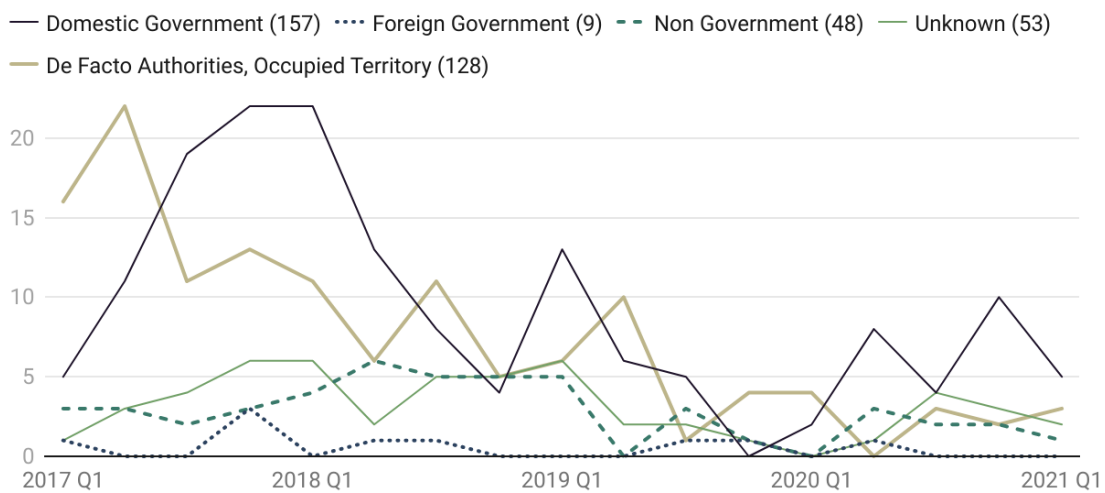
<sup>10</sup> A tag of pro-Western was applied only when there was a clear and publicly identifiable linkage with the West by virtue of funding or political views that supported EU integration, for example.

<sup>11</sup> The anti-Kremlin tag is only applied in instances where there is a clear connection to opposing actions of the Russian government writ large or involving an organization that explicitly positions itself as anti-Kremlin in ideology.

It should be noted that this classification does not imply that these groups were targeted because of their political ideology or affiliation, merely that they met certain predefined characteristics. In fact, these tags were deliberately defined narrowly such that they focus on only a limited set of attributes about the organizations and individuals in question.

Figure 2. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Ukraine by Initiator

Number of Instances Recorded  
Harassment/Violence

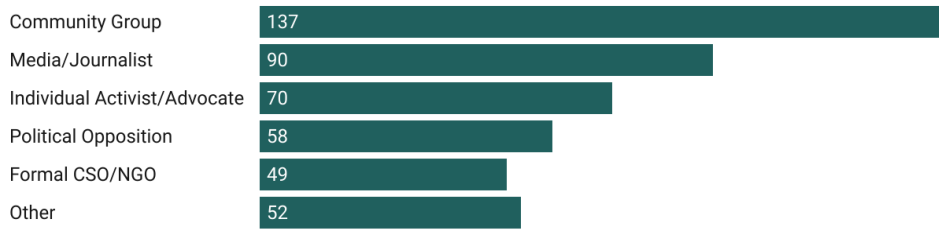


Created with Datawrapper

Notes: The figure visualizes recorded instances of harassment/violence of civic space actors in Ukraine, including in Crimea and the Donbas, categorized by initiator. If an instance of violence or harassment targeted multiple groups, it is counted for each group. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 3. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Ukraine

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017 - March 2021



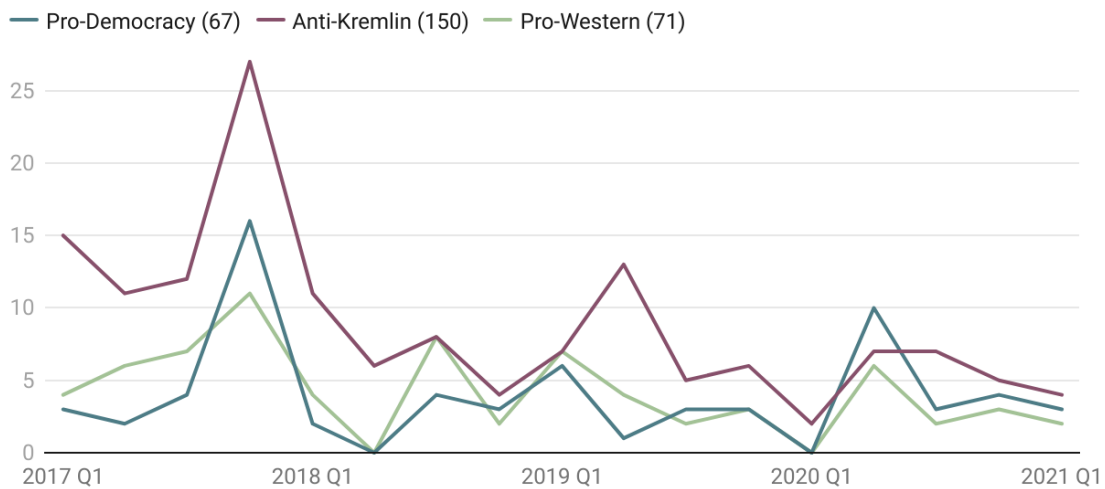
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*Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence of civic space actors in Ukraine, as well as in Crimea and the Donbas, disaggregated by the group targeted. If an instance of violence or harassment targeted multiple groups, it is counted for each group. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Figure 4. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Ukraine by Political or Ideological Affiliation

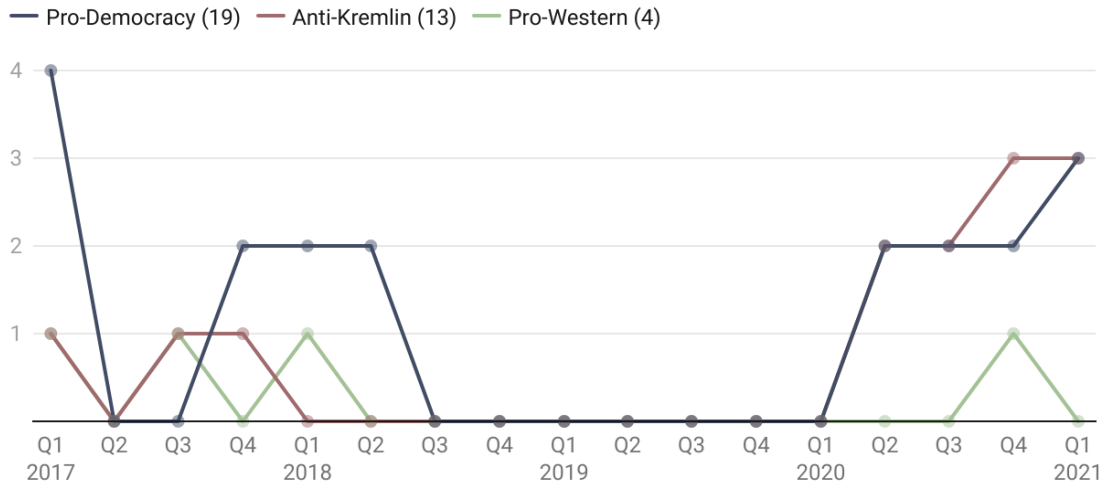
Number of Instances Recorded

Harassment / Violence



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## State-Backed Legal Cases



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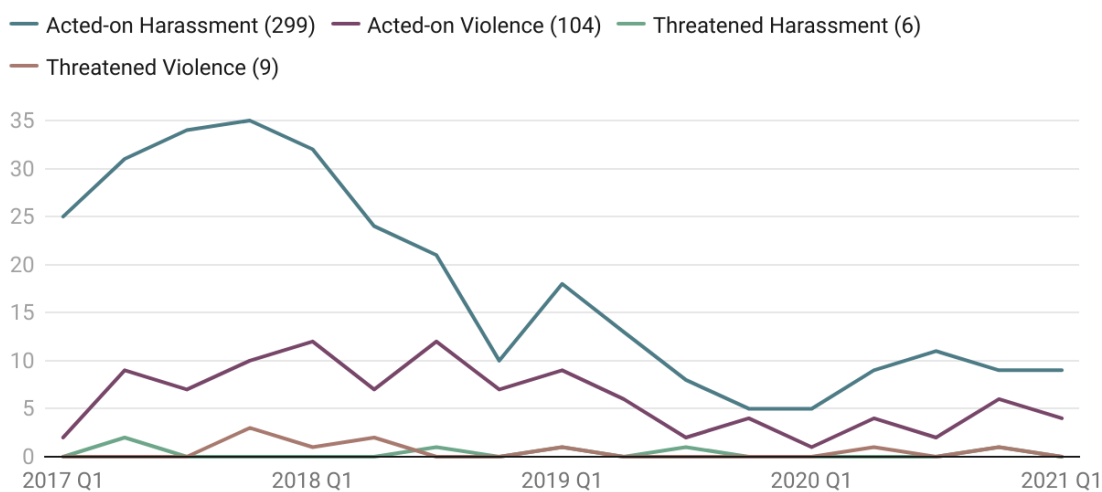
*Notes: These figures visualize instances of harassment/violence and restrictive legislation initiated against civic space actors in Ukraine, including in Crimea and the Donbas, categorized by whether targets were known to be “pro-democracy,” “pro-Western,” or “anti-Kremlin,” as manually tagged by AidData staff. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (6 threatened, 299 acted upon) of civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (9 threatened, 104 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these instances (96 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However, since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 5). Of the 418 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (71 percent).

Figure 5. Threatened versus Acted-On Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Ukraine

Number of Instances Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment/violence against civic space actors in Ukraine, including in Crimea and the Donbas. For definitions, please refer to the associated methodology document. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation in Ukraine (34) are important to capture, as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees, or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors (either subgroups or in general). Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

Taking a closer look at instances of restrictive legislation, the Ukrainian government constrained civic space in three respects: (i) the media; (ii) the Church; and (iii) the Russian language. Ukraine’s legislative practices in the realm of civic space highlight the trade-offs that government leaders sometimes face in balancing competing priorities, such as protecting citizens from the Kremlin’s

malign foreign influence operations on the one hand, while still preserving space for citizens to exercise their basic rights to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear. On the surface, one could read these examples of restrictive legislation as an effort to strengthen Ukraine's resilience in the face of Russian hybrid warfare tactics or circumscribe civic space for the public good.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, these same laws applied indiscriminately can deter opposition or stoke discontent among populations that self-identify on the basis of shared language, culture, or religious ties. In fact, several of the examples below raised concern among domestic civil society and international watchdogs for these very reasons. As discussed in Section 3, it appears likely that the Kremlin did indeed exploit unease and disenfranchisement to some of these pieces of legislation as an entry point for influence in Ukraine.

**Media restrictions:** Decrees on cybersecurity and information security were introduced in Ukraine in February 2017, calling for legal mechanisms to block, monitor, and remove content deemed threatening to the state. This was followed by at least nine identified instances of drafting, reviewing or passing laws that imposed strict sanctions on the media. In June 2018, the Committee on Security and Defense approved a bill that would allow the government to block any website for 48 hours without court authorization. In January 2020, the Ukrainian Disinformation Bill gave the state the mandate to impose large penalties (from sizable fines to seven years imprisonment) for spreading false information. Activists expressed concern over the breadth and ambiguity of these laws which allow the authorities to determine what constitutes a threat or disinformation, such that the laws could be used to selectively harass government critics.

**Religious restrictions:** Although the Orthodox Church in Ukraine officially separated from the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a law in December 2018 obliging the Church to state in its title that it is subordinate to Russia.<sup>13</sup> In January 2019, the Ukrainian

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<sup>12</sup> When faced with threats such as an invasion or a pandemic, leaders may choose to circumscribe civic space for the public good, such as in the name of public safety or national defense.

<sup>13</sup> In other words, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP).

parliament passed a bill on religious communities, amending an existing law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" to regulate the flow of parishes and other Church property from the old Ukrainian Orthodox Church (under the Moscow Patriarchate) to the newly established one. The laws were controversial, as religion is a sensitive aspect of identity, and Russian state-owned media fanned the flames of local discontent by portraying the legislation as promoting Russophobia (see Section 3).

**Language restrictions:** In April 2017, the parliament reviewed a bill that would oblige local media outlets to produce at least 75 percent of their content in the Ukrainian language. The bill invited criticism that it constituted a gag on media freedom and could be perceived as promoting Russophobia. When coupled with laws adopted in January 2020 which regulated Russian language instruction and use in Ukrainian schools, a sizable portion of the Ukrainian population felt disenfranchised. Language, like religion, is a resource of the community and is inextricable from identity.<sup>14</sup> Although this was likely intended to curb the Kremlin's campaign for influence, it may have had the unintended consequence of decreasing public trust in government (see Section 2.2), particularly among Russian-speaking minorities.

Civic space actors were the targets of 42 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2017 and March 2021 (Table 3), the highest volume occurring in 2017. The most frequent example of cases brought by the government of Ukraine involved individuals accused of sympathizing with Russia or opposing Ukraine. Often, the defendants' social media posts were presented as evidence of their crimes. As shown in Figure 6, 60 percent of the charges were tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). Thirty-eight percent of the charges were categorized as indirect nuisance charges (e.g., abuse of power, tax evasion) similar to those often used by regimes throughout the region to discredit the reputations of civic space actors. There was one instance where the nature of the charge was coded as "unknown," as there was insufficient information to make the determination.

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<sup>14</sup> Tabouret-Keller, A. (11 August 2017). Language and Identity. *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781405166256.ch19>

## Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Ukraine

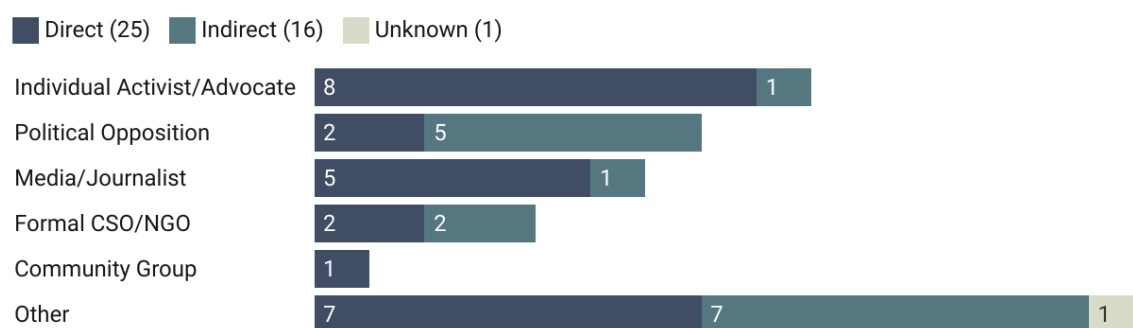
Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	6
Political Opposition	7
Formal CSO/NGO	4
Individual Activist/Advocate	9
Other Community Group	1
Other	15

*Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Ukraine, disaggregated by the targeted group. This excludes entries related to Russia-occupied Crimea and Donbas, where all entries regardless of type were categorized as harassment/violence. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Figure 6. Direct versus Indirect State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Ukraine

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: Bar chart of the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Ukraine, disaggregated by targeted group (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other) and the nature of the charge (i.e., direct or indirect). This excludes entries related to Russia-occupied Crimea and Donbas, where all entries, regardless of type, were categorized as harassment/violence. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine and Factiva Global News Monitoring*



## 2.2 Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Ukraine

Prior to the Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine had seen declining levels of confidence in government, political parties, and the parliament over the past decade, along with consistently low reported interest among Ukrainians in politics. However, Ukrainians' disenchantment with organized politics stands in sharp contrast to a substantial uptick in their reported participation in other forms of civic life—from increased involvement in demonstrations to growing levels of membership in voluntary organizations, charitable donations, and helping strangers. In this section, we examine how Ukrainians' interest and engagement in politics, along with less political forms of civic participation, evolved between 2010 and 2021 in the lead up to the outbreak of a hot war with Russia.

### 2.2.1 Interest in Politics, Willingness to Act, and Membership in Voluntary Organizations

In 2011, two-thirds of Ukrainian respondents to the World Values Survey (WVS) said they were disinterested in politics (Figure 7). An even larger majority (72-88 percent) said they would never take part in political activities such as petitions, boycotts, demonstrations or strikes (Figure 8). Respondents were most likely to have joined a demonstration—but even then, only 14 percent reported doing so. By 2020, there was a movement towards greater political participation—over 40 percent of Ukrainian respondents said they either had participated or would consider participating in a petition or demonstration (Figure 8)—even as a majority remained disinterested in politics (-3 percentage points).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the 2020 WVS wave here and throughout the profile refers to the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021 (EVS/WVS Wave 2017–2021), which was conducted in Ukraine in the year 2020. For more information, see Section 5.

As elsewhere in the region,<sup>16</sup> Ukrainians' greater willingness to demonstrate may be inspired by seeing large turnouts in response to the 2013–14 Euromaidan protests and the March 2020 protests in Kyiv, as citizens gathered in defiance of a COVID-19 lockdown to rally against President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's perceived concessions to Russia.<sup>17</sup> Relatedly, this could also speak to greater capacity among Ukrainian civil society to engage in advocacy and mobilize the involvement of citizens in mass movements, as described by the CSO Sustainability Index (CSOSI).<sup>18</sup> Yet, Ukraine was not the only country to report an uptick in political participation over the past decade. Other E&E countries not only caught up but ultimately surpassed Ukrainian involvement in protests, boycotts, and petitions by 2020 (Figure 9).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sharp increases in citizens' willingness to demonstrate were also observed following Montenegro's 2019–20 Clerical Protests and Armenia's 2015 Electric Yerevan. Although subsequent movements did not reach the scale of previous mass protests, the share of respondents who would consider joining a protest in the future generally increased.

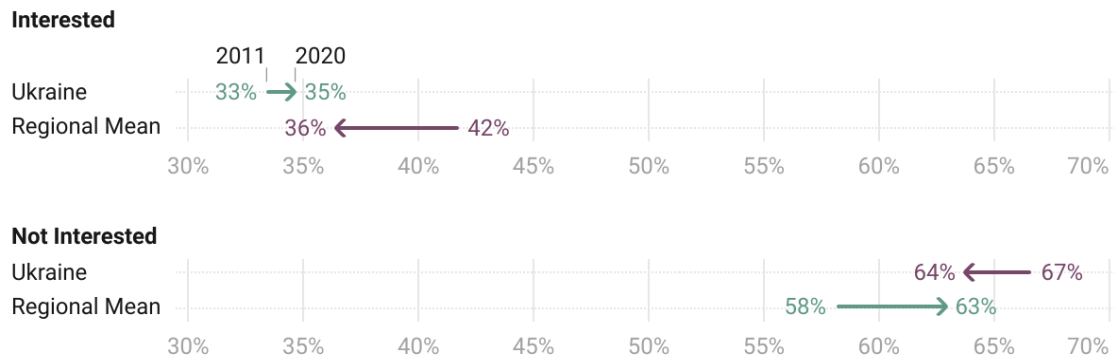
<sup>17</sup> Notably, the 2020 WVS was conducted in Ukraine just four months after the March 2020 protests. Andrew E. Kramer. (2020, March 17). "Anti-Russian protests erupt in Ukraine, despite a virus threat." New York Times (Online). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/world/europe/anti-russian-protests-erupt-in-ukraine-despite-virus-threat.html>

<sup>18</sup> The CSOSI reported that CSO capacities for advocacy in Ukraine were higher in 2020 than in 2011. 2020 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (2021). USAID. Retrieved from <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2020-report.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> In 2011, the share of Ukrainian respondents who engaged in public political action exceeded the regional mean for the E&E region, as well as levels in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Tajikistan. By 2020, Ukraine's regional peers reported higher rates of participation in all activities but strikes. Notably, Ukrainian respondents had an extremely high rate of non-response to these questions on the Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 and so the results may underreport actual practice.

Figure 7. Interest in Politics: Ukrainian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents



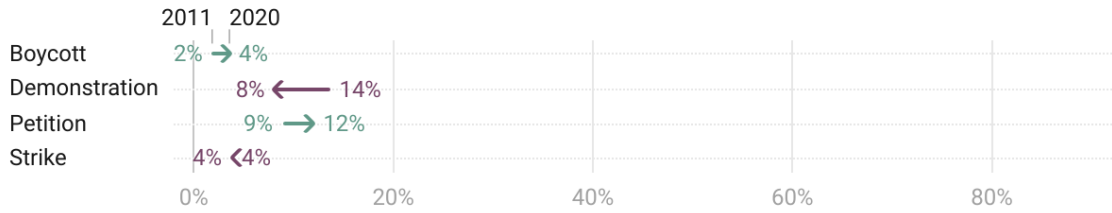
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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Ukrainian respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2011 and 2020, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021.

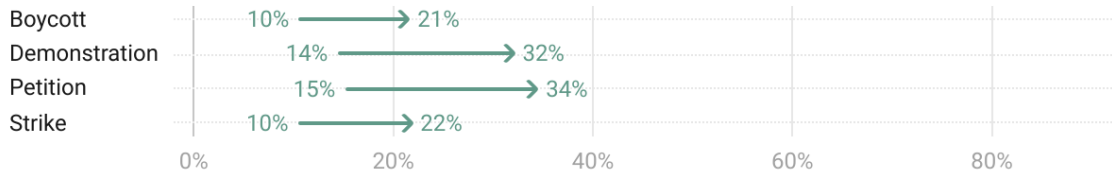
Figure 8. Political Action: Ukrainian Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2011 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents

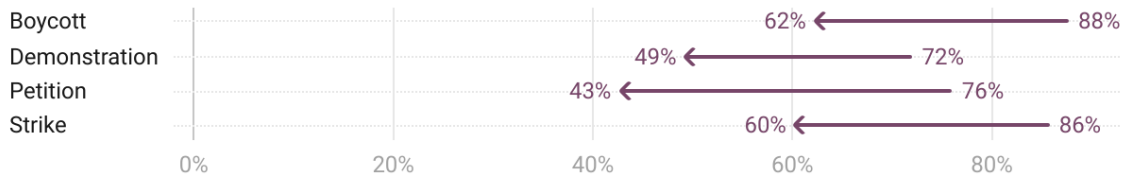
**Have done**



**Might do**



**Would never do**

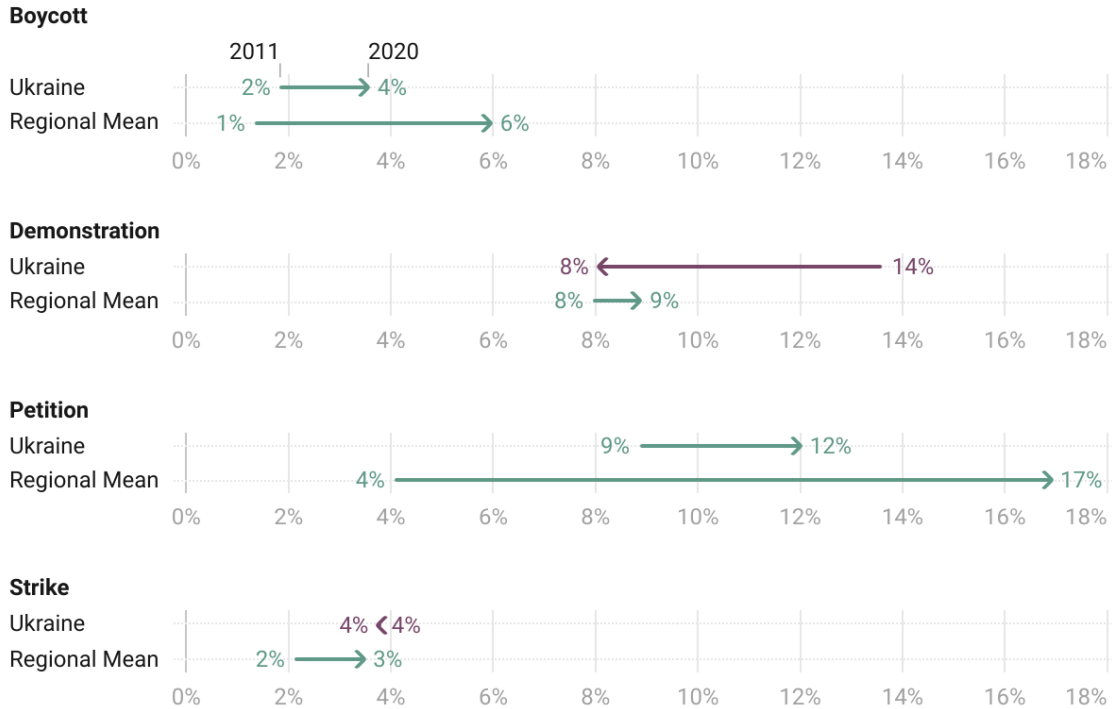


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Ukrainian respondents that reported past participation in four types of political action as well as their future willingness to do so. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011), and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021.

Figure 9. Political Action: Participation by Ukrainian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Ukrainian respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action in 2011 and 2020, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021.

Beyond increased involvement in political activities, a growing share of Ukrainians became members of voluntary organizations over the last decade. In 2011, labor unions and churches were the most popular membership organizations in the country, with 12-14 percent of Ukrainian respondents participating (Table 4).<sup>20</sup> By 2020, Ukrainians reported higher levels of

<sup>20</sup> As the WVS research team provided an estimated error rate on this wave of the survey of 2.6 percent, the difference in participation rates between labor unions and churches in 2011 may not be significant. Religious institutions had a more influential role in Ukraine’s civic space compared to the region as a whole, as churches were the only type of organization whose membership exceeded the regional average by 2 percentage points. Ukraine’s political parties were weaker than average, trailing their peers by 2 percentage points.

membership in nearly every organization type,<sup>21</sup> with the largest gains among churches (+27 percentage points), art organizations (+9 percentage points), and self-help groups (+7 percentage points). Notably, Ukrainians' expanded engagement in voluntary organizations far outstripped comparable participation rates among their regional peers. Ukrainians' participation in religious groups exceeded regional membership by 16 percentage points, while Ukraine's art, environmental, and self-help organizations exceeded the mean by 5 percentage points each.

At the start of the period, Ukrainians' low levels of membership in organizations was matched by similarly low confidence in the country's institutions overall. In 2011, 44 percent of Ukrainians were confident in their institutions, trailing the regional average by 11 percentage points. However, this average obscures a deeper crisis of confidence particularly in government, parliament,<sup>22</sup> and political parties which were each distrusted by three-quarters or more of Ukrainians (Table 5). There was greater optimism about other institutions, with churches and religious institutions,<sup>23</sup> environmental organizations, the press, and the military each trusted by the majority of respondents.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The only organization type that saw a small decrease in the share of respondents claiming membership was labor unions (-1 percentage point).

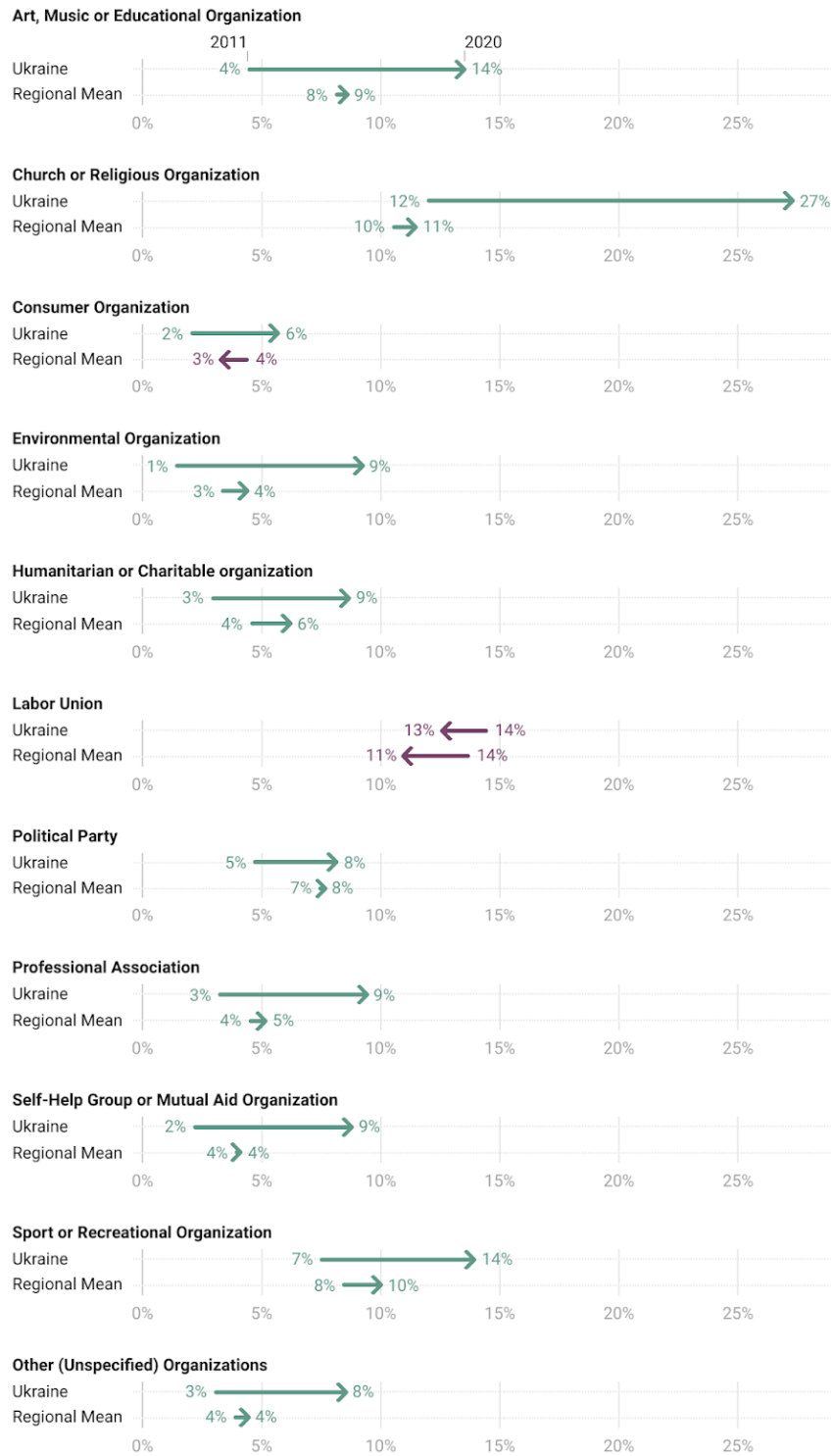
<sup>22</sup> Confidence in Ukraine's parliament was not only lower than in any other institution in the country, but it also trailed the average regional confidence in parliaments by 30 percentage points.

<sup>23</sup> The WVS did not specify specific denominations but rather questioned respondents on religious organizations more generally.

<sup>24</sup> Ukrainians were more confident in their media and religious institutions than the region (by 4 and 6 percentage points, respectively).

Figure 10. Voluntary Organization Membership: Ukrainian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Membership



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure highlights the changes in Ukrainians' membership in key categories of voluntary organizations from 2011 to 2020, as compared to regional peers. For further details, see Table 4 below. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021.*

Table 4. Ukrainian Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2011 and 2020

Voluntary Organization	Membership, 2011	Membership, 2020	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	11.9%	27.3%	+ 15.4
Sport or Recreational Organization	7.4%	13.9%	+ 6.5
Art, Music or Educational Organization	4.4%	13.5%	+ 9.1
Labor Union	14.5%	12.5%	- 1.9
Political Party	4.6%	8.1%	+ 3.5
Environmental Organization	1.3%	9.2%	+ 7.9
Professional Association	3.2%	9.4%	+ 6.2
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	2.8%	8.7%	+ 5.8
Consumer Organization	2.0%	5.7%	+ 3.7
Self-help Group, Mutual Aid Group	2.1%	8.8%	+ 6.7
Other Organization	3.0%	8.5%	+ 5.5

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Ukrainian respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2011 versus 2020. Sources: The World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021.*

Although membership in voluntary organizations and confidence in public institutions often go hand-in-hand elsewhere in the region, this was not the case in Ukraine. Even as Ukrainians reported higher membership levels in nearly all types of voluntary organizations in 2020, their confidence in their country's institutions plummeted across the board, with the exception of the military.<sup>25</sup> The press (-23 percentage points), labor unions (-19 percentage points), and

<sup>25</sup> The military was the single exception to this rule, attracting an increase in confidence by 12 percentage points in 2020 compared to 2011.



environmental organizations (-17 percentage points) saw the largest declines in public confidence.

At least some of these attitudes may be influenced by the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014 and its aftermath, as the Kremlin's increasingly aggressive use of hybrid tactics in the military and information spheres long preceded the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that came in February 2022. Ukrainians were highly confident in their military even prior to the onset of the 2014 conflict; however, six years of constant warfare against separatist fighters in the Donbas rallied even more of the country behind its armed forces, even in the face of losses.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, Ukrainians' confidence in their media plummeted by 23 percentage points to 30 percent in 2020, possibly reflecting concerns about the vulnerability of the country's press in the face of the Kremlin's second front of attack<sup>27</sup>—a proliferation of disinformation and cyber operations—over the past decade.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ukraine's subsequent losses to Russian-backed fighters in Crimea and the Donbas did not appear to have shaken Ukrainian confidence; instead, the growing number of families with ties to soldiers who fought on the front lines likely deepened the connection citizens felt with their soldiers. This strong support and trust in the military may also partly explain the willingness of Ukrainian citizens to join civil defense forces in early 2022. McDonald, B., Al-Hlou, Y., Dubchak, A., & Khavin, D. (2022, February 7). 'I have to come back home': In the trenches with Ukraine's soldiers. *New York Times* (Online), Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/europe/100000008195176/ukraine-russia-trenches.html>; Sreenivasan, H., Jengnaradze, A. & Tevzadze, M. (2022). Ukrainians are training in civil defense, just in case. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ukrainians-are-training-in-civil-defense-just-in-case>

<sup>27</sup> For more, see

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/disinformation-about-russias-invasion-ukraine-debunking-seven-myths-spread-russia\\_en?s=166](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/disinformation-about-russias-invasion-ukraine-debunking-seven-myths-spread-russia_en?s=166).

<sup>28</sup> As a case in point: the 2020 CSOSI (Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index) noted that several of Ukraine's media outlets ran negative information campaigns about CSOs and civil activists, which was the impetus for several civic groups to launch the Media Fuflo project to counter this phenomenon and publish a list of the worst offenders. While the list did not directly link these media outlets to Kremlin support, targeted harassment of activists likely aids the Kremlin's goal of weakening Ukraine's civic space. 2020 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. (2021). USAID. Retrieved from <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2020-report.pdf>

Table 5. Ukrainian Confidence in Key Institutions, 2011 and 2020

Institution	Confidence, 2011	Confidence, 2020	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organizations	75.2%	69.6%	- 5.6
Military	58.7%	70.7%	+ 12.0
Environmental Organizations	55.7%	38.6%	-17.1
Press	53.0%	29.6%	- 23.4
Labor Unions	39.2%	20.6%	- 18.6
Government	25.3%	18.9%	-6.4
Political Parties	22.1%	17.8%	-4.3
Parliament	20.5%	17.9%	-2.6

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Ukrainian respondents that reported confidence in various categories of institutions in 2011 and 2020. Sources: The World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021.*

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

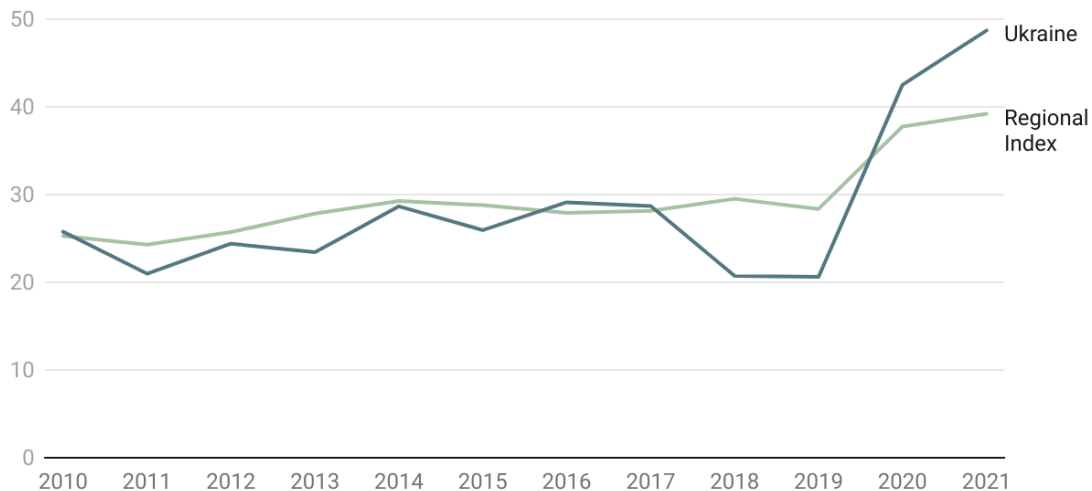
The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Ukrainian citizens' attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2021. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering with organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>29</sup> Overall, Ukraine charted its highest civic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021) period, with corresponding lows in 2011–13 and 2018–19. Donating to charity and helping strangers appeared to be the two key index components driving the overall index score. Although economic performance was correlated with civic engagement scores in several other countries in the region, that did not appear to be the case in Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you: Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month? Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a "yes" answer. The country score is then determined by calculating the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

<sup>30</sup> Charity correlates with GDP (constant Ukrainian Hryvnia) at -0.570,  $p = 0.233$ ; volunteering correlates with GDP at 0.498,  $p = 0.420$ ; and helping a stranger correlates with GDP at -0.147,  $p = 1.000$ .

Towards the start of the period (2011–2013), Ukraine’s civic engagement score trailed the regional average, at 23 to 26 points, respectively (Figure 11). During this three-year period, 8 percent of Ukrainian respondents reportedly gave money to charity, 25 percent volunteered at an organization, and 36 percent helped a stranger.<sup>31</sup> Ukraine’s civic engagement scores saw a 6-point increase in 2014 in the aftermath of the Maidan Revolution and the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War. This increased civic engagement was largely driven by an uptick in charitable donations to 38 percent, even as the share of Ukrainians volunteering decreased to 13 percent and those helping a stranger remained static.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 11. Civic Engagement Index: Ukraine versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows how scores for Ukraine varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2021, as compared to the regional mean. Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2021.*

The timing of this increase in charitable donations coincides with growing concerns in Ukraine regarding Russia’s military ambitions, as the Ukrainian Army

<sup>31</sup> Ukraine trailed the regional mean for donating by an average of 9 percentage points, which pulled Ukraine’s Civic Engagement Index score below average, despite exceeding the mean for volunteering by 4 percentage points.

<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that during this wave of the GWP, Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk were excluded from the sample due to the conflict. This reduced the total Ukrainian sample by roughly 10%.

raised \$13 million in private donations following the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014, and many other campaigns emerged to support servicemen and the displaced.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the corresponding decrease in Ukrainians volunteering with organizations raises the question of why this grassroots mobilization in response to war did not necessarily translate from the pocketbook to how Ukrainians spent their time.

It is possible that the answer to this apparent dissonance may lie with how the question was framed in the Gallup World Poll, which asked about “volunteering with an organization.” Respondents may have interpreted this as not including joining mass protest movements or enlisting with the army to defend Ukraine’s borders. Notably, the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for that same year reported a dramatic growth in of volunteerism in support of the Euromaidan protests, families of the Heavenly Hundred,<sup>34</sup> and defending the eastern borders of Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

Ukraine’s civic engagement receded again in 2018–19, before rallying in the wake of not one but two crises—the 2020 arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>36</sup> and the 2021 buildup of troops by Russia.<sup>37</sup> The country’s 2020 index improved 22 points compared to the previous year and climbed another 6 points in 2021 (Figure 11). In 2021, 47 percent of Ukrainians reported donating to charity, 24 percent volunteered with an organization, and over 75 percent reported helping a stranger. This upward trend in scores is consistent with improving civic engagement around the world as citizens rallied in response to COVID-19, even in the face of lockdowns and limitations on public gatherings; however, it

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<sup>33</sup> Hundreds of thousands engaged in protests and spawned or joined numerous new political and self-help groups, including the campaigns to support Ukraine’s soldiers on the front lines. 2014 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (2015). USAID. Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/europe-urasia-civil-society/2014>

<sup>34</sup> Civilians killed during the Euromaidan protests.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Reuters COVID-19 tracker: Ukraine.

<https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/ukraine/>

<sup>37</sup> Kramer, A. E. (2021, April 19). In Russia, a military buildup that can't be missed. International New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/world/europe/russia-ukraine-troops.html>; Helene Cooper, & Julian E. Barnes. (2021, May 5). 80,000 Russian troops remain at Ukraine border as U.S. and NATO hold exercises. New York Times (Online). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/us/politics/biden-putin-russia-ukraine.html>. The timing of the GWP survey in July 2021 would not have captured the full effects on Ukrainian public sentiment of Russia escalating the military standoff in the fall and winter.

remains to be seen whether this initial improvement will be sustained in the future. Although respondents were not asked why they engaged in their country's civic space, the timing of the GWP survey in July 2021 likely meant that the Kremlin's buildup of 80,000 soldiers on the border in April of that year was top of mind, and there is precedent for similar upswings in civic engagement coinciding with Russian provocations.<sup>38</sup>

Despite serious threats to Ukraine's sovereignty and security in the face of the Kremlin's intensifying aggression, there is reason to believe that the country's civic space will continue to be an important source of resilience and resolve. The Maidan Revolution may have created space for Ukrainian civic actors to emerge, but communities choosing to support each other during the Russo-Ukrainian War and the War in Donbas have fueled the sustained growth of a variety of forms of civic engagement. It remains to be seen whether and how the Kremlin's military aggression changes perceptions of Ukrainians about their own government in the future. Distrust of government and political parties has worsened since 2011 and likely suffocates citizens' interest in politics, which has remained static. Working to rebuild public trust in government and interest in political processes will likely be important to the long-term sustainability of Ukraine's civic space and its ability to endure beyond response to immediate crises.

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<sup>38</sup> Russian military aggressions are certainly not new, with the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014 over the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea and the conflict over the Donbas preceding the dramatic escalation of hostilities that led to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

### 3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Ukraine

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. While these tools can be used independently, Ukraine is a sobering example where we can see with the benefit of hindsight how the Kremlin employed these instruments of power to soften the ground for conventional military force.

In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in Ukraine (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2). Notably, the Kremlin's involvement in Ukraine's civic space differed somewhat from its interactions with other countries in the E&E region, even before Russia's full-scale military invasion in February 2022. Ukrainian political leaders, in the face of Russia's financial and military support for separatist militias in the Donbas and the annexation of Crimea,<sup>39</sup> passed legislation and took executive actions (Section 2) to scrutinize the activities of Russian actors, close Russian centers, and otherwise curb the Kremlin's influence within their borders. Ukraine's crackdown on Russian cultural centers came both from the bottom up (e.g., the local Lviv council evicting the Russian Pushkin Society from its center on Korolenko street in 2016)<sup>40</sup> and the top down (e.g., President Zelenskyy's April 2021 sanctions and operational

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<sup>39</sup> In Crimea, the Kremlin illegally installed a full government apparatus.

<sup>40</sup> Viktoria Prychid. (2016, October 27). Lviv regional authorities in Ukraine evict Russian cultural center. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/lviv-regional-authorities-in-ukraine-evict-russian-cultural-center/a-36179097>

restrictions of Rossotrudnichestvo's offices and eviction of the Russian State Agency from the country).<sup>41</sup>

In practice, these crackdowns likely inhibited the Kremlin's ability to replicate in Ukraine one of its common influence tactics from elsewhere in the region: channeling financing and in-kind support to pro-Russian civic actors. This may be why we captured relatively few instances of Russian support to Ukrainian civic space actors or regulators between January 2015 and August 2021,<sup>42</sup> though the Kremlin backed pro-Russian groups in the Donbas.<sup>43</sup> Instead, the Russian government doubled down on another of its tools in Ukraine—international broadcasting—in a bid to influence public attitudes. In fact, Ukraine alone accounted for over half (55 percent) of the nearly 23,000 mentions of civic space actors or democratic rhetoric by two Russian state media outlets across the E&E region between January 2015 and March 2021. We delve into greater detail about these channels of Kremlin influence in Ukraine's civic space in the remainder of this section.

### 3.1 Suppliers of Russian State-Backed Support to Ukrainian Civic Space

Although there were fewer documented instances of the Kremlin channeling financing and in-kind support to civic space actors in Ukraine (Figure 12) as compared to other E&E countries, the five examples captured were noticeably

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<sup>41</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia. Decree of the President of Ukraine no.140/2021, (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1402021-38381>

<sup>42</sup> A few important caveats. First, we do not go into depth regarding the ways in which Russia's installation of an occupying government in Crimea likely interferes with civic space, though this is discussed in part in Section 2, with regard to instances of violence and harassment initiated by occupying authorities. Second, given the emphasis on civic space, we exclude mentions of direct military support as outside of our inquiry, even as Russian support to separatists undoubtedly affects the broader environment within which civic actors operate.

<sup>43</sup> In sum, pro-Russian military groups in the self-declared Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) received financial support from the Kremlin to engage in anti-Ukraine propaganda activities and to ameliorate a budget deficit. The regional arm of Spanish-charitable organization Good Cause also received in-kind support to deliver humanitarian aid. In parallel, Russia channeled event support and political training to students and employees from two labor organizations in the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)—the Trade Union of Education and Science Workers of the [so-called] Donetsk People's Republic and GOUVPO "Donetsk Academy of Management and Civil Service under the Head of the [so-called] Donetsk People's Republic."

consistent in their thematic focus with broader regional trends. Specifically, Russia’s support to Ukrainian and Crimean civic space actors between 2015 and 2021 prioritized youth “patriotic” education, Eurasian integration, and the promotion of narratives centered on increasing federal autonomy for regional governments.

Figure 12. Russian Projects Supporting Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support	Institutional Development
2015	0	0
2016	0	0
2017	2	0
2018	1	0
2019	0	0
2020	0	0
2021	2	0

*Notes: This table shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic space actors or government regulators between January 2015 and August 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The Kremlin routed its engagements in Ukraine (inclusive of Crimea) through five identified channels (Figure 13), which included language and culture-focused funds, charitable foundations, and the Russian Cultural Center in Lviv. The stated missions of these Russian government entities tend to emphasize themes such as education, culture promotion, and patriotic celebrations of Russia’s military history. However, not all of these Russian state organs were equally important. The Gorchakov Fund,<sup>44</sup> which provides projectized support to NGOs to bolster

<sup>44</sup> Formally The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, it was founded in 2010 as a soft power instrument to promote Russian culture abroad and provide funding to CSOs/NGOs.



Russia's image abroad, was the most prominent organization, writing grants to two Crimean CSOs.

As it often does throughout the region, the Gorchakov Fund partnered with other Kremlin agencies in both of its projects.<sup>45</sup> For example, in May 2021, the Gorchakov Fund and the Presidential Grants Fund together underwrote a conference hosted by the Crimean Foundation for History, Culture, and Development (the Sevastopol Foundation). A few months later, the Gorchakov Fund and the Russkiy Mir Foundation organized the "Union Patriotic Camp-Forum 'Young Guards Crimea: Donuzlav 2021'" for youth from Crimea, Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk, Russia, and Belarus.

Even in the absence of Rossotrudnichestvo, the above-mentioned Kremlin organs active in Ukraine during the 2015–2021 period generally operated in the same mode: partnering with local organizations in Ukraine (including in occupied Crimea), to promote cultural and educational events with a pro-Russian narrative. These public-facing events sought to leverage and build upon organic local interest among students and the Russian diaspora in Ukraine, which gave the Kremlin plausible deniability of malign intent as it could position these educational activities as innocuous in content and responsive to local demand.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin also engaged in more opaque schemes to influence Ukraine's civic space. The national head of the Socialist Party of Ukraine, Illia Kiva, reportedly expelled several members of the political party in 2018 for soliciting \$30 million in campaign funding for local elections from the Russian government.<sup>46</sup> The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) found indications of Kremlin activity in several oblasts just west of the Donbas. In February 2017, the SBU identified suspected Kremlin funding of petitions in the local councils of Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhzhia, supported by the "Public Council of Dnipropetrovsk Region, Social Zaporizhia, Kharkiv Solobozhanschyna [Sloboda Ukraine]."<sup>47</sup> In September 2017, the SBU uncovered a plot by a Russian Center

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<sup>45</sup> In nearly all other E&E countries, with the exception of Georgia, the Gorchakov Fund acts as a prime conduit for the Kremlin to influence civic space in the region, bringing along a variety of other partners from Russia as supporters of their projects.

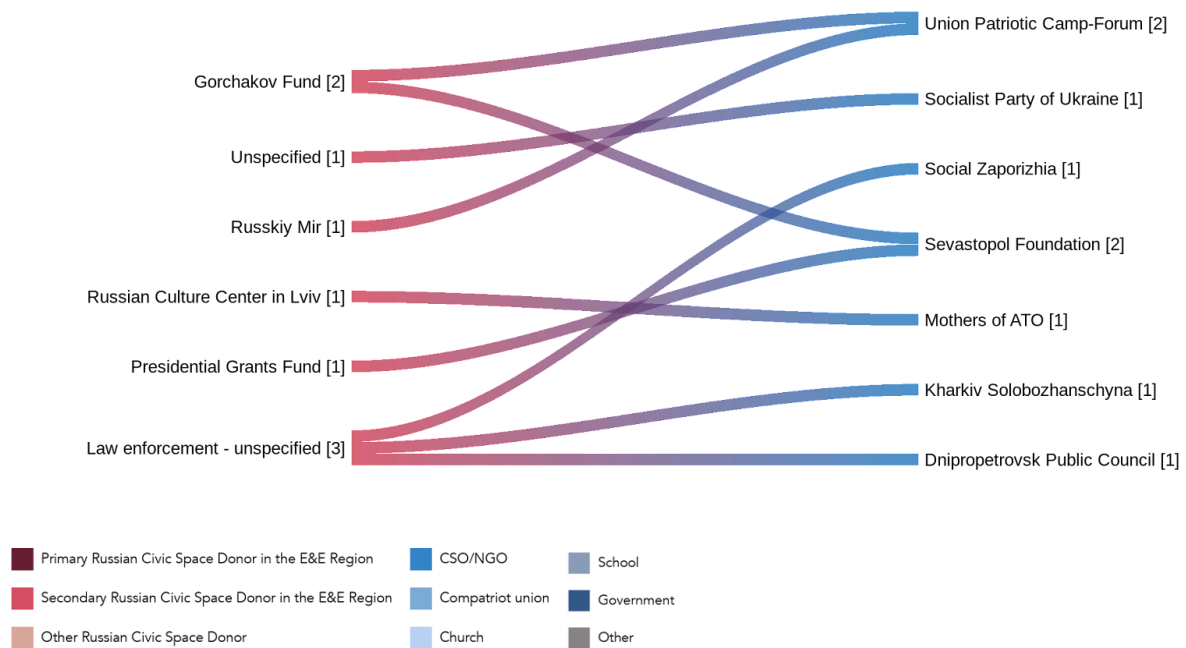
<sup>46</sup> SPU head: some party members expelled for attempts to get funding from Kremlin. (2018, January 29). Interfax : Ukraine General Newswire, Retrieved from <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/480751.html>

<sup>47</sup> For more on these groups, see Section 4.2.

activist from the Volyn Region to hire and pay 100 protesters 400 hryvnia each to participate in a Lviv protest organized by the mothers of Ukrainian servicemen in the Donbas Security Operation. Perhaps in reaction to the 2016 eviction of its Russian center in Lviv, the Kremlin instead levied its networks in the neighboring region to influence western Ukraine’s largest city.

The Crimean Occupation Authorities are another important set of known Russian actors influencing Ukraine’s civic space. The illegal annexation of Crimea severed many civic actors from their counterparts in Kyiv-controlled Ukraine, and eight years of Russian-backed law enforcement have had a profound impact on the operations of civic actors in the peninsula, as discussed in Section 2.

Figure 13. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Ukrainian Civic Space  
Number of Projects, 2015–2021



*Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civic space actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## 3.2 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Ukraine's Civic Space

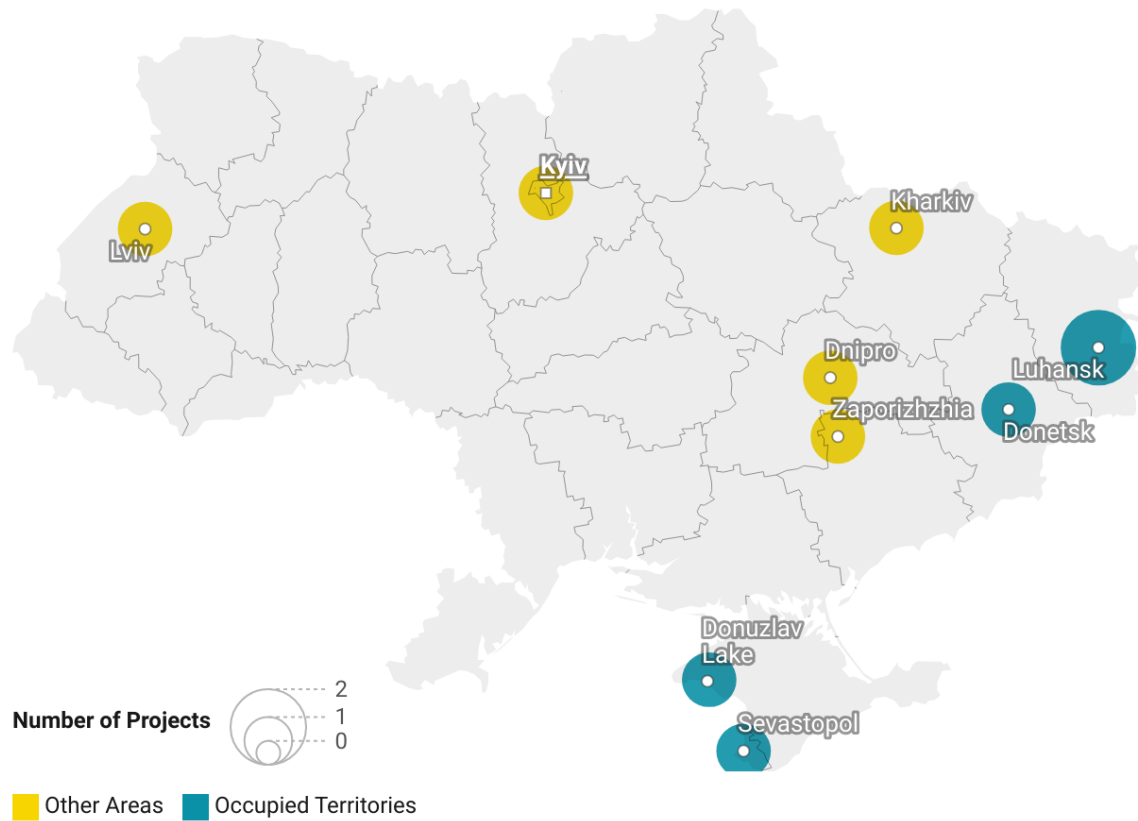
The recipients of Kremlin support in Ukraine's civic space included formal CSOs, youth summer camps, political parties, historical foundations, and false front protestors. Russia focused most of its support to actors in eastern oblasts and occupied Crimea, which is unsurprising given its goal of building a buffer between the Russian state and NATO-friendly nations (Figure 14). The western part of the country still saw Kremlin efforts to influence civic debates, however, with two attempts to buy friends and muddy the political discourse by inflating the appearance of pro-Russian sympathies in Kyiv and Lviv.

Ukraine's SBU identified attempts by the Kremlin to influence public councils in the eastern capitals of Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia, in a bid to turn their oblasts into federally independent regions.<sup>48</sup> Generally following the model of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the self-declared Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), three public councils were formed and began to push for increased decentralization of authority to operate their oblasts independent of Kyiv's oversight. These arguments took many forms and employed common narratives: creating and expanding special economic zones, increasing independence for local groups, and improving trade connectivity with Russia.

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<sup>48</sup> Barbieri, J. (2020). The Dark Side of Decentralization Reform in Ukraine: Deterring or Facilitating Russia-sponsored Separatism? *Decentralization, Regional Diversity, and Conflict* (pp. 211–256). Cham: Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41765-9\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41765-9_8).

Figure 14. Locations of Russian Support to Ukrainian Civic Space  
Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This map visualizes the distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Ukraine. A more detailed analysis of the flows to Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk can be found in their respective profiles. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The “Public Council of the Dnipropetrovsk Region,” also known as the “Dnipro Public Council,” was created in 2015 and led by Serhiy Shapran, the local leader of Viktor Medvedchuk’s<sup>49</sup> “Ukrainian Choice” NGO with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>50</sup> The council soon adopted language demanding increased regional autonomy. Similarly, in December 2015, law enforcement broke up a separatist forum organized by the NGO Social Zaporizhia, which had organized a fraudulent congress and promised 200 hryvnias for each vote to create a

<sup>49</sup> Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch and close personal friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is one of the most powerful pro-Russian and Eurosceptic politicians in Ukraine, with ties to local movements across the country.

<sup>50</sup> Barbieri, J. (2020).

Zaporizhzhia People's Republic.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, in Kharkiv, Alla Alexandrovskaya, as the head of the "Kharkiv Solobozhanshchyna" movement (also known as the "Slobozhanshchyna" movement) pushed for a bill establishing a special region within the Kharkiv oblast.<sup>52</sup>

All three entities appear to share the same middleman to the Kremlin: Victor Medvedchuk. While it is unclear if Medvedchuk was directly funding the three initiatives, individuals associated with the local offices of "Ukrainian Choice" acted as nodes to connect these NGOs with the Russian government.<sup>53</sup> The Ukrainian SBU ramped up its scrutiny of separatists in early 2017. Andriy Lesyk, an associate of Medvedchuk, was arrested in December 2017 for repackaging and lobbying for the same separatist agenda as "Kharkiv Solobozhanschyna."<sup>54</sup> The Prosecutor General's Office in Kyiv opened an investigation against Medvedchuk in 2019, charging him with suspected treason, and placed him under house arrest in May 2021.<sup>55</sup> The charges were tied to Medvedchuk's business activities in Russia-occupied Crimea, but this also constrained the Kremlin's ability to leverage "Ukrainian Choice" to further influence Ukraine's civic space.

The Kremlin's efforts to fund civic actors since the 2017 crackdown on "Ukrainian Choice" affiliates highlights Medvedchuk's importance as a middleman. As mentioned above, an activist from the Russian Culture Center in the Volyn region tried to fund a fake protest rally in Lviv in September 2017. Allegedly organized by the "Mothers of the Donbas Security Operation," the rally adopted rhetoric used by separatists and Kremlin allies in the Donbas oblasts. There were a number of earlier appeals across the occupied territories by the

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<sup>51</sup> SBU thwarted possible creation of "zaporozhye people's republic." (2015, December 12). TSN, Retrieved from <https://tsn.ua/ru/politika/sbu-sorvala-vozmozhnoe-sozdanie-zaporozhskoy-narodnoy-respubliki-543071.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Barbieri, J. (2020).

<sup>53</sup> *Interception of conversations of a group of mediators who took Russian money to bribe Ukrainian politicians.* (2017, Feb 21). Security Service of Ukraine. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmPH-8Nro1o>.

<sup>54</sup> Court arrests Medvedchuk's associate Lesyk suspected of separatism. (2017, December 16). Kyiv Post, Retrieved from <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/court-arrests-medvedchuks-associate-lesyk-suspected-separatism.html>

<sup>55</sup> Medvedchuk was placed under house arrest. (2021, May 14). Ukrayinska Pravda, Retrieved from <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/05/13/7293436/>.

"Mothers of Donbas" to end the conflict, which were amplified by the blog "Solidarity with the Antifascist Resistance in Ukraine"<sup>56</sup> and writer Vladislav Rusanov<sup>57</sup> (a vocal supporter of Donetsk's "independence"). The petitions were framed as impartial pleas for peace from concerned mothers but criticized the Ukrainian government for failing to protect citizens and withdraw troops.

The fake rally in Lviv intended to use these same themes to stir up unrest in the city and create the illusion that large numbers of Ukrainian citizens in the west of the country were pushing for a unilateral withdrawal from the east. The SBU quickly closed down the operation, as it discovered the activist was using Russian money to pay protesters to march in Lviv. This operation echoed the Kremlin's earlier attempts to push forward separatist agendas within city councils, but in this case without the endorsement of local politicians to give the rally a semblance of legitimacy.

At the national level, the head of the Socialist Party of Ukraine, Illia Kiva, disclosed in January 2018 that some of his party members had approached Putin's aide, Vladislav Surkov, to entice the Kremlin to sponsor the party in upcoming elections in exchange for promoting a pro-Russian agenda in Kyiv. The Kremlin's willingness to consider bankrolling a party that has failed to win a seat in parliament since 2006 (when it captured 6% of the popular vote) to the tune of \$30 million reflects the difficulties the Kremlin has had in building political networks in Kyiv after the doors closed on its allies in the eastern oblasts.

### 3.3 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Ukraine's Civic Space

The Kremlin's civic space operations in Russia-occupied Crimea grew more frequent and public in 2021, perhaps in a bid to secure popular sympathy in advance of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In May 2021, the Gorchakov and Presidential Grants Funds held a conference with the

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<sup>56</sup> Mothers and parents organisations appeal: Stop the war! save the people of Donbas. (2014). <https://ukraineantifascistsolidarity.wordpress.com/2014/06/13/mothers-and-parents-organisations-appeal-stop-the-war-save-the-people-of-Donbas/>.

<sup>57</sup> Rusanov, V. A. (2014). *Collective appeal of Donbas mothers to all peace-loving people*. <https://brend-archer.livejournal.com/324036.html>.

Crimean Foundation for History, Culture and Development (also known as the Sevastopol Foundation) entitled “The Black Sea Problem in Focus of World Politics.” The conference included a roundtable celebrating Russian history in the peninsula in “Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the London Conference of 1871.” In July 2021, the Kremlin funded the Union Patriotic Camp “Young Guards Crimea. Donuzlav – 2021” on the banks of Lake Donuzlav. The youth camp promoted several of the Kremlin’s preferred narratives across the region: celebrating the victory of Soviet forces over the “German-fascist invaders” in World War II and emphasizing Eurasian identity in support of a Eurasian Union.

Russia’s emphasis on its role in defeating the Nazis in “the Great Patriotic War” and attempts to portray its enemies as contemporary Nazis is not unique to Ukraine. Yet, in the aftermath of the February 2022 invasion, the Kremlin’s narrative-building efforts took on greater significance in illuminating Russia’s use of hybrid warfare tactics to build popular support and create a pretext for military intervention. Notably, the Kremlin’s long-standing practice was to portray the fight in the Donbas as protecting citizens from “Ukrainian fascists” and frame the separatist struggle as a crusade against fascism.<sup>58</sup> Some news coverage and academic studies have reported on far-right militias operating in eastern Ukraine.<sup>59</sup> However, the Kremlin manipulated these fears to stoke a self-serving narrative that countering fascism outweighed concerns of Ukraine’s national sovereignty and justified the ongoing war in Donbas (see Section 3.2).

Eurasian integration was also a central theme in several of the Kremlin’s civic space activities, particularly the framing of the Union Patriotic Camp. In addition to representatives from Russia-occupied Crimea, the camp hosted individuals

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<sup>58</sup> James Verini, & Paolo Pellegrin. (2022, January 16). In the trenches of Ukraine's forever war. New York Times (Online), Retrieved from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/16/magazine/ukraine-war.html>; Shaun Walker. (2014, September 9). Donetsk’s pro-Russia rebels celebrate expelling ‘fascist Ukrainian junta’. The Guardian (London), pp. 15. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/08/donetsk-pro-russia-rebels-ukrainian-junta>

<sup>59</sup> April Gordon. (2020, January). A New Eurasian Far Right Rising: Reflections on Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. Freedom House. Retrieved from:

[https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FarRightEurasia\\_FINAL.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FarRightEurasia_FINAL.pdf).

Josh Cohen. (2018, June 20). Ukraine’s got a real problem with far-right violence (and no, RT didn’t write this headline). Atlantic Council.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-s-got-a-real-problem-with-far-right-violence-and-no-rt-didn-t-write-this-headline/>

from Russia, Belarus, and the self-declared Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, whose flags flew high in a picture documenting the event included in the official press release (Figure 15). The inclusion of a Belarusian delegation at a Crimean youth conference is not surprising, as Russia views Belarus as its co-ambassador for Eurasian integration to promote an economic and political bloc to counter the EU.<sup>60</sup> The presence of the self-declared LPR and DPR at the Union Patriotic Camp foreshadowed the Kremlin's vision for these two regions to become independent sovereign entities like Belarus, deeply enmeshed in Russia's political and economic sphere of influence, under the banner of "Eurasian integration." Seven months later, Putin formalized this view by officially recognizing the two regions as independent states.<sup>61</sup>

Even in advance of the February 2022 invasion, civic space within Kyiv-controlled Ukraine had grown more resistant to the Kremlin's attempts to undermine it. But in Russia-occupied Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk, the Kremlin was able to act with greater impunity in using multiple channels of influence to promote pro-Russian narratives on the ground. In hindsight, this underscores the unique vulnerabilities of occupied territories throughout the E&E region as the first, and arguably easiest, entry points for the Kremlin to expand its sphere of influence. Yet, as we have seen in Ukraine, the Kremlin's pro-independence and anti-fascism narrative building can have far-reaching effects outside of the occupied territories themselves.

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<sup>60</sup> Eurasian integration has been a central theme of Kremlin support to Belarusian civic space actors, and Russia has teamed up with Belarusian NGOs to co-host activities that reinforce this theme in the past. For example, in August 2016, with Russian support, the Belarusian NGO "Actual Concept" gave a presentation in support of Eurasian integration at a political summer camp for Moldovan youth.

<sup>61</sup> Ukraine crisis: Russia orders troops into rebel-held regions. (2022, February 22). BBC. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60468237>.



Figure 15. Young Guards of Crimea in the Union Patriotic Camp in the Donbas, 2021



*Notes: The Gorchakov Fund-sponsored event in July 2021 flew flags from Russia, Belarus, and several separatist regions. Source: Photo by Donbas State Technical University, under fair use.*

### 3.4 Russian Media Mentions Related to Civic Space Actors and Democratic Rhetoric

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Ukrainian civic actors a total of 5,993 times from January 2015 to March 2021.<sup>62</sup> Approximately two-thirds of these mentions (3,995 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining one-third (1,998 instances) focused on foreign and intergovernmental actors. Russian state media mentioned 516 organizations by name and 235 informal groups. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Ukrainian citizens, we also analyzed 6,563 mentions by Russian state media of five keywords in conjunction with Ukraine: North Atlantic Treaty

<sup>62</sup> This number does not include Russian state-owned media's coverage of civic actors in Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk, who were referenced 925 and 668 times, respectively. The frequency and mentions of civic actors in these occupied territories are analyzed in their respective profiles.

Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West.

### 3.4.1 Russian State Media's Characterization of Domestic Ukrainian Civic Space Actors

Forty-seven percent of Russian media mentions of domestic civic actors in Ukraine referred to specific groups by name. The 289 named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types, ranging from political parties to civil society organizations and media outlets. Media organizations (542 mentions), "nationalist paramilitary groups" (515 mentions),<sup>63</sup> and political parties (310 mentions) were most frequently mentioned. Russian state media mentions of named domestic actors were most often neutral (64 percent) or negative (34 percent) in tone. Positive mentions were scarce (2 percent).

Russian state media most often referenced domestic Ukrainian media as source material for local coverage of events of interest, such as the War in Donbas and protests in Kyiv. Kremlin-affiliated media mentioned the Donetsk News Agency, the main newspaper for the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), 117 times (20 percent of all domestic media mentions).<sup>64</sup> Similarly, they provided a megaphone for the LuganskInformCenter in Russia-occupied Luhansk, citing the outlet 30 times. In addition, the Kremlin amplified local pro-Russian newspapers in Ukraine, broadcasting messages through local outlets such as 112 Ukraine Television Channel (48 mentions), Vesti (19 mentions), Ukrainian Independent News Agency (UNIAN) (16 mentions), Strana.ua (16 mentions), and Inter TV (16 mentions).

Nationalist paramilitary groups attracted the most negative coverage (89 percent negative mentions) among named domestic civic space actors. Russian state media portrayed nationalist organizations as hijacking the Euromaidan

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<sup>63</sup> The nationalist paramilitary group category is intended to capture the complicated nature of far-right organizations which can incite both violent and peaceful protests, operate as both informal militias and organized political parties, and mobilize the Ukrainian public to engage in right-wing political activism. These organizations were included in the dataset due to their engagement in relevant civic activities, but given their controversial nature, they were given a separate "Nationalist Paramilitary Organization" tag for easy exclusion in the event that policymakers and scholars want to assess civic space dynamics without these groups.

<sup>64</sup> Most of these mentions use the Donetsk News Agency as a supposedly unbiased source for the War in Donbas; however, the Donetsk News Agency is tied to the self-declared DPR, a primary antagonist in the conflict.

protests, which helped overthrow the Yanukovich regime, and controlling the government in Kyiv, which allegedly allowed them to commit brazen acts of violence against pro-Kremlin actors with impunity. As elsewhere in the E&E region, this line of rhetoric also advances one of the Kremlin's preferred narratives: that Russia is the natural defender of conservative values and a bulwark against the dangerous spread of neo-Nazism. In this case, co-opting controversial nationalist radical organizations as the face of, and force behind, grassroots activism is best understood as a tactic to discredit civil society movements in Ukraine and is an important tool of influence in the Kremlin's state media arsenal:

- *A January 2015 Sputnik article argued, "Moscow has repeatedly expressed concern over the rise of neo-Nazism in Ukraine. Far-right groups were actively involved in the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February last year and have also been engaged in Kyiv's military operation against independence supporters in the country's predominantly Russian-speaking eastern regions."<sup>65</sup>*
- *A June 2017 Sputnik article continued this refrain, "the Ukrainian authorities did not do anything to remove the violent 'civic activists' who prevented the lines from being repaired, beating and insulting the repair teams. These Ukrainian 'civic activists'...included...the veterans of the neo-Nazi Azov battalion and the Right Sector group, made infamous by their suppression of the population of Donbas."<sup>66</sup>*

The organization Right Sector (297 mentions in non-militant contexts) was a favorite target of Russian state media attention—attracting 267 negative references (90 percent). Kremlin-affiliated media blamed the group for the alleged "Odessa Massacre of 2014," which resulted in the deaths of 48 activists. As highlighted in a 2015 TASS segment, "radicals from the far-right Ukraine's Right Sector movement, which is banned in Russia...burnt a tent camp in Odessa where the city residents were collecting signatures in support of the referendum on Ukraine's federalization and the granting of state status to the Russian language. The federalization supporters found shelter in the House of Trade

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<sup>65</sup> Russia Blacklists Five Ukrainian Ultra-Nationalist Organizations. (2015, December 12). Sputnik News Service.

<sup>66</sup> Sanctions or Not, Crimea Wants to Be Part of Bigger World Together With Russia. (2017, June 23). Sputnik News Service.

Unions, which was later surrounded by the Right Sector militants who set the building on fire. As a result, 48 people [were] burnt alive and over 200 were injured.”<sup>67</sup> Although multiple international organizations, including the Council of Europe and the May 2 Group, determined that the deaths at the Odessa Trade Union House were not caused by intentional arson,<sup>68</sup> Russian state media ignored this evidence, blaming the Right Sector to advance the narrative that extremist organizations dominate Ukrainian civil society.

Beyond nationalist groups, an additional 45 domestic organizations attracted 178 negative mentions from Russian state media. Most notably, ethnic Crimean Tatar organizations and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were vilified as threats to conservative values. The ethnic Crimean Tatar media outlet ATR TV Channel (3 negative mentions), the Crimean Tatar National Movement (NDKT) (4 negative mentions), and the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (37 negative mentions) all attracted negative coverage by Russian media, which claimed that the organizations do not represent the interests of “real” Crimean Tatars. This narrative is consistent with negative coverage of organizations associated with Muslims or traditionally Muslim ethnic minorities across the E&E region more broadly, but also serves a specific purpose in the context of Ukraine—questioning the legitimacy of Crimean Tatar civil society organizations, such as the Mejlis, for their opposition and activism in seeking to curb the Kremlin’s control over the peninsula:

- *A September 2015 TASS article is illustrative of such coverage: “On the eve of the Crimean spring, supporters of the Majlis [Crimean Tatar self-styled parliament] were wreaking havoc among the fellow nationals, frightening us with deportation.”<sup>69</sup> Eventually, Russian state media began calling these organizations “extremist,” a tactic on display in this February 2016 TASS article: “Monday’s request from the Crimean prosecutor, Natalya Poklonskaya...for banning the non-governmental organization calling itself the Mejlis (assembly) of the Crimean Tatar People as*

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<sup>67</sup> Exhibition in memory of Houser of Trade Unions victims to take place in Odessa. (2015, September 6). ITAR-TASS.

<sup>68</sup> Coynash, Hayla. (2021, April 30). *Russia’s Lie Machine Fans Flames of Odessa ‘Massacre’*. Center for European Policy Analysis. Retrieved from <https://cepa.org/russias-lie-machine-fans-flames-of-odessa-massacre/>

<sup>69</sup> Russian Press Review. (2015, September 23). ITAR-TASS.

*extremist was a reasonable move, even belated somewhat, polled analysts told TASS.*"<sup>70</sup>

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (15 negative mentions), formed on December 15, 2018, was another target of negative coverage by Russian state media. The Kremlin viewed the formation of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church, independent of the Moscow Patriarchate's control and recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, as threatening an important historical lever of influence in the country. Seeking to defame the "defectors" and assert Russia's status as the sole protector of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Russian state media ran articles portraying the episode as evidence of a U.S.-backed erasure of Russian culture in Ukraine.

- *In January 2019, a TASS article stated that: "[Russian Duma member Gavrilov] considers the signing of the Tomos of Autocephaly for the newly-established Ukrainian church, the so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine, by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to be a blatant action under the U.S. patronage."*<sup>71</sup> *The narrative intensified, as shown in this TASS article from February 2019: "The green light was given [by Ukrainian authorities] to violent redistribution of church property and elimination of the canonic Ukrainian Orthodox Church."*<sup>72</sup>

Aside from these named organizations, Russian state media made 2,114 more general references to domestic Ukrainian non-governmental organizations, protesters, opposition activists, and other informal groups during the same period. The sentiment was most often neutral (55 percent) or negative (38 percent), though some informal civic actors also received more favorable coverage than named organizations, with 161 positive mentions (8 percent).

Unnamed nationalist paramilitary groups, such as "nationalist organizations" and "radical activists" received 224 mentions, including 23 percent of all negative mentions. Crimean Tatar NGOs, representatives, and activists all received

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<sup>70</sup> Crimean Tatars' Mejlis may be outlawed for extremism. (2016, February 16). *ITAR-TASS*. Such coverage sought to provide a justification for the later ban of the Mejlis on April 26, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Russian State Duma committee head refers to signing of Tomos for Ukraine as blatant action supported by US. (2019, January 5). *ITAR-TASS*.

<sup>72</sup> Ukraine plunges deeper and deeper into chaos - Russian foreign ministry. (2019, February 19). *ITAR-TASS*.

predominantly negative coverage as well. Mentions of Orthodox informal groups were bifurcated between neutral or positive coverage of adherents to the Russian Orthodox Church (i.e., “Orthodox believers” or “clergy”), while the term “Ukrainian Orthodox splitters” (2 mentions) received only “extremely negative” sentiment.

The informal groups that appear most frequently are associated with informal activism and nationalist movements in Ukraine. In Table 6, and in the dataset, we distinguish between “radical activists,” which refer to Russian state media mentions of informal civic activism by unnamed nationalist organizations, versus “activists,” which capture a broader swath of protest movements and activism.<sup>73</sup> Russian state media tended to afford more positive coverage to the generic term “journalists” in Ukraine than in other countries; however, this too served one of the Kremlin’s preferred narratives that the Ukrainian government’s alleged mistreatment of local media and journalists was further proof of the regime’s illegitimacy. Similarly, “anti-government” protesters and activists who questioned the authorities in Kyiv garnered more favorable coverage than those espousing anti-Kremlin views.

Table 6. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Ukraine by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Group	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Total Mentions
Right Sector	148	119	30	0	0	297
Activists	54	75	108	21	1	259
Journalists	0	1	161	28	1	191
Radical Activists	87	47	12	0	0	146
Protesters	9	25	76	20	4	134
Ukrainian Media	2	12	113	3	0	130
Donetsk News Agency	0	0	117	0	0	117

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the domestic civic space actors most frequently mentioned by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and*

<sup>73</sup> For example, both the Right Sector and “radical activists” are categorized as “nationalist paramilitary groups.”

### 3.4.2 Russian State Media's Characterization of External Actors in Ukraine's Civic Space

Russian state media also devoted substantial attention to external actors in Ukraine's civic space. We recorded 1,998 relevant mentions in total, including 22 intergovernmental organizations (370 mentions) and 205 distinct foreign organizations (1,042 mentions) by name. Russian media also referenced 84 general foreign actors (586 mentions). The most frequently mentioned external organizations were foreign or intergovernmental observer missions, foreign delegations to Russia-occupied Crimea, or Russian organizations (see Table 7).

Russian state media coverage of external actors in Ukraine tended to be more positive (6 percent) or neutral (90 percent) than its coverage of domestic civic actors, though we still recorded 86 negative mentions. However, this status quo is best understood in the context of how the Kremlin seeks to co-opt coverage of these external actors to advance its preferred media narratives. International monitoring missions, for example, accounted for approximately one-quarter (26 percent) of Russian media mentions of external civic actors—including the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), and international election observers. The preponderance of this coverage was neutral (91 percent of instances) with some positive mentions (6 percent), highlighting the international monitoring missions to corroborate Russia's accounts of the mistreatment of journalists, as well as the Kremlin's allegations of the Ukrainian government's violence in the Donbas.

Since its annexation of Crimea in early 2014, Russian officials have invited foreign delegations consisting of European political parties, NGOs, social activists, and businessmen to the peninsula in an effort to court their support and bolster the perceived legitimacy of Russian rule. Kremlin-affiliated media reinforced this objective with their coverage of these foreign delegations (mentioned 111 times), which was most often neutral (80 percent) or positive (14 percent).

Forty-nine percent of Russian state media mentions (973 instances) of external civic actors focused on Russian organizations or individuals operating in Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, coverage of these actors was exclusively neutral (95 percent) or positive (5 percent). Beyond burnishing Russia’s own reputation, mentions of actors such as Russian (or other foreign) journalists in Ukraine served the Kremlin’s larger purpose of seeking to discredit the Ukrainian government in the eyes of potential allies and Ukrainian citizens long before the February 2022 invasion. A March 2015 TASS article is illustrative of the Kremlin’s party line: “Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday that there was no possible justification of the situation concerning the professional work of Russian journalists in Ukraine.”<sup>74</sup>

Table 7. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Ukraine by Sentiment

External Civic Group	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Total Mentions
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	1	4	98	2	4	109
OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM)	0	0	103	4	0	107
Foreign Journalists	0	0	94	9	0	103
Russian Journalists	0	0	74	5	0	79
Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine	0	1	72	1	0	74

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Ukraine between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.4.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Ukraine’s Civic Space over Time

For many countries in the region, Russian state media mentions of civic actors spike around major events and tend to show up in clusters. This trend remains largely true in Ukraine, particularly in the earlier years of the period, as Russian

<sup>74</sup> Situation with Russian journalists in Ukraine cannot be justified - FM Lavrov. (2015, March 2). *ITAR-TASS*.



state media mentions spike during significant events in Ukraine's civic life: the one-year anniversary of the Odessa Trade Union House fire (2015), the 2017 restrictions on Russian banks and social media sites, the 2019 Ukrainian presidential elections, Crimean blockades, and Ukrainian bans on Russian media.

Russian media mentions of civic space actors first spiked in May 2015, during the one-year anniversary of the Odessa Trade Union House fire. As mentioned previously, the Kremlin used its state media coverage to stoke concerns of rampant far-right nationalism spreading in Ukraine, and articles portraying the death of 48 activists as a deliberate attack by Ukrainian nationalists (a theory later debunked by numerous independent investigations) provided useful scapegoats in the form of the "Right Sector" and the "Maidan Self Defense Force." Coverage evolved over time, from initial articles claiming that Ukrainian nationalists were attacking individuals at memorials and hijacking peaceful marches held in memory of those that died in Odessa, to stories arguing that Ukrainian nationalists controlled the Kyiv government, faced no repercussions for their actions, and freely roamed Ukraine seeking out pro-Russian citizens to attack.

The largest spike in Russian media mentions occurred in September 2015, stemming from coverage of the Crimean food blockade (which blocked trucks from bringing food into Russia-occupied Crimea in protest over Russian rule of the peninsula) and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's September 16, 2015 decree (which blacklisted some foreign journalists and media organizations from Ukraine). Russian state media articles made several accusations related to the blockade: that the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (one of the organizers) was an extremist organization and traitorous to Crimean Tatars,<sup>75</sup> that the Ukrainian government had planned the blockade to hurt Crimeans,<sup>76</sup> and that the blockade was useless and Crimean Tatar organizations were only hurting

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<sup>75</sup> This quote from an ITAR-TASS article about the leaders of the Mejlis is telling: "It is time to consider the fact that the organization headed by Dzhemilev and Chubarov carries out the same anti-national destructive activities. These parasites are destroying their own country and are threatening the people around them under the guise of patriotic slogans..." Mejlis of Crimean Tatars headed by Rada deputies may be banned in Russia. (2015, September). *ITAR-TASS*.

<sup>76</sup> Ukraine No Longer Sees Crimea as its Own – Georgian Politician. (2015, September 24). *Sputnik News Service*.

themselves.<sup>77</sup> These stories fueled a broader Kremlin narrative that the food blockade was carried out by a few pro-Ukrainian extremists that hated Russia and, therefore, was not a legitimate protest.

Similarly, Russian state media promoted a narrative of “unfair treatment of Russians” in Ukraine, using the September 16, 2015 ban on Russian journalists as evidence. It should be said that many international organizations, including Reporters Without Borders and Human Rights Watch, also protested these bans over concerns of censorship and freedom of expression. These concerns were amplified by Russian state media but supplemented by additional accusations of government-sponsored Russophobia in Ukraine, of which the ban was allegedly illustrative of broader antagonism towards Russian speaking minorities.

Smaller spikes in Russian state media mentions in 2017 and 2018 reinforced the Kremlin’s narrative, that the Ukrainian government and nationalists were anti-Russian and infringing upon the rights of Russian compatriots in the country. Kremlin-affiliated media devoted ample coverage to Ukrainian nationalists attacking Russian banks in March 2017<sup>78</sup> and the Russian Center for Science and Culture in May 2018, as well as the Kyiv authorities’ banning certain Russian social media sites in May 2017<sup>79</sup> and charging RIA Novosti’s Editor-in-Chief in Ukraine (Kirill Vyshinsky) with treason in May 2018.<sup>80</sup> Taken together, these stories fueled the Kremlin’s narrative of the “power of Ukrainian nationalists” and unease among Russian speaking minorities about growing Russophobia in Ukraine.

The final major spike in Russian state media mentions occurred in March 2019, during the Ukrainian Presidential elections. Coverage of the 2019 elections writ

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<sup>77</sup> Blockade of Crimea Turning Into Disaster for Ukrainian Farmers. (2015, September 27). *Sputnik News Service*.

<sup>78</sup> Ukraine Demonstrators Attack Russian Banks in Kiev. (2016, February 20). *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/kiev-demonstrators-attack-russian-banks-1455977173>

<sup>79</sup> Luhn, Alec. (2017, May 16). Ukraine blocks popular social networks as part of sanctions on Russia. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/16/ukraine-blocks-popular-russian-websites-kremlin-role-war>.

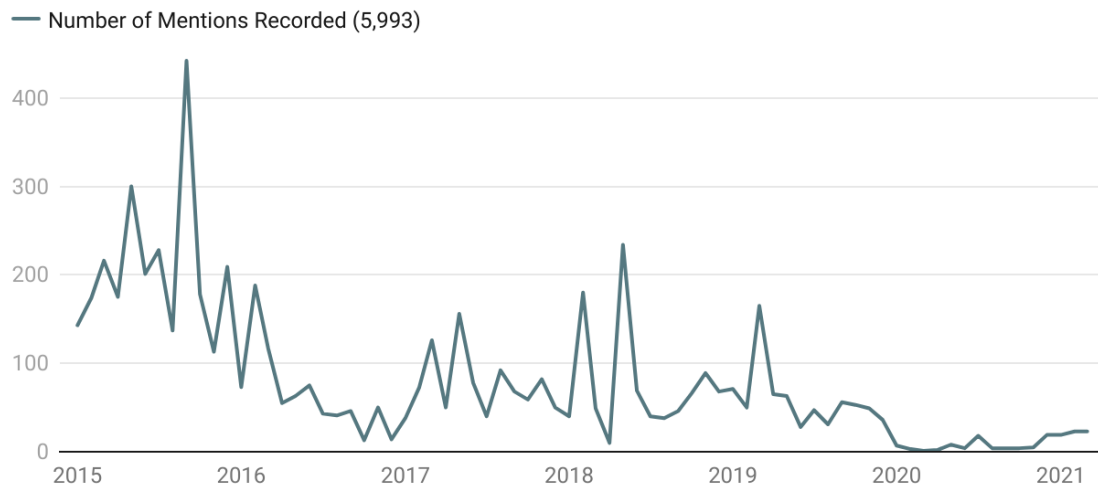
<sup>80</sup> Vyshinsky was accused of coordinating with the Kremlin in a hybrid information warfare campaign. Russian state media criticized the Ukrainian government and rallied behind Russian media in Ukraine. Source: Head Of Russian News Agency's Office In Ukraine Goes On Trial For Treason. (2019, April 4). *RFE/RL*. Retrieved from

<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-vyshinsky-ria-novosti-ukraine-treason-trial/29861826.html>.

large was largely neutral in tone (82 percent of mentions in March 2019). However, the focus of the negative mentions (16 percent) is more revealing of the Kremlin’s priorities: to lambast incumbent President Petro Poroshenko for his role in creating the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, empowering Ukrainian nationalists, and refusal to recognize Russia’s control of Crimea.

Figure 16. Russian State Media Mentions of Ukrainian Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the distribution of Russian state media mentions of Ukrainian civic space actors, including Crimea but not the Donbas, between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.4.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Ukraine’s citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of Russian state media coverage related to five keywords used in conjunction with Ukraine.<sup>81</sup> Two state-owned media outlets,

<sup>81</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West.

the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced all five keywords from January 2015 to March 2021 (Table 7). Russian state media mentioned the European Union (2,002 instances), the United States (2,090 instances), NATO (915 instances), the “West” (1380 instances), and “democracy” (176 instances) with reference to Ukraine during this period.

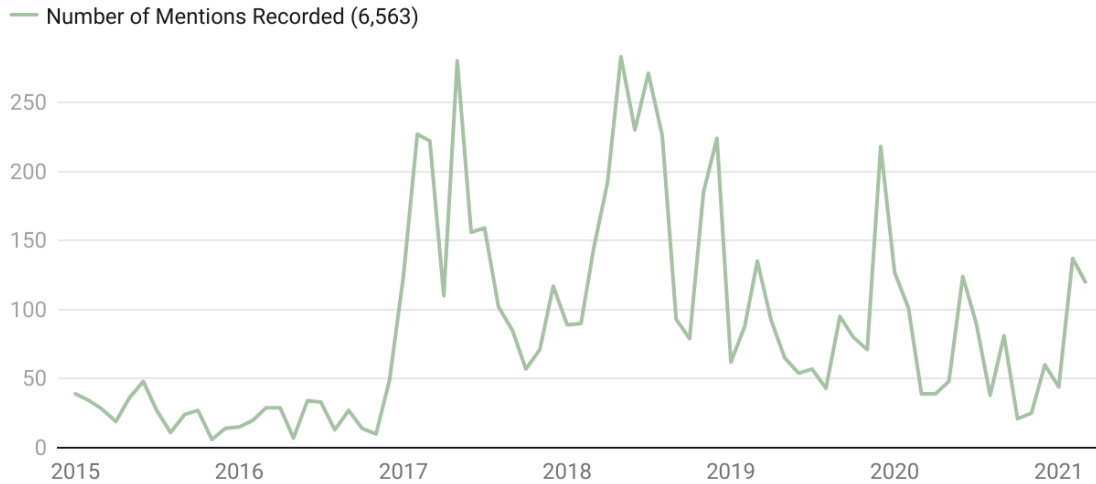
The Kremlin’s evident prioritization of shaping media attitudes within and about Ukraine via its state-run media is clearly evident in these numbers. They far outstrip any comparable metrics of Russian state media captured for the other 16 E&E countries (which are most often in the hundreds, not thousands, of relevant mentions). It is also important to state that the number of keyword mentions for Ukraine is almost certainly under-reporting the actual universe of relevant articles. Given the volume of media articles for Ukraine pertaining to the keywords, we only included a random sample of articles for the first two years of the period (2015 and 2016), with all relevant articles analyzed for the remaining years.<sup>82</sup> For this reason, the volume of keyword mentions appears to be artificially small in 2015–16 (Figure 17), though this is most likely a reflection of the sampling strategy in those two years, rather than a relative lack of coverage of these topics on the part of the Kremlin.

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<sup>82</sup> The universe of potentially relevant articles for 2015 and 2016 included nearly 5,000 articles for those two years alone that were compiled using our standard methodology. We used a random number generator (1-365) to select 400 articles from this set, until the total number of articles selected was equal to 200 for 2015 and 200 for 2016. AidData staff ensured that there was at least one article included in the sample from each month in 2015 and 2016.

Figure 17. Keyword Mentions by Russian State Media in Relation to Ukraine

Number of Unique Keyword Instances of NATO, the U.S., the EU, Democracy, and the West in Russian State Media

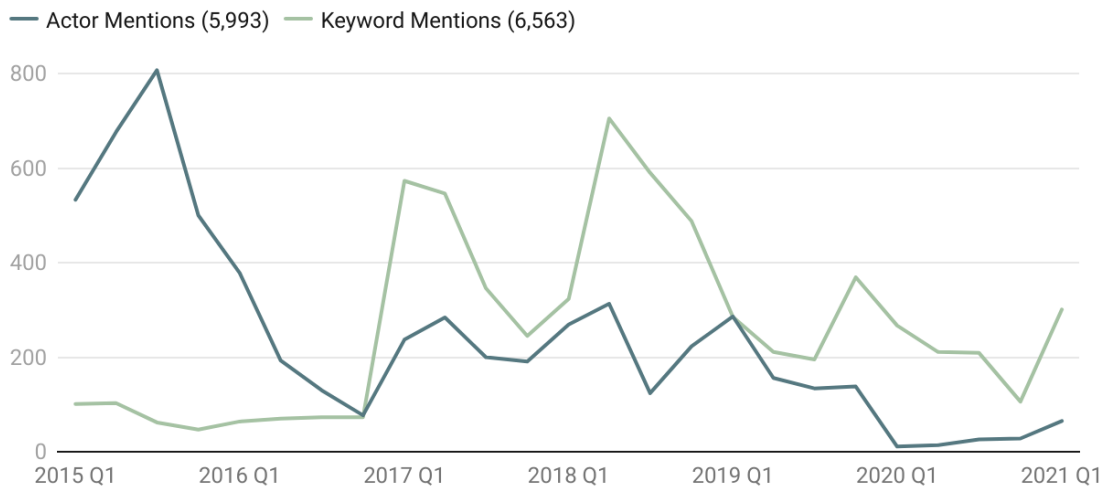


Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of five keywords in relation to Ukraine between January 2015 and March 2021. These keywords included the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. The years 2015 and 2016 are based on a random sample of articles, due to the volume of coverage, while the remaining years include all relevant articles. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Yet, even with that piece of context in mind, there still appears to be a striking temporal shift in the Kremlin's state media strategy vis-a-vis Ukraine over time. Russian state media paid far greater attention to domestic and external civic space actors operating in Ukraine (sections 3.2.1–3.2.3) earlier in the period, but the volume of these mentions subsequently tapered off in later years, especially in comparison to the five keywords, which continued to attract ample attention through the end of our tracking period in March 2021 (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Keyword Mentions versus Mentions of Ukrainian Civic Space Actors by Russian State Media



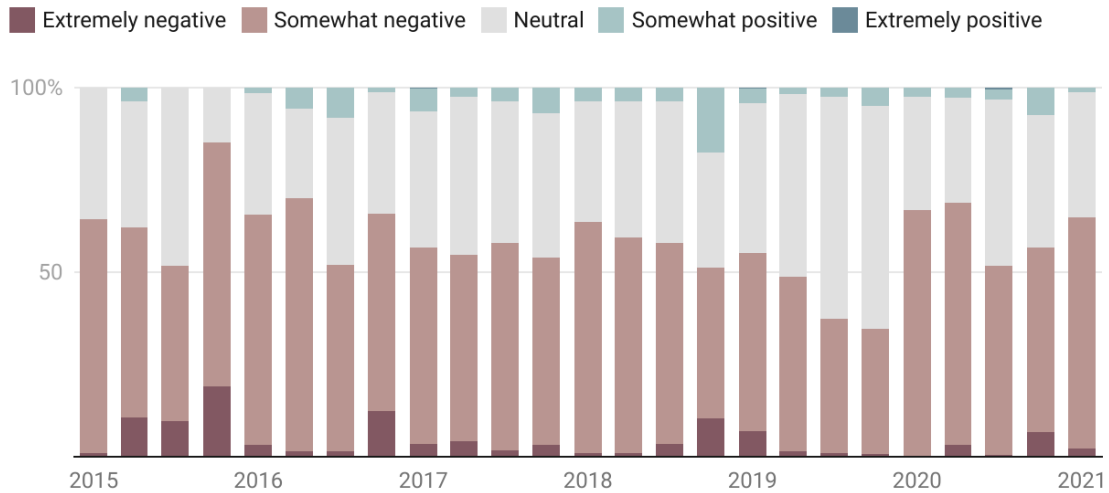
Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the distribution of Russian state media mentions of civic space actors versus five keywords in relation to Ukraine between January 2015 and March 2021. These five keywords included the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. For the keyword mentions, the years 2015 and 2016 are based on a random sample of articles, due to the volume of coverage, while the remaining years include all relevant articles. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Why might this be? One hypothesis that would require more intensive research to assess is that the Kremlin’s priorities may have shifted—from trying to influence domestic attitudes within Ukraine (i.e., exploiting societal cleavages along religious, ethnic, linguistic, and ideological lines) in earlier years, to shaping international attitudes about Ukraine in later years in an effort to isolate Ukraine by driving a wedge between the authorities in Kyiv and its powerful Western allies. Examining the sentiment of Russian state media articles reveals an additional piece of nuance in the Kremlin’s strategy to influence international attitudes about Ukraine. Overall, just over half (56 percent) of the keyword mentions (3,695 instances) were negative, while an extremely small share was positive (5 percent). This breakdown of sentiment remained fairly consistent throughout the tracking period (Figure 19); however, the tone of the Kremlin’s coverage varied substantially between the keywords, with the U.S. and the

“West” attracting a larger share of negative mentions than the EU and NATO (Table 8).

Figure 19. Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State Media in Relation to Ukraine



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the breakdown in sentiment of Russian state media mentions across all five keywords in relation to Ukraine between January 2015 and March 2021. These keywords included the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. For the keyword mentions, the years 2015 and 2016 are based on a random sample of articles, while the remaining years include all relevant articles. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Table 8. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
NATO	34	319	493	68	1	915
European Union	35	927	916	124	0	2002
United States	68	1179	774	68	1	2090
Democracy	7	36	103	28	2	176
West	84	1006	264	26	0	1380

*Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to five keywords—NATO, the European Union, the United States, the West, and democracy—between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The European Union and NATO were the second and third most frequently mentioned keywords in reference to Ukraine. The Kremlin targeted a higher proportion of negative coverage (48 percent) towards the EU relative to NATO, positioning the EU as “hypocritical” in its support of Ukraine,<sup>83</sup> “indifferent” to the struggle of occupied territories to assert their independence,<sup>84</sup> and willing to turn a “blind eye” to human rights infractions on the part of Kyiv’s authorities.<sup>85</sup>

Russian state media articles painted EU membership as “unattainable,”<sup>86</sup> chastising politicians who “implicitly dangle the ever so faint prospect of EU membership”<sup>87</sup> as enabling Kyiv to refrain from fully implementing the Minsk II

<sup>83</sup> “Russian diplomat calls on EU to abandon hypocritical policy towards Ukraine.” World Service Wire. Published November 24, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> “Russian Wheelchairs, the New ‘Invasion Threat.’” Sputnik. Published March 24, 2017; “Russia’s Zakharova Questions ‘New European Standards’ in EU Report on Ukraine.” Sputnik. Published December 1, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> “EU Membership Unattainable for Kiev in Foreseeable Future - Russian Parliament Speaker.” Sputnik. Published September 7, 2015.

<sup>87</sup> “German Support of Ukraine’s EU Ambition Hampers Enforcement of Minsk Accords – EU Lawmaker.” Sputnik. Published May 5, 2017.



agreement to resolve the conflict in the Donbas.<sup>88</sup> Well before Moscow officially recognized the self-declared People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in February 2022, its state media apparatus portrayed Russia as defending Ukraine's Russian-speaking minorities and the rights of residents of the occupied territories in the face of the EU's collusion with Kyiv. For example:

- *"EU countries, who claim that protecting human rights all over the world is their top priority, are actually involved in activities aimed at strangling Donbass residents. They decided not to recognize Russian passports that people in Donbass obtain for humanitarian reasons and not to issue visas to them."*<sup>89</sup>
- *"The Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman emphasized that European countries were showing disregard for the linguistic and educational rights of the Russian-speaking residents of Donbass, only fighting for the rights of those Ukrainian citizens who spoke EU languages...The EU criticizes Russian laws that make the life of Ukrainian nationals easier but ignores Kiev's legislative initiatives and actions that make their life unbearable."*<sup>90</sup>

Comparatively, Russian media coverage of NATO in relation to Ukraine was more often neutral (54 percent) and somewhat less negative (39 percent), though consistent in articulating Moscow's position that NATO's future expansion to include Ukraine or Georgia would be unacceptable.<sup>91</sup> Negative coverage expressed concern over NATO's "unprecedented build-up...near Russia's border,"<sup>92</sup> casting doubts on the bloc's joint exercises as a pretext for "staging military provocations"<sup>93</sup> in the lead up to Ukrainian elections, and labeled its granting Kyiv "Enhanced Opportunities Partner" status as signaling disinterest in resolving the Donbas conflict.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> "Germany, EU 'Enabling Ukraine to Refrain From Implementing Minsk Agreements'." Sputnik. Published May 5, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> "Russian diplomat calls on EU to abandon hypocritical policy towards Ukraine." World Service Wire. Published November 24, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> "TASS: RUSSIA WOULD BE EXTREMELY NEGATIVE ON FURTHER EXPANSION OF NATO, MEMBERSHIP FOR GEORGIA AND UKRAINE - PUTIN." TASS. Published July 16, 2018.

<sup>92</sup> "TASS news roundup, 21.45 Moscow time, February 12." TASS. Published February 12, 2019; "Crimea is Russian!" - Norwegian Right-Wing Heavyweight." Sputnik. Published December 24, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> "Russian Press Review - TASS World Service." TASS. Published February 22, 2019.

<sup>94</sup> "NATO's Move to Upgrade Ukraine's Status Shows Reluctance to Solve Donbas Problem - Moscow." Sputnik. Published June 15, 2020.

Russian state media reserved its most negative coverage for articles related to the United States (60 percent negative) and the “West” (79 percent negative). The U.S. attracted negative coverage related to the Kremlin’s depiction of Ukraine as a “de facto [U.S.] colony”<sup>95</sup> and a proxy for Washington to wage war on Russia.<sup>96</sup> Russian media sowed public distrust in the Ukrainian government as an example of “forced democratization...by color revolution, foreign-sponsored civil unrest or even direct military interference,” at the hands of the U.S.<sup>97</sup> Articles portrayed the aftereffects of U.S. intervention in Ukraine’s elections as “accelerating Crimea’s reunification with Russia” and bringing about “nothing but misery, in the form of civil war and poverty.”<sup>98</sup>

Other coverage amplified Moscow’s preferred image of itself as a defender of conservatism, democracy, and a bulwark against the spread of neo-Nazism (see also Section 3.1) on the one hand, while questioning American and Western values on the other. For example, Russian state media argued that the U.S. was behind the Patriarchate of Constantinople allowing the Orthodox Church in Ukraine to break free from Russian supervision,<sup>99</sup> that Washington had colluded with Kyiv to use “neo-Nazi and ultra-right wing forces” to advance their political interests,<sup>100</sup> and that the U.S. had backed the closure of broadcasters in Ukraine under the guise of countering Russian disinformation.<sup>101</sup> Kremlin-affiliated media sought to spotlight the West’s hypocrisy in failing to live up to stated values: refusing to recognize the “democratic will” of the Crimean people to reunify with Russia,<sup>102</sup> imposing “barbaric” blockades in contravention of human

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<sup>95</sup> “Under Biden, Will Ukraine Once Again be a Flashpoint in NATO-Russia Relations?” Sputnik. Published February 6, 2021; “Embattled Opposition Leader Medvedchuk Says U.S. Running Ukraine Like Colony – Reports.” Sputnik. Published February 25, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> “Le Pen confirms her stance on Ukraine is identical to Russia’s.” World Service Wire. Published March 24, 2017. “No Brains in Washington.” Sputnik. Published September 26, 2015.

<sup>97</sup> “Democracy of Mass Destruction: Dissecting U.S. Actions in Syria, Ukraine & Iran.” Sputnik. Published January 6, 2018.

<sup>98</sup> “Russian Lawmaker Praises U.S. for Helping Reunite Crimea With Russia Through Coup in Ukraine.” Sputnik. Published February 22, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> “Russian Orthodox Church Believes U.S. Behind Constantinople’s Actions Toward Ukraine.” Sputnik. Published October 19, 2018; “West Behind Constantinople’s Decision to Legalize Schism in Ukraine - Orthodox Society.” Sputnik. Published October 16, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> “Russia’s security chief says U.S., Ukraine use neo-Nazi forces in own political interests.” World Service Wire. Published December 26, 2018.

<sup>101</sup> “West Openly Backing Kiev’s Censorship of Broadcasters - Russia’s Deputy Envoy to OSCE.” Sputnik. Published February 12, 2021.

<sup>102</sup> “Crimean Residents’ Lives Improved After Reunification With Russia - Serbian Lawmakers.” Sputnik. Published March 15, 2019.

rights,<sup>103</sup> inflaming conflict to influence sovereign nations,<sup>104</sup> and “supporting an illegal coup, while presenting it as a democratic revolution.”<sup>105</sup>

- *Expressing moral outrage at the arrest of journalist Kirill Vyshinsky, formerly of Ukraine’s RIA Novosti branch, one Sputnik article argued, “the hypocrisy of the so-called Western states is surprising and shocking as these countries have been told us for decades about the freedom of expression, democracy...and that nobody could be prosecuted for his opinion. [But they] avoid [speaking about] the arrest of Kirill Vyshinsky in Ukraine.”<sup>106</sup>*

Looking across the five keywords, Russian state media employed a triangulation strategy in its use of varied media narratives to sow doubts about the legitimacy of the authorities in Kyiv, in advance of Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. At times, the Kremlin painted a picture of Ukraine as a belligerent actor, highlighting Kyiv’s “provocations” in the 2018 Kerch Strait incident on the one hand and contrasting them with positive references to the EU, NATO, and U.S., in order to isolate Ukraine from its potential allies.<sup>107</sup> For example, one World Service Wire article quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as saying, “Calls from the United States, NATO and the European Union for de-escalation in the Kerch Strait, including those addressed to Ukraine, are clear evidence Kiev is to blame for the incident.”<sup>108</sup> Other coverage diminished Ukraine as a “junior partner”<sup>109</sup> or “puppet regime”<sup>110</sup> working at the behest of the EU, NATO, and the U.S., which supply “weapons and IMF loans” allowing Kyiv to perpetuate “a terror campaign against the ethnic Russian populace of Eastern Ukraine.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> “Russia’s delegate at UN HRC session slams Ukraine’s blockade of Crimea as barbaric.” World Service Wire. Published March 19, 2021.

<sup>104</sup> “Ukraine, Georgia got no real help from the West, only dependency - official.” World Service Wire. Published June 10, 2020.

<sup>105</sup> “West Understands Indiscretion of Steps to Support Kiev, Afraid to Admit It - Lavrov.” Sputnik. Published November 2, 2018.

<sup>106</sup> “Western States’ Hypocritical Position on Vyshinsky’s Arrest in Ukraine Shocking – Simonyan.” Sputnik. Published November 2, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> “Ukrainian navy ships were tasked to pass via Kerch Strait secretly, says FSB.” World Service Wire. Published November 27, 2018.

<sup>108</sup> “West’s calls on Ukraine for de-escalation in Kerch Strait confirm Kiev’s guilt - Lavrov.” World Service Wire. Published November 28, 2018.

<sup>109</sup> “Moscow urges world response to reporter’s expulsion from Kiev.” TASS. Published October 5, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> “Deafening Silence: Western Media Silent on Ukraine’s Russian News Agency Raid.” Sputnik. Published May 16, 2018.

<sup>111</sup> “Kiev Chicken.” Sputnik. Published November 28, 2018.

Alternatively, Russian media sometimes portray Kyiv as manipulative in enmeshing Western partners into conflict with Russia.

Kremlin-affiliated media spent considerable column inches between 2015 and 2021 in an attempt to undermine the resolve of the U.S. and its European allies in sustaining sanctions related to Russia's occupation of Crimea,<sup>112</sup> arguing that these restrictions were "counterproductive"<sup>113</sup> and undermined global stability.<sup>114</sup> This may foreshadow what we should expect to see in future media narratives following the expansion of Western sanctions against Russia after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Some Russian state media articles argued that the sanctions hurt European economies more than Russia: "Western sanctions have no impact on Crimea's development, and by prolonging them, the European Union hurts no one but itself and its producers."<sup>115</sup> In other cases, Russian state media injected skepticism about the motives of the sanctions as coming in the wake of Crimean residents' righteous refusal to recognize the Ukrainian government installed in what was characterized as a EU- and US-backed "coup."<sup>116</sup> At times, Russian state media articles exploited dissension among EU member states (such as Germany and Italy versus the rest of the bloc)<sup>117</sup> and with the U.S. (such as by casting Brussels as blindly following Washington's lead),<sup>118</sup> seeking to break down their unified resolve:

- *"Brussels has not only sacrificed its principles and values and shut its eyes to the armed coup in Kiev that overthrew the democratically elected president but has also followed Washington's directive by joining the anti-Russia sanctions."*<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> "UPDATE - Albania, Montenegro, Norway, Ukraine Agree to Abide by EU Sanctions Against Russia." Sputnik. Published August 31, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> "Russian Experts Draft Response Measures to U.S. Sanctions - Kremlin." Sputnik. Published June 21, 2017.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> "Extension of EU Sanctions on Russia Hurts No One But Brussels Itself - Crimean Lawmaker." Sputnik. Published June 20, 2019.

<sup>116</sup> "Prolongation of EU Anti-Russia Sanctions Expected at Upcoming EU Council Meeting - Source." Sputnik. Published June 21, 2017.

<sup>117</sup> "French National Front Senior Leader Calls for Balanced Position in Relations With Russia." Sputnik. Published April 2018. "Authorities of Italy's Liguria, Crimea Agree on New Maritime Transport Lines - Official." Sputnik. April 21, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> "We Feel Your Pain': Who Benefits From EU Sanctions Against Russia?" Sputnik. Published March 3, 2016.

<sup>119</sup> "US uses crisis in Russia-EU dialogue for dangerous military activity - Lavrov." World Service Wire. Published November 24, 2018.

## 4. Conclusion

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see clearly three important truths about civic space in Ukraine between 2010 and 2021.

The first truth is revealing: the Kremlin patiently invested its media, money, and in-kind support for many years ahead of the February 2022 invasion in a bid to stoke discontent with the authorities in Kyiv; exploit societal cleavages along fault lines of religion, language, and ideology; isolate Ukraine from prospective democratic allies; and undermine domestic resolve in the face of its territorial ambitions.

The second truth is encouraging: it reveals a critical blindspot in the Kremlin's influence playbook—the tendency to underestimate the strength of democratic societies to mount a unified resistance. Even if the Maidan Revolution created the initial opening for Ukrainian civic actors to emerge, it is the willingness of communities to stand together in the face of Russian aggression in Crimea, the Donbas, and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war that has served as an enduring source of resilience.

The third truth is sobering: Russia's appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable elsewhere across the E&E region. Taken together, it is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

## 5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org).

### 5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from three primary sources: (i) the CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Ukraine; (ii) the RefWorld database of documents and news articles pertaining to human rights and interactions with civilian law enforcement in Ukraine operated by UNHCR; and (iii) the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions. Restrictions of civic space actors that took place prior to January 1, 2017 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

Survey data on citizen perceptions of civic space were collected from three sources: the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 6, the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021, and the Gallup World Poll (2010–2021). These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the three surveys and the exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality and comparability of the datasets remains high.

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 6 in Ukraine was conducted in Ukrainian, Russian, Moldavian, Tartar, Ruthenian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Armenian between January and December 2011, with a nationally representative sample of 1500

randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>120</sup> The research team provided an estimated error rate of 2.6.<sup>121</sup>

The E&E region countries included in WVS Wave 6, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question “How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?” were first collapsed from “Very interested,” “Somewhat interested,” “Not very interested,” and “Not at all interested” into the two categories “Interested” and “Not interested.” Averages for the region were then calculated using weighted averages from the seven countries.

Regional means for the WVS Wave 6 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a WVS Wave 6 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group, etc.). Respondents to WVS 6 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

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<sup>120</sup> See: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

<sup>121</sup> See: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

The confidence indicator uses responses to a WVS Wave 6 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service, etc.). Respondents to WVS 6 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: "A great deal," "Quite a lot," "Not very much," or "None at all." The "A great deal" and "Quite a lot" options were collapsed into a binary "Confident" indicator, while the "Not very much" and "None at all" options were collapsed into a "Not confident" indicator.<sup>122</sup>

The Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021 in Ukraine was conducted in Ukrainian and Russian between July and August 2020, with a nationally representative sample of 1,289 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>123</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable "computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases."<sup>124</sup>

The E&E region countries included in the Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 dataset, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question "How interested have you been in politics over the last 2 years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

Regional means for the Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 question "Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under

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<sup>122</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

<sup>123</sup> See

<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>.

<sup>124</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssnar.70110>.



any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group, etc.). Respondents to WVS 7 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. For our analysis purposes, we collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to “Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

The confidence indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service, etc.). Respondents to the Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while the “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.<sup>125</sup>

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2009–2020, with the exception of the countries that did not

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<sup>125</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

complete fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. The data are weighted to be nationally representative. The dates vary by year, but two key years were 2014 and 2021. In 2014, the Gallup World Poll was conducted in September and October. This was the first year that the poll excluded Russia-occupied Crimea and areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts due to the ongoing conflict. The 2021 wave of the survey was conducted in July, and the documentation does not specify if the sample included the Donetsk or Luhansk oblasts.

The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens' willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: "Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?" The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Ukraine's country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception, as Gallup World Poll fieldwork was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan in 2020, and data is only available for Ukraine and Serbia for 2021.

### 5.3 Russian Financing and In-kind Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and in-kind assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones

between January 1, 2015 and August 30, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to global news, we reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where possible, confirm reports from news sources. While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, a greater portion of instances only identified support provided in-kind, through modes of cooperation, or through technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). These were recorded as such without a monetary valuation.

## 5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors and Democratic Rhetoric

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from three Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS, Russia Today, and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData was able to record mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in Ukraine. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news. Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

Russian state media mentions pertaining to democratic norms or democratic rivals are potentially consequential for civic space in E&E countries in a few different ways. AidData staff identified several keywords to operationalize this concept of democratic norms or democratic rivals in the E&E region including: democracy, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States, and the West:

- Democracy: we include all mentions of the word “democracy” (except in the context of named organizations like “National Endowment for Democracy”). To measure anti-democracy sentiment, we also included mentions of different ideologies, including words related to democracy, fascism, authoritarianism, and dictatorships, which allows us to better explore Russian state media coverage of non-democratic sentiment.
- European Union: we include both general terms “European Union” and “EU,” as well as specific EU bodies, such as “European Parliament,” “EU Courts,” “EU Human Rights Councils,” but not individuals.
- NATO: we include both general terms “North Atlantic Treaty Organization” or “NATO,” as well as specific bodies associated with NATO, but not individuals.
- United States: we include both general terms “United States,” “U.S.,” “American,” “America” (unless referring to the continents), as well as specific government bodies (such as Congress, US Department of State). We do not include references to “White House” or specific individuals, with the exception of mentions of the president when combined with U.S./American in front.
- West: we include all non-geographic mentions of “West” or “Western,” but exclude geographic mentions of “west,” such as “the western portion of Armenia.”

Each identified mention of a keyword was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive.